MINI-MK3 • CC-300
ADP-150 • PS-1000

Paradigm

"a seriously GOOD SPEAKER"

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HOME Theater

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by Corey Greenberg

Mini-Mk3

These speakers from the frozen North pack serious sound into an inexpensive package.

Canada's full of surprises. If you think the national sport of Canada is hockey, guess again—it's actually lacrosse! A big surprise awaits visiting tourists when they order back-bacon—it's actually more akin to ham than bacon! Amazing but true!

Still, I'm a-boot to tell you about the biggest Canadian surprise of all—their excellent loudspeakers! Due in large part to the Canadian government's sponsorship of loudspeaker research and development at the National Research Council, we've been hearing some mighty fine speakers from o'er the icy border lately. And this month's Paradigm system ranks with the best of them.

PARADIGM MINI-MK3 SPEAKER

The Mini-Mk3 is Paradigm's take on the classic two-way mini-speaker, with a 6-1/2-inch woofer and a 1-inch tweeter. Both the translucent polypropylene woofer and the ferrofluid-damped, textile-dome tweeter are built from scratch right in Paradigm's factory, along with nearly every other part that goes into the line. Few speaker companies can make this boast, because few speaker companies have the brains to actually get into the speaker driver business themselves—most of the speakers you see on the market, even high-end models, use off-the-shelf drivers from various OEM suppliers. Paradigm's ability to build their own drivers gives them tremendous advantages when it comes to quality control and custom design.

The Mini-Mk3 is a ported design, with a bass-reinforcing port located on the speaker's rear panel. The port-loaded woofer, plus the Mini's deceptively deep 13 by 8 by 11-inch cabinet, allow for deeper and louder bass response than most of the two-way mini speakers in this price class. Placed on the recommended 22-inch Premier stands, the Minis look way too small for the amount of room-filling sound they can deliver.

"Man, do these li'l guys sing! We're just not used to hearing $329/pair mini speakers dish up so much clear, detailed, fleshed-out sound …"

And what a sound it is. Man, do these li'l guys sing! We're just not used to hearing $329/pair minispeakers dish up so much clear, detailed, fleshed-out sound—these Minis are definitely at the top of our list in this price range. We actually like 'em better than a lot of audiophile speakers that cost two and three times the price. They're really that good.

OK, so their 6-1/2-inch woofers burp if you crank them on material with a lot of low bass—so what else is new when it comes to mini speakers? And the Mini's wonderfully detailed highs are just a tad on the bright side of strictly neutral, if you really want to be a hoser about it. But the midrange is terrifically open and clear, lending an easy clarity to movie dialog and music alike, and the overall sound is much more refined and high-end than you get from almost anything else this inexpensive. We dug this li'l guy from the get-go, and our feelings never wavered—this is a seriously good speaker for the bucks.

CC-300

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PARADIGM CC-300 CENTER SPEAKER

The CC-300 is Paradigm's timbre matched center speaker for the Mini-Mk3. Featuring a pair of the Mini-Mk3's 6-1/2-inch polypropylene woofers flanking a slightly modified version of the Mini-Mk3's tweeter, the CC-300 was designed to sound as close as possible to the Mini-Mk3 while still retaining the popular low 'n' wide horizontal cabinet configuration.

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What sets the CC-300 apart from the rest of the center-channel pack is its clever driver spacing. By shaving the tweeter's faceplate down to the bare minimum, Paradigm can raise it up closer to the top of the cabinet and bring the two woofers closer together. This greatly reduces the horizontal "lobing" effects that degrade the sound of center speakers that simply line the three drivers up across the front of the cabinet. The hollow, nasal coloration caused by such lobing is why we Homeys prefer using three identical speakers for left, center, and right. A vertically oriented speaker sitting atop your TV might not look as unobtrusive as a horizontal center channel, but it usually sounds a lot better. Paradigm's driver spacing trick neatly solves the lobing problem, while maintaining the popular cabinet shape. Of course, the CC-300 is also video-shielded for purple-free plopping atop your TV.

"… the soundstage across the front three speakers was wonderfully focused and coherent, and pans across the stage sounded smooth and natural. The CC-300 is a great sonic match for a pair of Mini-Mk3s."

In terms of sound, the CC-300 was a very close sonic match for the Mini-Mk3, which is a trick most horizontal center-channel speakers can't pull off. As a result, the soundstage across the front three speakers was wonderfully focused and coherent, and pans across the stage sounded smooth and natural. The CC-300 is a great sonic match for a pair of Mini-Mk3s.

"… wonderfully detailed highs …"

PARADIGM ADP-150 SURROUND SPEAKERS

At first glance, Paradigm's ADP-150 dipole surrounds don't look all that much different from other surround speakers. But underneath that black grille cloth lurk some interesting design choices that give the ADP-150 a real edge over competing dipoles, including many THX-approved models.

For starters, unlike the cheap paper-cone tweeters, found in many surround speakers, the ADP-150 sports a pair of real live 3/4-inch dome tweeters, one fore and one aft. This makes for an easily heard improvement in the clarity of the surround audio—ambient sounds are much cleaner and more natural-sounding, and spoken background dialog becomes clear enough to finally understand. Even though the Dolby Pro Logic decoding process rolls off the surround channel audio above 7 kilohertz,

ADP-150

the ADP-150's higher-quality tweeters make a very audible difference in the clarity and spaciousness of the surround soundfield.

"… the PS-1000 certainly fills a room with rumbling, grumbling low end on movie soundtracks … powerful …"

Unlike almost everyone else, Paradigm believes that surrounds should have good low-end response. Even though Dolby Surround soundtracks theoretically contain no bass below 100 hertz in the surround channel, certain soundtracks, like *Backdraft*, sneak low bass into the surrounds, and Paradigm wants to be able to deliver this extra bass when it pops up. So the ADP-150's woofers are configured to operate in-phase in the bass range, eliminating the bass cancellation that occurs with the out-of-phase woofers on many dipole surrounds. Sure enough, when we played the *Backdraft* LD, we could hear the low rumbling of the fire coming from all around the room, including the sides. The verdict is in: Surrounds that do bass are definitely cooler.

PARADIGM PS-1000 SUBWOOFER

The PS-1000 is Paradigm's top-o'-the-line powered subwoofer. It features a 10-inch woofer driven by a built-in 120-watt amplifier. The PS-1000 features bandpass loading, with the driver hidden inside the enclosure, so that all of its output comes out of three rear-mounted 3-inch ports. The PS-1000 also features speaker-level and line-level crossovers for hooking up the Mini-Mk3s or other Paradigm satellite speakers, as well as an auto on/off circuit that turns the unit on and off in the presence or absence of an audio signal. A unique phase alignment knob adjusts the PS-1000's phase through the crossover region, allowing the user to achieve a more seamless blend between the sub and the main speakers.

While the PS-1000 certainly fills a room with rumbling, grumbling low end on movie soundtracks, we were less enthusiastic about its performance with music material.

"… ambient sounds are much cleaner and more natural-sounding, and spoken background dialog becomes clear enough to finally understand. … the ADP-150's higher-quality tweeters make a very audible difference in the clarity and spaciousness of the surround soundfield."

Though it was able to achieve impressively high levels before distorting, the bass it produced was a powerful yet indistinct roar, rather than the tight, well-defined low end we've heard from the better subs in this price range. The Paradigm, like all bandpass subwoofers, achieves high output capability at the expense of bass tightness and clarity, making for a low end that thunders on movie soundtracks, but doesn't really have the tightness or speed to keep up with the bass line during music playback. We found it more acceptable for movies. We also found that using the line-level crossover with the main speakers degraded the sound of the main speakers slightly, so we don't recommend running the main speakers through it if you're looking to get audiophile-caliber sound quality from this Paradigm speaker system.

"The verdict is in: Surrounds that do bass are definitely cooler."

Bottom line? This Paradigm surround system rocked like a champ. The PS-1000 subwoofer is more suitable for movie soundtrack rumbling than serious music listening, but taken as a whole, this system embarrasses many home theater speaker combos costing several times its price. We give this great value speaker system from Canada an "eh plus."

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SUMMARY

Oh, Paradigm! This is one of the best home theater speaker systems we've heard to date at this price. The PS-1000 subwoofer doesn't do as well on music as it does on movies, but the Mini-Mk3s are almost too good to believe for the bucks, and the CC-300 center channel and ADP-150 surrounds make for a perfect match. An easy recommendation.

PS-1000