

Steinman Audio Labs

SMB4 Surround Loudspeaker Package

What do you desire from your home theatre speaker system? Do you want sound quality, style or both? If both, then the Steinman Audio Labs SMB4 surround loudspeaker package may be just what you need.

Equipment

First, let us look briefly at the styling of this package. Each of the five loudspeakers is finished in a beautiful black piano gloss. The front speakers have their baffles canted back by a few degrees, while the tops slope upwards. The sides are rounded, with a waist a little wider than the front, and then turning inwards to a quite narrow rear.

The centre channel speaker has widely rounded edges on the sides of the baffle, while the surrounds are newly-complete triangular prisms, with just the edges shaved off.

The front speakers are largish bookshelf-sized, but as with all fine loudspeakers, should never be placed anywhere near a bookshelf. In fact, stands are available as an option, costing \$299 per pair. These are heavily constructed from metal and include cable management so the fine styling need not be diminished by dangling cables. The grilles on these are held in place magnetically.

These front speakers carry two drivers each. The tweeter is a 25mm soft dome unit, while bass and midrange is handled by a 140mm driver. The cabinets are bass reflex loaded with a port at the rear. There are also two hefty binding posts for the speaker connections.

Steinman Audio Labs rates the frequency response of these speakers at 58 to 20,000 hertz +/-3dB, sensitivity at 87dB, impedance at eight Ω and power handling up to 80 watts.

The centre channel uses two of the larger drivers and one tweeter, while the surround speakers use two each of the tweeters and the bass/midrange driver. The reason this is the case for the surrounds is because they are wired for a diffuse sound. The manufacturer isn't clear as whether the arrangement is dipolar, as recommended by THX, or bipolar. Both ways provide a more diffuse sound field than regular direct radiating surround speakers, with dipolar speakers a bit more effective. However they must be mounted very carefully so their 'null'



area is directed towards the listening position.

As it happens, our tests showed the surround speakers were wired up in the bipolar configuration, easing placement concerns while retaining the diffuse effect.

The enclosures of both the centre and surround speakers are sealed, and they share similar manufacturer's specifications of a 65 to 20,000 hertz +/-3dB frequency response, 87dB sensitivity, eight Ω impedance, and 'music power' handling up to 135 watts.

Too late to be included in this review is a forthcoming subwoofer, expected to sell for around \$500, which features a long throw 254mm driver and a 175 watt amplifier.

Performance

With this system, given the size of the front main stereo pair, a subwoofer is pretty much essential. In its absence, we conducted the review coupling our own subwoofer with this package.


Used as a stereo pair, the front speakers provided a nice sound with very good imaging, thanks to their small size. Of course, their bass was limited, but they had not been designed to disguise this with an unfortunate upper bass boost. This is important because you can always add more and deeper bass to a system with a subwoofer, but removing a hump in the bass generally needs some kind of special equalisation which is as likely as not to do damage to the rest of the speaker's performance.



They were also able to go quite loud with the 100 watt per channel home theatre receiver we were using, especially when we configured it so that they were regarded as 'Small' speakers (thereby re-routing the bass to the subwoofer) with the crossover at 80 hertz. We were of two minds as to whether 80 or 100 hertz worked best. There was a small amount of upper bass coloration that seemed to come from cabinet resonance, and at

100 hertz this was a little diminished, but at a small cost in imaging performance.

As a surround system this package really shone. The centre channel delivered clean and balanced dialogue with good horizontal dispersion, while the diffuse nature of the sound produced by the surround speakers really shone during movies with a lot of surround atmospherics. It also aided 'handover' of sounds between the front speakers and the surround ones since they effectively eliminated the usual 'point source' effect of direct radiating speakers.

Conclusion

Steinman Audio Labs has produced an attractively-styled and fine sounding surround loudspeaker system for a very reasonable price. Coupled with a suitable subwoofer, it provides a very pleasing surround experience. 

Steinman Audio Labs SMB4 Surround Loudspeaker Package	
Price	\$1499
Warranty	3 years
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good value for money • Beautiful styling • Excellent surround sound
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires a subwoofer
Contact	Aussie Hi Fi Traders 1300 308 711 www.aussiehifitraders.com.au