

PSB 2B loudspeakers

Something in the Canadian water?

By Michael Jones

PSB 2B loudspeakers. \$899

There must be something in the water. That's the only explanation I can come up with for the number of successful loudspeaker designers to be found in Canada.

One such designer is Paul Barton, the founder and designer for PSB Loudspeakers.

Although Paul Barton no longer owns the company (it's owned by a company called Lenbrook, who also own NAD), Barton still designs the speakers sold under the PSB brand.

Known as the "I" Series in New Zealand (for legal reasons PSB can't use the Image name here in EnZed) the range consists of two bookshelf speakers, four floorstanders and various home theatre add-on speakers.

The 2B is second from the bottom in the range and is, in today's world, a decently large stand-mounted loudspeaker. The 2B is some 412mm high with a width of 203mm and a depth of 299mm.

The speakers are finished in a choice of boring black (my samples, alas) or a

very nice cherry veneer which, at first or even second glance, looks like real wood (it's actually a plastic veneer).

Connections are via a single pair of binding posts half way up the back panel.

This range of PSB speakers have a fascinating method of construction.

While the speaker cabinet is the normal veneered mdf, the front baffle is made up of two plastic mouldings, one for the tweeter and the second for the woofer and port. The complete range is constructed from these mouldings, with the bigger floorstanding models simply adding more woofers and ports.

The 2B includes a 165mm midrange/woofer, loaded by a reflex

port and a 25mm aluminium dome tweeter.

Something special

There's always been something about small to medium sized speakers with 165mm or so woofers. Maybe it's because the woofer (and normally the cabinet) is a similar width to that of the human head.

Maybe it's because the size of the speaker means that the cabinet is less resonant than larger speakers. Maybe it's because the designer realises that bass extension won't reach 20Hz, so encouraging the designer to concentrate on the all-important midrange.

Whatever the reason, the PSB 2B is a magical loudspeaker. The 2B is no wimpy bookshelf speaker, instead producing a large scale, solid and dynamic presentation of music. You'd swear that the speaker was worth twice it's \$899 price tag.

Guy Clark's live album *Keepers* is an excellent example of the many strengths of the 2B speaker. *Keepers* is an amazing live album, featuring the best of Guy Clark's songs throughout his career. Clark's gravelly voice is clear as, well, gravel, but the rest of the instrumentation (plenty of guitars, mandolins, dobro and Clark's son Travis on fretless bass) and backing vocals are solidly portrayed and always audible through these speakers.

AudioEnz writer Brent Burmester brought around some music to help audition a couple of speakers, including the PSBs. New to me was The Webb Brothers, supposedly the sons of songwriter Jimmy Webb. Their album sounded big and solid through the 2Bs, with the articulate nature of the 2Bs again made us concentrate more on the music and less on the hi-fi.

After listening to the Webb brothers I brought out Poppa (Jimmy) Webb's *Ten Easy Pieces* CD. As it was a couple of days after the death of actor (and occasional singer) Richard Harris, what else could I play but Webb's magnificent song for Harris, *MacArthur Park*. On *Ten Easy Pieces*, Webb accompanies himself on piano.

Through the 2Bs the left hand of the



piano had all the weight and power from the instrument that I could want, while the right hand's reproduction was sparkling. Piano can be hard to reproduce, but the 2Bs did a very good job.

The woofer in the 2Bs is a good one, without obvious colourations or breakups. Be careful though. The articulate and dynamic nature of this driver encourages one to raise the volume. It's still only a small driver and will, as you'd expect, run out of steam if you try to play music at very loud volumes.

I'd also encourage you not to put these speakers (or most others, for that matter) in a bookshelf. Like all good speakers, the 2Bs benefit from a bit of space around them and deserve good, solid stands.

Something better

The PSB 2Bs are great speakers. I regard them as a "best buy" in their price range, easily being one of the better loudspeakers in their class. You should audition them.

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