

Tannoy fx5.1

A civilised home theatre sub/sat system

By Michael Jones

Tannoy FX 5.1 home theatre speaker system. \$1499

There are two increasing trends that converge in this delightful – and very affordable – speaker package from Tannoy.

The first is the rise in importance of aesthetics in hi-fi. Twenty years ago manufacturers could (and did!) produce the ugliest components. It didn't matter back then as long as it sounded good. Today, people demand products that look as well as sound good.

An associated trend is towards smaller and smaller speakers. Sometimes the speakers are so small that they are almost invisible, such as with the Bose cubes and these (slightly larger) Tannoys. Teeny tiny speakers have their own problems; as one famous engineer said, "I cannae change the laws of physics, Capn!" But more on this latter.

The Tannoy system is aimed at people who want both – a small speaker system with good aesthetics. The system is finished in a silver/grey (Tannoy call it titanium), which matches the colour of today's televisions and plasma screens.

The depth of the Tannoy satellites is similar to that of a plasma screen; I can see many people finding the Tannoy FX 5.1 speaker system to be a perfect compliment to a plasma screen on the wall.

If you've been into one of the electronic chain stores recently, you might think that these speakers

look similar to the speakers on the end of the cheapie all-in-one DVD systems. Look similar, yes. Are similar, no.

The subs of these all-in-one systems are normally small and plasticky. The satellites are cheap and nasty, with a single drive unit struggling to reproduce either highs or lows.

Contrast this with the Tannoy system. The satellites have a bit of weight to them, suggesting that a decent magnet is used for the 75mm midrange driver. The separate 15mm titanium dome tweeter is rated to carry on tweeting up to beyond 70kHz.

The subwoofer is an active unit, which means that an 100 watt amplifier for driving the sub is built in to the subwoofer. The subwoofer includes a 200mm woofer inside the box.

The sub is rated down to 45Hz (-6dB), so you can't expect the lowest of bass from this Tannoy system.

The rear panel of the subwoofer has both speaker level and line level inputs, along with a volume control. The line level input is the most likely to be used, fed from the sub output on an AV receiver.

The satellite speakers come with little wall brackets, enabling these speakers to be quickly attached to a wall. I did just this with the two speakers used for the rear. The other three satellite speakers sat atop my existing speakers and TV.

Play some music through the Tannoys and I was impressed. Many cheaper sub/sat systems can sound a bit peaky and squawky. Not so these Tannoys. They are smooth, detailed and articulate on music.

The only real problem was the one alluded to before. A small satellite speaker simply can't go low enough to seamlessly meet a subwoofer.

Voices could sound a little lean and overall there was a lack of weight in the lower midrange.

This is a problem that all small sub/sat systems have – if you insist on teeny tiny speakers for aesthetic reasons then



you suffer in the sound stakes.

The sub did an adequate job. It's not particularly articulate or powerful, but it does fill in the upper and mid bass.

Watching movies, the five identical speakers certainly helped set up a coherent sound field. Watching a modern movie with a carefully developed soundtrack (such as the recent Sandra Bullock flick *Murder By Numbers*) shows the benefits of identical speakers.

At around this price there's a few competing sub-sat systems. The cheaper Polk system has a subwoofer with far more poke than the Tannoy, but the satellites are nowhere near as good, lacking both the clarity and smoothness of the Tannoys.

The DB Dynamics Mini-Vega system again has more impact in the bass, and a much better transition between satellites and sub, mainly because the satellite speakers are larger than with the Tannoy system. But the satellites are not of the same quality and the overactive tweeter can get a bit tiring.

The Tannoy system does everything that can be asked of it. The fx5.1 has a smooth and civilised sound the you can listen in to, and the identical surrounds are terrific for movies. Recommended.

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