

The Great Subwoofer Divide

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Tight and tuneful...this is what I'm used to hearing from a good sub

Sound & Vision Certified and Recommended

Paul S. Barton, founder of PSB Speakers, is one of the world's most conservative speaker designers. He never gives us A/V journalists radical new technologies to write about, but year after year, he gives A/V enthusiasts a line of consistently excellent products. They won't give you the momentary bliss you get from a fancy new bauble, but they will give you the long-term satisfaction of a well-engineered, well-built product.

It comes as no surprise, then, that PSB's flagship subwoofer, the \$2,149 SubSeries 500, is a completely straightforward design; just a 12-inch woven-fiberglass cone woofer in a ported cabinet, with an amplifier rated at 500 watts continuous power and 1,500 watts peak power. The amplifier is Class H, a highly efficient analog design. The SubSeries 500 is fairly compact, measuring 23 1/8 inches high and 15 7/8 inches wide—and at 71 1/2 pounds, it's a relative lightweight among this crew. The controls are mounted on the front, behind the grille, for easy access.

The SubSeries 500 looks a little jazzier than past PSB subs, though, because it employs the same construction techniques pioneered in PSB's recent Synchrony series speakers. Aluminum extrusions form the corners of the cabinet, and medium-density fiberboard panels snap into the extrusions. PSB says this construction ensures an exceptionally rigid cabinet, and I think it looks nicer than your average box sub.



"Tight and tuneful...this is what I'm used to hearing from a good sub," was my reaction to hearing Steely Dan's "Aja" through the SubSeries 500. Other material elicited similar comments. No

matter what I played, the SubSeries 500 gave me a textbook performance. The sound was similar to what I heard from the two other Trad subs, the Axiom EP600 v2 and the SVSound PB-12 Plus; my preferences for one sub in this group over the others generally depended on the program material. On certain cuts—say, Holly Cole's "Train Song"—the SubSeries 500 sounded slightly sloppier than

the PB-12 Plus. But a couple of songs later, when I played “Falling” from the electropop group Olive’s Extra Virgin CD, the SubSeries sounded tighter than the PB-12 Plus. My preferences shifted almost as fast as the bass notes the musicians chose to play.

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The SubSeries 500 did sound exceptionally powerful on movie soundtracks, though. On the Attack of the Clones explosion, it gave that sense of air being ripped apart that’s essential for realistic action-movie sound. It also did a superb job of shaking my couch until it felt like it would fall apart (a very real possibility, considering I got it a Ikea).

Barton is one of the most measurement-centric of speaker designers—in fact, he’s one of the pioneers in using measurements as an evaluation tool—so the SubSeries 500’s consistent performance in the lab didn’t shock me. It did delight me, though. Instead of putting out high volumes within a certain frequency band and then taking a dive in other bands, it consistently delivered about 100-dB output at 10% THD from 28Hz to 80Hz. Peak output was 113.3dB at 63Hz, and bass output remained solid down to 22.5Hz, where it achieved 98.7dB.



The SubSeries 500 can at least keep up with—and occasionally surpass—any subwoofer in this test, yet it has the most practical form factor of any of the traditional subs we tested. There’s nothing fancy about the SubSeries 500’s back-to-basics engineering, but in many ways it’s the most well-rounded subwoofer of the bunch.