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Bass extension

This sub-£500 sub from MartinLogan delivers a sound that belies its diminutive dimensions

PRODUCT MartinLogan Dynamo
TYPE Active subwoofer
PRICE £449
CONTACT ☎ 020 8971 3909
 Ⓜ www.uk.martinlogan.com

This is the most affordable model in the growing MartinLogan subwoofer line-up, and it's a mostly straightforward and compact design. While hardly the cheapest of its type, it boasts an unusually solid and heavy construction, being sealed rather than reflex-loaded, which eliminates various problems to do with vented operation. The enclosure is tight and reasonably non-resonant too, save for the panel covering the user controls, sockets and digital amplifier. There are also some design subtleties that make the sub especially suitable for mixed stereo/multichannel operation.

Straight from the box, the Dynamo has a downwards-firing drive unit, and is supported by a slim, optionally spiked framework. This can be repositioned so the driver is forward-firing – mainly intended for when the sub is housed inside a cabinet. Four well-made spikes are supplied, and the digital amplifier is a clean-sounding 200-watt BASH unit.

The Dynamo is designed to be home cinema and stereo-friendly. There's a choice of straight

line-level inputs using twin phonos and speaker-level 4mm binding-post inputs, both of which feed a low-pass adjustable filter, and a level control specifically for stereo applications. There's also a separate (wideband) LFE input to accommodate the output of an AV amp or processor. This has its own internal low-pass filtering applied at source, bypassing the sub's internal bass management. Each of the two independent inputs can be adjusted individually, the former using the system amplifier controls. Phase switching (0, 90 and 180 degrees) is included, plus an auto-power standby switch.

SOUND QUALITY

It may not be large, but this is a sophisticated design, with very specific voicing. Following the 50-hour break-in period, bass depth and weight are much better than you might expect. The internal low-pass filter is very effective, with a rapid roll-off. At the same time there's a softness to the Dynamo's delivery, but it remains crisp and tuneful enough, and the sound is clean and agile, with a hint of sweetness.

There are a few niggles. MartinLogan's claim that corner positioning usually works best is very dubious. Yes, if you want the biggest bang for your buck for home cinema, it's the way to go – but the results tend to be rather uneven. Overall, the Dynamo works best with small AV

systems, and in particular when adding bottom-end presence to quality stereo systems.

There's a lot of flexibility built into the model, but not all of it is very useful. The forward-facing configuration is aurally less successful than the downwards-firing default – and placing a sub in a cabinet generally means transparency takes a hit. On the plus side, though, the interface section will accommodate a second similar sub, which usually gives a more even spread of sound. All in all, the Dynamo impresses. **HFC**

Alvin Gold

VERDICT	
SOUND >> 90% 	PRO Superior construction quality, compact packaging and unusual flexibility. A refined performance with a good perception of bass depth and speed. Good for stereo and multichannel systems alike.
FEATURES >> 86% 	
BUILD >> 90% 	
VALUE >> 87% 	
CONCLUSION Compact, powerful and well controlled, this is a classy and well-designed subwoofer that delivers a solid performance in mixed-purpose systems (hi-fi/AV), though arguably it's at its most impressive with compact, quality stereo systems.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 86%	