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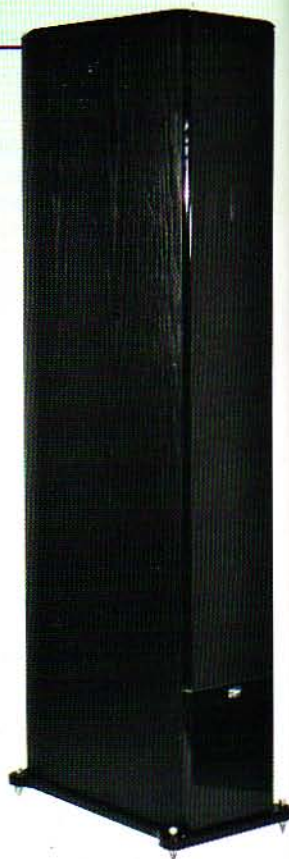
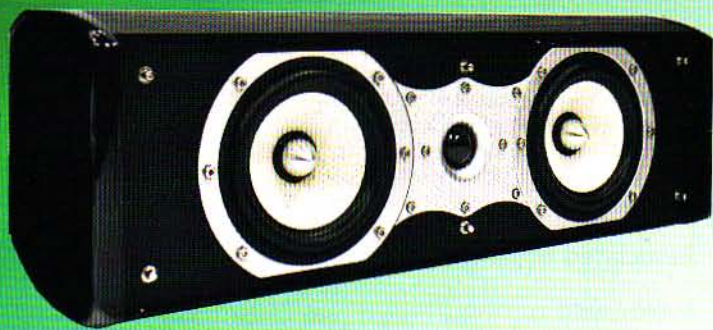


**Sinclair Audio**  
**BRIGHTON 5.1 LOUDSPEAKER SYSTEM**

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**5.1 LOUDSPEAKER SYSTEM**

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# EQUIPMENT REVIEW



## Sinclair Audio Brighton 5.1 Loudspeaker System

Doug Blackburn

Sinclair Audio, based in Montreal, Canada, is just getting started in the U.S. Their loudspeakers have been sold in Canada for some time. The brand is owned by JAM Industries, a 40-year-old company specializing in electronics and musical instruments. Sinclair loudspeakers are designed in Canada and have unique drivers and cabinets, not off-the-shelf designs. Manufacturing is done in China to help keep prices moderate.

The Brighton series loudspeakers are free-standing models intended for stereo systems or surround sound systems. Sinclair also has a line of in-wall/in-ceiling loudspeakers and a line of slender and smaller loudspeakers with more contemporary styling cues.

The Brighton 5.1 system provided for this review included a pair of the next-to-top-of-line floor-standing tower loudspeakers, the 260T at \$999 per pair. The center channel loudspeaker is the 25CC, with a very common arrangement of a 1-inch dome tweeter between a pair of 5.25-inch mid-woofers, for \$299 each. The rear surrounds were the \$299 per pair 50B bookshelf model that could be the basis of an entire 5.1 system should your budget dictate. The subwoofer is the 310S, with a 300-watt amplifier, a 10-inch driver, and two 10-inch passive radiators, for \$499. Total price for the review system is \$2,097

### 260T Front Left And Right Tower

This is a fairly conventional-looking, three-way floor stander of moderate height at about 38 inches tall. The sides are slightly tapered at the front and rear edges. The tops are softly curved at the edges and finished in high-gloss black that contrasts with the satin black vinyl wood-grain finish on the sides and the black detachable grille cloth. The base is also gloss black and stands out a little bit from the front, back, and sides of the loudspeaker. Short integral outriggers have holes for the supplied spikes. Sinclair also supplies thin rubber adhesive-backed discs that can be used when the loudspeakers are placed on hard floor surfaces. The spikes are recommended for carpeted floors. I had a hard time keeping the spikes tight. Apparently, cabinet vibrations caused them to loosen over days or weeks of use. I suspect a thin rubber washer on the top might assist with keeping the spikes tighter over the long haul. The thumb-screws on the top

were difficult to hand tighten. I was hesitant to use pliers for fear that getting them extra tight might damage the high-gloss black finish. So the rubber washer would protect the finish and probably keep the spikes tight over months or years of use.

Jumpers were installed on the four binding posts to allow for single runs of loudspeaker wire. I found bi-wire loudspeaker cables sounded better than the same type of single-wire loudspeaker cables with the jumpers, so I used bi-wire loudspeaker cables with the jumpers removed for the entire review period. The binding posts have round thumbscrews that will accept spades, bare wire, or banana plugs. There may or may not be enough room for pin terminations, depending on how long they are and how stiff the cables are.

About 100 hours of use are needed to begin to hear all the quality the 260Ts can deliver. The rear-mounted port means you want at least two feet of open space behind the loudspeakers. The loudspeakers were designed to sound best with a bit of toe-in. I liked the sound best when my eight-foot listening distance and 8.5-foot distance from center-to-center of each loudspeaker had the loudspeakers aimed just a bit outboard of my shoulders. I listened to the loudspeakers with and without the grille cover and had a slight preference for the small extra bit of detail I heard without the grille cover. The tweeter is surrounded with a silver metallic-appearing plastic plate that has a pattern of tiny pyramids (aka "diamond cut") on the surface. It's not clear if this texture is there for performance or looks, or perhaps both. I'm used to seeing either smooth or damped (i.e. felt or foam) surfaces near a tweeter. This plastic plate holds the slightly recessed tweeter and has a rounded "throat" that allows sound from the edges of the tweeter to transition smoothly into the air. I'm not being critical when identifying this material as plastic... it could actually be a sophisticated moldable anti-resonant composite for all I know. But it's definitely not metal. And it does sound a little plastic-y when tapped. But metal sounds ring-y metallic when tapped, so metal is not automatically better in this application. If the plastic is damped over its entire surface, it might even be a better choice than metal. Sinclair Audio specifies the lower-frequency limit at 40 Hz without specifying whether this is flat or -3 dB. In my room, 40 Hz was about 3 dB, down from 50 and 60 Hz, so it was still fairly well-represented. By 35 Hz, bass was disappearing quickly. This

**Features – 260T floor-standing loudspeaker**

1-inch Black Diamond polymer infused silk dome tweeter  
 6.5-inch woven fiberglass midrange with phase plug  
 6.5-inch woven fiberglass woofer  
 Rear port  
 Bi-wireable; single wireable with supplied jumpers  
 Four spike feet or rubber discs  
 Curved sides and top  
 High gloss black top and bottom caps  
 DALtech (dead as lead) damping material applied to cabinet sides in strategic areas

**Specifications – 260T floor-standing loudspeaker**

Frequency Response: 40-20,000 Hz (+/- 3 dB assumed, but not specified)  
 Nominal Impedance: 8 ohms  
 Crossover Frequency: not specified  
 Crossover Type: not specified  
 Sensitivity: 91 dB  
 Recommended Amp Power: up to 200 watts  
 Dimensions: 38 H x 9 W x 13 D (inches)  
 Weight: 43.8 pounds each  
 Designed in: Canada  
 Manufactured in: China  
 Warranty: 5 years parts and labor  
 MSRP: \$999 per pair

**Features – 25CC Center Channel loudspeaker**

1-inch Black Diamond polymer infused silk dome tweeter  
 Two 5.25-inch woven fiberglass mid-woofers with phase plugs  
 Two rear ports  
 Single pair of binding posts  
 Curved top, bottom, and sides

**Specifications – 25CC Center Channel loudspeaker**

Frequency Response: 55-20,000 Hz  
 Nominal Impedance: 8 ohms  
 Crossover Frequency: not specified  
 Crossover type: not specified  
 Sensitivity: 88 dB  
 Recommended amp power: up to 125 watts  
 Dimensions: 7 H x 21 W x 8 D (inches)  
 Weight: 16.45 pounds  
 Designed in: Canada  
 Manufactured in: China  
 Warranty: 5 years parts and labor  
 MSRP: \$299 each

**Features – 50B Surround loudspeaker**

1-inch Black Diamond polymer infused silk dome tweeter  
 5.25-inch woven fiberglass woofer with phase plug  
 One rear port  
 Single pair of binding posts  
 Curved sides and top  
 Gloss black top

**Specifications – 50B loudspeaker (surround channels)**

Frequency Response: 55-20,000  
 Nominal Impedance: 8 ohms  
 Crossover Frequency: not specified  
 Crossover type: not specified  
 Sensitivity: 88 dB  
 Recommended amp power: up to 100 watts  
 Dimensions: 12 H x 7 W x 8 D (inches)  
 Weight: 10.75 pounds  
 Designed in: Canada  
 Manufactured in: China  
 Warranty: 5 years parts and labor  
 MSRP: \$299 per pair

is respectable bass extension for loudspeakers in this price range. DALtech (dead as lead) damping material is used inside the cabinets of the 260T and other Brighton-series tower loudspeakers. The material is applied to surfaces where resonances appear, reducing the detail-blurring effects of cabinet resonances.

## 25CC Center Channel

The tapered edges of the top and bottom surfaces made it a bit tricky to place the 25CC on the 12-inch-high stand I use for center channel loudspeakers. The brass cones I normally put under the center channel loudspeaker ended up so close together (front-to-back) that the loudspeaker was unstable on them. I ended up letting the back of the loudspeaker rest on the stand while the center-front of the loudspeaker was supported by a large sorbothane (soft-sticky rubber)

puck. This tilted the loudspeaker slightly up. Mounted flat on the 12-inch stand made dialogue seem to be placed a little too low. Tilting the loudspeaker up slightly on this fairly low stand raised the perspective so it seemed more natural. The stand is as low as it is to keep the top of center channel loudspeakers from getting too close to the bottom edge of the projection screen.

The dual rear ports mean this is not a center channel loudspeaker you want to place inside a cabinet. It wants to be out in open space so the ports can "breathe" and not be compromised by being inside a cabinet or too close to the wall behind the loudspeaker. Loudspeaker cable connections are via the same thumbscrew terminals used on the 260Ts. For movie sound, the grille cover didn't make much difference whether it was on or off. For music, I slightly preferred the sound with the grille cover removed. The tweeter surround matched the material used in the 260T, including the molded-in diamond texture.

## 50B Surrounds

There's nothing about the design of the 50B that requires it be used as a surround loudspeaker. In fact, these are pretty good, small bookshelf loudspeakers for the money and would be great as stereo loudspeakers in a starter system, or even as the five channels or seven channels in a 5.1 or 7.1 surround system. Combine five of these with a 310S subwoofer and you'd have a \$1,250 surround system. The 50Bs were placed in the back corners of the room, about 10 feet from the main seat.

Loudspeaker cable connections are the same thumbscrews used on the other Brighton loudspeakers. I used banana plugs with no problems. The rear port means you want some space around and behind these loudspeakers also. As with the other Brighton loudspeakers, the sound was slightly more detailed with the grille cover removed, but when used as surround loudspeakers, it really didn't matter whether the grilles were on or off. There are two threaded brass inserts on the back of the loudspeaker that could be used with some types of loudspeaker stands or wall brackets.

## 310S Subwoofer

There are three radiating surfaces, a driven forward-facing 10-inch woofer, and passive radiators firing to the left and right. Having radiating surfaces on three sides made placement a little bit of a puzzle. I started with the forward-firing 10-inch woofer aimed at the listening seat, but something wasn't quite right. As it turned out, rotating the sub 45 degrees made enough of a difference to eliminate my concerns about the sound of the subwoofer. I used the LFE input because it bypasses the internal crossover. When the AVR or processor has a subwoofer crossover setting, if the subwoofer also has a crossover that can't be defeated, you end up with two crossovers in series with each other. This isn't a good thing for sound quality, so it's a great feature to be able to bypass the internal crossover when using the LFE input.

The 300-watt amplifier has a very small-gauge two-conductor power cord that is captive in a strain relief. This power cord doesn't look beefy enough to deliver enough current for a 300-watt amplifier. But I never heard anything that indicated the amplifier was starved for current. Apparently, the small gauge power cord is more a matter of perception than actual performance. The Auto-off feature worked invisibly. I never heard any hint that the subwoofer was turning on or off as it turned itself on and off in response to the presence or absence of an input signal. I set the volume control to mid-point and let the surround processor control the volume from there. The phase switch lets you use "normal" (0) or inverted phase (180). The internal crossover control ranges from 80 to 150 Hz, but it is only in the circuit when using the line-level input.

I found that setting the crossover point in the AVR/surround processor higher than about 80 Hz caused dialogue to have a noticeable

amount of cupped-hands sound with a somewhat muffled characteristic. This wasn't too bad at 90 Hz, but using a setting of 100 Hz (or higher) really degraded the sound quality. I ended up preferring the AVR/surround processor crossover setting at 80 Hz.

## Amplifier Requirements

With the five loudspeakers all having nominal 8-ohm impedances, you would expect that they would work fine with an average AVR. I did use them with two different AVRs (NAD T-757 and Anthem MRX-700) and had no trouble driving any of the Brighton loudspeakers with a single amplifier channel from the AVR. The small 50B bookshelf loud-

**"I found them just as easy to enjoy as the more expensive loudspeakers."**

speakers are rated for use with amplifiers up to 100 watts, but nothing bad happens when you use a "100-watt loudspeaker" with a 200-watt or higher amplifier... as long as you don't crank the volume so high you go beyond 100 watts. I had no trouble achieving satisfying volume levels in every channel with either AVR or with an outboard amplifier (AudioControl Savoy G3).

## Stereo Sound

The 260Ts were very good for loudspeakers selling for \$1,000 per pair. When the recording contained good spatial information, the 260T

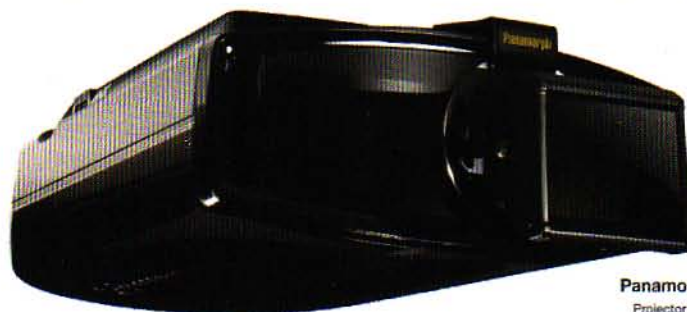
loudspeakers would vanish and reveal the full size of the space captured in the recording. It was impossible to tell exactly where the 260Ts were placed, they disappeared so well. Classical music recordings sometimes do a great job of capturing the size of the space where the recording was made. The 260Ts did an excellent job of reproducing that space in the room, even if it is much too small to hold an entire orchestra. There was an excellent image of the full orchestra, all the way to the left and right sides and front to back. The 260Ts even revealed the overhead perspective most classical recordings have, due to the high placement of the recording microphones.

Rock recordings that manage to capture or create some space within the recording sounded great, with the space sometimes being incredibly large, like the distant thunder in Dire Straits' 2008 remaster of their *Love Over Gold* album. Aside from the very-competent reproduction of the distant thunder, much of the time, this album is loaded with space and is very clean and clear sounding over the 260Ts. I couldn't help thinking while listening to this album that there was really nothing obvious to criticize about the sound of the 260Ts. That's a big surprise at this price point. So I intentionally pushed the volume level higher and higher to see if or when they would start to show signs of stress. Things were really good up to 95 dB or so. That is pretty darn loud for any purpose other than a party. In fact, 95 dB is annoyingly loud for me; I can't even listen to a whole song that loud, let alone a whole album. In the 95 dB to 100 dB range, there were some signs of stress. It became easier to localize the loudspeakers, and the sound-field began collapsing into the space around the two loudspeakers rather than the two loudspeakers being invisible within the three-dimensional space they were creating. That tells me two things: these aren't party loudspeakers and if you keep the sound levels below 95 dB, they make some pretty impressive music. I have no problems with

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or concerns about either of those limitations, especially at this price point. You won't want to try to fill a huge room with sound using these loudspeakers. They will have to work too hard. But 85 dB music in my largish room (nominally 15x29x8) was great.

The sound has no obvious "holes" or mismatches caused by problems in the crossover networks. The tweeter produces very natural-sounding high frequencies. Not notably "fast" nor "slow," you get what seems to be relatively effortless highs with no tendency towards being gritty or edgy or harsh. The highs were always smooth and natural without over-emphasis of high frequencies that you sometimes find in "high-end" loudspeakers when the manufacturer isn't confident enough in their product to deliver linear response. Even in moderately priced loudspeakers you sometimes find products that try to set themselves apart from the crowd by boosting bass or treble or both. Compared to some "splashy" loudspeakers in the same price range, a side-by-side comparison might make some potential customers think the "splashy" loudspeaker sounds "better," while the 260T sounds too laid-back. But that would be a wrong interpretation of what is being heard. The 260T seems properly balanced to me, and "splashy" loudspeakers are intentionally manipulating you... trying to trick you into buying them over a more accurate product. Don't fall for that trick.

When you've been using \$5,000 MartinLogan Theos or \$4,500 Vandersteen 3A Signatures, or even the over-achieving \$2,500 Atlantic Technology AT-1s loudspeakers, you typically don't look forward to switching to loudspeakers that sell for just \$1,000 per pair. But the 260Ts were so good, I never felt deprived or like I was in a penalty box. I found them just as easy to enjoy as the more expensive loudspeakers. That's not to say that they sound just like those other loudspeakers...

#### Features – 310S subwoofer

10-inch forward-firing woofer  
Two 10-inch passive radiators (left and right sides); planar radiating surface; dual rubber surrounds  
Separate LFE and line level inputs  
LFE input bypasses internal crossover  
On/Auto/Off power switch  
Auto mode turns amp off after 5 minutes with no input signal  
Volume control  
Phase switch, 0- or 180-degrees

#### Specifications – 310S subwoofer

Frequency Response: 30-150 Hz  
Crossover Frequency: adjustable from 80 Hz to 160 Hz when using Line Level input  
Amplifier power: 300 watts RMS; 800 watts peak  
Power consumption: not specified  
Dimensions: 15.75 H x 15 W x 16 D (inches)  
Weight: 35.7 pounds  
Designed in: Canada  
Manufactured in: China  
Warranty: 1 year on amplifier/electronics, 5 years on rest of sub, parts and labor  
MSRP: \$499 each

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they don't. Yet there's a thread of reality and neutrality that runs through the sound of all those loudspeakers.

In switching between several different AVRs and a couple of surround processors and two different amplifiers, one thing became very



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clear, the 260Ts can grow with your system. If you are starting with a modest AVR, the 260Ts will work well. And as you improve the system and get a better AVR, then possibly switch to a surround processor and separate amplifier, the 260Ts will keep pace with the changes, revealing all the new performance the better products provide. You won't feel compelled to change the loudspeakers every time you upgrade the system.

The \$800 to \$1,200 price range can be tough for loudspeakers. You can find loudspeakers that are way too difficult for most AVRs to drive within that price range. So you are forced into using an outboard amp at a fairly steep cost. Then there's the problem with nice, easy-to-drive loudspeakers that work well with AVRs, but they sound sort of lifeless, as if making them easy to drive sucked the life out of them. Fortunately, the 260Ts have neither of those problems, making them a good choice for both basic and more ambitious systems.

The 260Ts easily revealed differences in different loudspeaker cables, different power conditioners, and different power cords. You might be surprised how important power cords can be... but not on video displays, any power cord is fine for a projector or panel display. That's impressive for this price range. But it also means that if you've added the 260Ts to your modest system, you'll undoubtedly find yourself wanting to max-out the sound quality you're getting, so you could be in for a several bouts of component and accessory upgrades when you add 260Ts to your system.

I was consistently surprised that even with the 260Ts too far apart (8.5 feet center-to-center) for my listening distance (8 feet), they still created a very stable center image and they remained very "invisible" within the sound-field they were creating. I was even getting sonic images beyond the left edge of the left loudspeaker and beyond the right edge of the right loudspeaker with good recordings. Some loudspeakers never do that, or if they do, those outboard imaging things don't go much beyond the edges of the loudspeakers. You won't have that problem with the 260Ts.

I listened to the 50Bs as stereo loudspeakers in locations right beside the 260Ts. The small size of the 50Bs, not surprisingly, limits bass response. There was useful output at 50 Hz, but 55 Hz (Sinclair's low-frequency spec) was the practical limit. The placement in the middle of the room did nothing to reinforce bass, so the loudspeakers sounded a little lighter-weight in the bass than they do closer to a wall. The 50Bs do the same great job of creating a large space with lots of depth like the 260Ts. The tonal match with the 260Ts was amazingly similar, except for a bit of cupped hands or muffled character that was probably somewhere in the 300 Hz range. This could be caused by the smaller enclosure or the mid-room placement. It was not detectable with the 50Bs in the back of the room as surround loudspeakers. In fact, I never would have noticed it had I not directly compared the 50Bs to the 260Ts. To be fair, the 260Ts are 333 percent more expensive than the 50Bs, so it may be expecting a bit too much for the 50Bs to sound exactly like the 260Ts minus the 6.5-inch woofer. Nevertheless, the 50Bs produced a big soundstage with excellent localization and the same entertaining presentation as the 260Ts.

### Surround Sound

With every loudspeaker in every position having the same tweeter, and the woofers, midrange, and mid-woofers all being either 6.5-inch

or 5.25-inch versions of essentially the same drivers, the balance of the sound from each channel was extremely similar. This produced excellent surround sound performance, particularly in light of the total cost of the 5.1 system. There was nothing about the sound that made it obvious that this was a budget system. The subwoofer didn't reach much below 30 Hz in my room, which is commensurate with Sinclair's spec. This wasn't obvious unless directly compared with a subwoofer with strong response down to 20 Hz. You don't miss any information with the 310S, but there were times when some effects lacked the chest and body slams that big (expensive) subwoofers can deliver. While the 310S is no giant-killer of a subwoofer, it does offer good performance commensurate with its MSRP.

The title song during the credits of *Casino Royale* was quite nicely presented, with excellent spatial relationships between vocals and instruments. The sound was very musical and exciting, just as intended. The rest of the soundtrack challenged the system to create tension, urgency, romance, and loss, and the Brighton system delivered it all. Dialogue was clean and clear. Surround effects were well placed and just as focused or amorphous as intended. The subwoofer delivered powerful bass, which in *Casino Royale* was present primarily during various chase sequences. When the building collapses in Venice, the 310S did a respectable job of delivering the foundation-shaking collapse with great drama.

*Captain America* was a great sonic treat, with intelligible dialogue

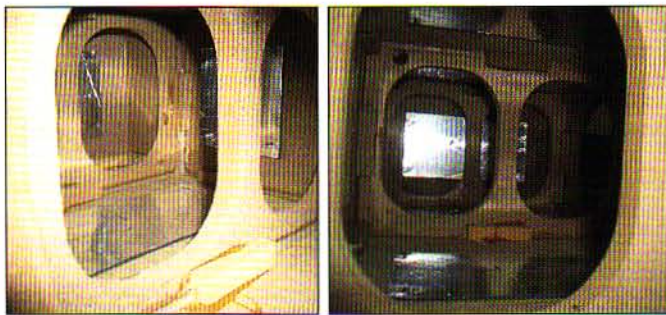
and good use of the extra channels, to help tell the story and produce interesting ambient effects during a variety of scenes. The size and character of the spaces in the soundtrack were reproduced well by the Brighton system. Laboratory effects were very well done, from subtle background sounds to crescendos of energy swirling around the room.

I never had an experience with a movie soundtrack where I felt the Brighton system had an obvious defect or limitation. I have a feeling that some owners who get into this 5.1 system as a "starter"

system, with the intention of upgrading in a few years, may be surprised with the staying power of the Brighton system. As the review period drew to a close, I felt no urgency to get the Brighton system out and move on to something more expensive. You can't ask much more of a budget system.

### Summary

I tend to have a soft spot for products that don't cost a lot but perform very well. Add the Sinclair Audio Brighton loudspeakers to that list of products. It shouldn't be too surprising that loudspeakers selling for \$2,000 a pair or more tend to sound pretty good. But when you start trying to squeeze a lot of performance into \$1,000 or \$300 boxes, getting them to sound really good is a little more problematic. Sinclair Audio seems to have done just that very well. The stereo and surround sound capabilities of the Brighton system were easy to enjoy and ever-increasing levels of performance elsewhere in the system were dealt with in stride by the Brighton system. The sound would just get better and better as more capable components were used. If you're on a budget, but don't want sound that gives away your modest budget, a Sinclair Audio Brighton system could very well be the ideal cover. Highly recommended. **WSR**



A lot to do with the overall performance is the DALtech damping material within the cabinet, a very unique characteristic that while not obvious to the eye has a great effect on the ears. It lines the towers of the Brighton series.