

SINCLAIR AUDIO

NEW Brighton Series



by Suave Kajko

Our first encounter with Canadian-based Sinclair Audio was more than two years ago when the company asked us to review their very first product offering, the Brighton Series speakers. **We enjoyed the speakers enough that we used them in one of our reference systems when evaluating other similar speakers for the next little while.**

In the summer of 2007, Sinclair Audio announced an upgraded and refined Brighton Series with all new models. The notable upgrades in the new series include improved motor assembly and cone construction, and DALtech acoustic damping treatment for the tower speakers. Each subwoofer has been upgraded and now includes a forward firing active driver and dual side firing Planar Depth Radiators (non-active). A top-mounted control module offers various equalization settings for the subwoofers. Finally, each model underwent some cosmetic refinements.

We asked Sinclair Audio to put together a 5.1-channel speaker system for us to evaluate consisting of all the top models from this series (yes, we prefer big speakers with big sound!) These included the BT36 towers (\$1199/pair), the BC26 centre channel (\$349), the B3D bipolar surrounds (\$399/pair) and the SW10.3 subwoofer (\$549) to top it all off. The total price of this system came to \$2496. A smaller, more affordable version of each speaker and subwoofer is available.

The BT36 towers are large and surprisingly heavy. I rarely ever break a sweat when setting up a multi channel speaker system but I did this time. By the time I moved the towers to my basement theatre and set them up, I decided to give them a listen before lugging the rest of the speakers downstairs. In fact, I ended up listening to just the towers during the first week (not because I'm lazy of course, but because I thought this would make for a better review). At 48 inches tall, nearly 5 inches taller than the original SB3600T towers, these speakers are tall alright, although their foot prints are

about the same as the original towers. For guys like me that's a positive but for those who want to conceal their speakers, the significantly smaller B25 towers may be a preferred choice. Anyway, each BT36 tower has a traditional 3-way design, consisting of triple 6.5-inch Woven Fiberglass Hybrid woofers and a 1-inch Polymer Integrated Soft Dome tweeter.

The BC26 is a 3-way centre channel which combines two of the same 6.5-inch woofers found in the towers, two 3-inch midrange drivers and a single 1-inch tweeter. **This is perhaps the largest centre channel that I've tested, with a sweet looking array of drivers.**

The B3D 2-way surround speaker has a bipolar design, containing dual 3-inch full range drivers (which fire in phase toward the listening position) and four 3-inch woofers (which fire perpendicular to listening position). **The B3D offers a couple of important advantages compared to a typical bookshelf speaker that is often used as a surround speaker: it is very compact and capable of producing a more enveloping sound in a home theatre.**

Topping off the system is the ".1", better known as the subwoofer. The SW10.3 contains a 250 watt amplifier and triple 10-inch woofers, one active (firing forward) and dual non-active (non-firing, aimed to the sides). The dual non-active woofers are used instead of a tuned port found in typical subwoofer designs. They are moved by the air pressure inside the cabinet created by the active woofer. Theoretically, this combination of active and non-active woofers should yield increased and deeper bass from a smaller enclosure. The SW10.3 is an attractive subwoofer of a comfortable size that shouldn't pose a challenge with placement. A control module located on the top of the cabinet offers volume control and four crossover settings. The rear contains switches for power and phase, as well as a low level, gold-plated RCA subwoofer input.

The cabinets of the Brighton Series come in a typical black finish, accented with some glossy panels; the drivers use a combination of white, black and chrome and are surrounded with silver trims. This combination gives the series a traditional but very elegant look. Those who prefer to remove the speaker grilles will definitely appreciate the presentation of this system.

Just in time for this review, the new Pioneer BDP-95FD Blu-ray player (that will replace our Pioneer BDP-94HD) arrived at our lab. This is Pioneer's first player that's capable of outputting the bitstream of all of the new audio formats to an AV receiver for decoding. I was glad that we still had the Marantz SR8002 receiver on hand, reviewed in our Feb/Mar 2008 issue, as it can decode bitstream of the new audio formats.

Since the most likely application for the Brighton speakers will be in a home theatre setting, I started by loading Blade Runner on Blu-ray disc. The movie's soundtrack created an eerie atmosphere of a dark Los Angeles in the not-so-distant future (2019 to be exact). **I flipped back and forth between the Dolby Digital and Dolby TrueHD soundtracks to see how noticeable the difference was on the Brighton speakers. The Dolby Digital track was undeniably enjoyable, thanks to the great 5.1 channel mix, but the details of the Dolby TrueHD soundtrack were just outstanding.** This high resolution track was noticeably more airy and alive. The delicate ringing of triangles and strumming of stringed instruments sounded fuller. I also noticed that sounds in general, made smoother transitions between the channels. But regardless of which soundtrack I listened to, the dialogue always came clearly through the centre channel.

While watching Flyboys on Blu-ray, **the audio transitioned seamlessly across the front soundstage - the centre speaker was perfectly integrated between the front towers. The bipole design of the surround speakers did a fantastic job of extending this soundstage smoothly to the back of the room. During dogfight scenes, this seamless speaker integration produced a massive, three-dimensional soundstage with planes zipping from channel to channel. In other scenes, the sensation of planes flying overhead was truly realistic.** Of course, the Marantz receiver and the DTS HD Master Audio soundtrack played significant parts in this presentation.

To test the SW10.3 subwoofer's abilities, I played a few scenes from the Children of Men DVD. Dialing into a chapter with lots of gunfire and explosions, **it quickly became obvious that this subwoofer could deliver quite a powerful punch. Tank rounds blasting through the concrete walls of an apartment building sounded truly devastating.** I've never been a fan of subwoofers with the active/non-active woofer design in the past but the SW10.3 just about changed my thoughts on this. This subwoofer was clearly capable of producing deep and at the same time tight bass. During a couple of scenes from Casino Royale on Blu-ray, the SW10.3 shook my medium-sized theatre with some thunderous bass, although I did notice that at times it wasn't the most articulate bass that I've heard. I was glad to learn that this subwoofer didn't make a "popping" sound when powering on, which many subwoofers make. Overall, I was quite happy with the SW10.3's performance.

As I watched all these bass-heavy scenes, I became curious as to how the system would sound without the subwoofer, considering the large size of the front towers. I watched the same scenes again, this time with the subwoofer off, and allowed the receiver to send all the frequencies to the front speakers. I was glad to learn that the BT36 towers were capable of producing respectable low frequencies on their own. Of course, some of the lower frequencies and overall punch were lost, but the roaring of tank engines and explosions still sounded very decent. **If your room can't accommodate a subwoofer, the towers can produce a satisfying amount of bass all on their own.**

I got a little taste of these speakers' musicality from the high resolution soundtracks from Blu-ray movies; Chris Cornell's "You know my name" during the opening credits of Casino Royale sounded great. But to do a proper evaluation I needed a really well recorded music disc. My first choice was Legends of Jazz also on Blu-ray, a phenomenal Jazz compilation. **The performers' voices were full of emotion and every instrument played with natural richness.** The position of the performers and instruments accurately matched the on-screen picture. The Beatles Love album on DVD-Audio sounded just as rich and immersive.

For the final stage of testing, I listened to a few stereo CD selections fed by

our reference ARCAM DiVA CD73 CD player. The Beatles "Love" played with the dynamics and excitement that I've become accustomed to. **Norah Jones' "Feels like home" showed that these speakers were capable of producing excellent vocals and a rich mid-bass.** I was more than satisfied listening to these tracks playing through just the BT36 towers. While listening to Holst's The Planets, performed by the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, the soundstage presented a good width and depth. The instruments sounded natural and had enough emotion that made me close my eyes and enjoy the performance. The high frequencies were smooth and the mids were full-bodied. Although the soundstage didn't have the size or the pinpoint accuracy that you would expect from a dedicated two channel system, I was perfectly content with my favourite track "Jupiter".

The Sinclair Audio Brighton Series proved to be versatile and gracefully played whatever I sent in their direction. At the \$2500 price point, they performed exactly as I had hoped. Whether I used them to play a high resolution movie soundtrack or a two channel music disc, I never felt that anything was lacking. If you're shopping around for a speaker system that's capable of producing a cinematic experience when watching movies and a clean musical experience when listening to CDs, the Brighton Series are definitely worth a listen.