

“WE LOVED THE  
MIGHTY ATOM ...”

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**HOME**  
Theater

*“I began with some typical stereo material to get the feel for the Atoms. Right away, I was impressed ... Its super — clean sound really won us over ... as a part in a home theater molecule, the Atom makes an essential element.”*

by Steve Thompson

**W**ith this collection of teensy-tinsy, super-affordable speakers, the law of diminishing returns just doesn't apply.

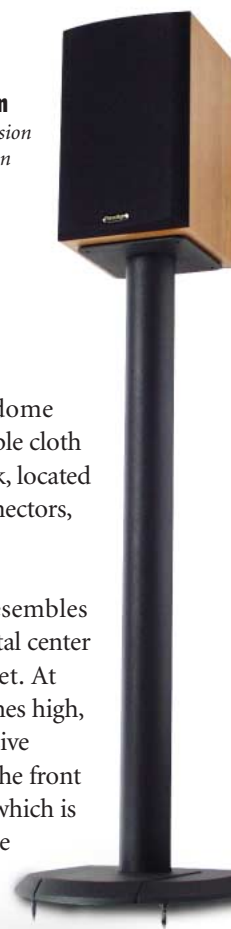
I'm a big fan of value. My friends know me for my refined, well-tuned home theater system. But deep down inside, I know that as the price and sophistication of components go up, the increase in performance you get by paying more generally declines. That's why the kid in me — the guy who used to drool over the big-ticket hi-fi gear, yet found delight in discovering a budget preamp or speaker that performed well beyond its means — became a bit restless and excited when HT offered me the opportunity to audition Paradigm's latest entry into value-priced home theater.

The package begins with a pair of mini monitors, whose name evokes images of diminutive cartoon characters possessing the strength of 100 men. The Atom is a cute little two-way speaker in a 10-inch high cabinet that houses a 5-1/2-inch

mid/woofer and a 3/4-inch dome tweeter behind a non-removable cloth grille. A small port on the back, located just above the spring-clip connectors, augments the bass response.

The CC-50 center speaker resembles any of the millions of horizontal center speaker models on the market. At about 18 inches wide by 6 inches high, this design would be unobtrusive above or below your TV set. The front baffle points slightly upward, which is ideal for applications where the speaker resides under your TV set, but not so ideal if you plan to stick this baby on top (more about this later). Removing the grille reveals a single 5-1/2-inch woofer adjacent to a 3/4-inch dome tweeter. I'm not a big fan of the typical horizontal woofer-tweeter-woofer designs on the market, and was happy to see that Paradigm resisted this urge. As with the Atom, a rear port controls the bass response.

**The New Atom**  
(Improved over version reviewed, for even better sound.)



If the Atoms are cute, the Micros are just adorable. At only a fraction over 8 inches high, they're perfect for tucking away in the back of the room. The Micros also offer a single 5-inch mid/woofer and 3/4-inch tweeter behind a fixed cloth grille, and a rear port right above the spring clips.

Paradigm's tiny 14-inch x 13-1/2-inch x 16-inch PDR-10 subwoofer contains a 10-inch woofer and an integral 80-watt power amplifier. It's one of the smallest powered subs we've ever seen and one of the least expensive. Like most powered subs, the PDR-10 accepts either line-level or speaker inputs. Controls on the back let you adjust output level and crossover frequency to suit your room and system.

Paradigm also makes a line of sweet little outboard passive crossovers; we tried the least expensive one, the X-10. The X-10 has spring clips you use to connect it between your amp and your left and right speakers, and a full-range line-level output to feed a powered sub. It filters the low frequencies out of the left and right speakers, relieving them of the strain of reproducing bass.

Once I had poked and prodded the system for awhile, I figured that it was time to put it to the test. Integration into my current home theater was easy – I simply had to replace my current left, right, and center satellites with the Atoms and the CC-50. The PDR-10 plugged into the line-level subwoofer output of my preamp/processor, and the Micros mounted nicely behind the couch on my IKEA telescoping surround speaker stands. These innovative (and inexpensive) stands are perfect for supporting small surround speakers like



**The New CC-170**

(Improved over version CC-150 reviewed, for even better sound.)

the Micros. (No, I don't write for the IKEA catalog, I just recognize a good idea once in awhile).

I began with some typical stereo material to get the feel for the Atoms. Right away, I was impressed with the general quality of these guys. I was ready for that characteristic crispness that mini monitors often provide, yet the high-end was relatively smooth. However, they lacked the fine detail one usually expects from small monitors like these. All in all, quite listenable indeed, although don't expect much from the low-end with these babies by themselves they're not intended for that.

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Editor Brent Butterworth and associate editor Al Griffin also tried the Atoms, this time in the HT listening room with the X-10 crossover in place and the PDR-10 subwoofer hooked up, and reported impressive results – they found the Atoms amazingly clean for their price, especially in the midrange, where most speakers (even many \$1,000/pair models) really screw up the sound. They were especially enthusiastic about the Atoms' very clean voice reproduction.

Next I added the subwoofer. I adjusted the level control on the PDR-10 with the built-in crossover wide-open (my processor does the job for me) until the blend between the front channels and the subwoofer matched. I also played with subwoofer placement a bit to try

**X-10**



to get a smooth transition and natural-feeling low end. But while the bass was there, even close to what I wanted at times, it's not punchy, and the pitches are generally not well-defined enough to keep me entertained. The PDR-10 puts out an honest amount of bass for the money, and for monetary reasons makes a good match with the Atoms, but it's the first place we'd think about upgrading – we've found it takes a good \$600 sub to keep our feet tapping.

But enough of the stereo thing—what about movies? Now, I'm a big fan of identical (or at least closely matched) speakers across the front, so I was curious to see how the CC-50 performed with the Atoms. I hoped that Paradigm would prove my intuition wrong and show me that the CC-50 could form a seamless sonic fit with the Atoms. Unfortunately, I didn't get a chance to find out, because the CC-50 sample I had was apparently damaged in shipping; it sounded bad. Brent tried a second sample and reported that it sounded pretty good—a little rolled off and not quite as smooth as the Atom, but a decent compromise if you



**PDR-10**

want a horizontal center speaker. For the best sound and a perfect sonic match across the front, we recommend you use a shielded Atom for the center.

Finally the Micros. High atop their IKEA stands, the Micros never really drew attention to themselves (that's a good thing). While I don't recommend them for reproducing intense sound pressure levels (which aren't necessarily a bad thing), the Micros worked well in the back, especially through the limited surround bandwidth of Dolby Pro Logic.

## SUMMARY

We were hoping to be really blown away by this little system for not a lot of money, and in many ways, we were – as a part in a home theater molecule, the Atom makes an essential element. Its super clean sound really won us over, and the Micros make a nice complement. The PDR-10 gives you OK woof for its very low price, but we

recommend spending more for a better sub. The CC-50's surprisingly good for an inexpensive horizontal center speaker; using a shielded Atom for the center will serve you even better.

- This little Micro handled the surrounds well.
- We loved the mighty Atom, especially its clean voice reproduction.
- The CC-50's unobtrusive on top of a TV.
- For an inexpensive sub, the PDR-10 produced good woof.
- Hook this little X-10 crossover up to filter the bass to the sub.

### The New Micro

*(Improved over version reviewed, for even better sound.)*

