PRODUCT review

Paradigm®

PHANTOM • CC-170 • ADP-170 • PDR-12

"... this system sounded SO GOOD."

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"... big-time points on value ... tons of detail, and an overall musicality that belies their price tag."

by Joe Hageman

The New Phantom
(Improved over version reviewed for even better sound.)

September 24, 1999—I miss the days when bigger was better. Somewhere in the 1980s, we strayed from this notion, and things like cars, computers, and women's clothing began to get smaller (although I'm not complaining about that last one). This trend leaked into the hi-fi biz, and now it's hard to find a pair of good-sounding, affordable tower speakers. Oh sure, there are plenty of nice mini-monitors, but there's nothing like a big ol' tower speaker staring back at you—towers just *beg* you to play them as loud as you can. Well, it seems that the folks at Paradigm share my feelings. They've created a tower speaker, the Phantom, that pumps out a good amount of bass, sounds great on movies and music for a remarkably low price.

FEATURES

- 3/4-inch ceramic/metal composite dome tweeter
- two 6-1/2-inch poly cone woofers
- non-removable grille
- available in Black Ash, Light Cherry or Rosenut finish
- frequency response 55 Hz – 20 kHz (±2 dB)
- bass extension 40 Hz
- 33-1/4 x 7-1/2 x 12-3/4 inches (HWD)

The Phantom uses the same good-sounding, 3/4-inch, ceramic/metal composite dome tweeter found in many of Paradigm's other affordable speakers, like the CC-170 center speaker and the ADP-170 surround speaker. Using the same tweeter throughout a home-theater speaker system is usually a good idea, because it helps maintain consistent tonal characteristics from speaker to speaker. Also, since you'd usually see just *one* 6-1/2 inch woofer at this price, not two, I'll have to throw in some extra points here.

The non-removable grille is a little unusual; speakers usually sound better with their grilles off. But one could argue that most people buying a speaker this inexpensive will keep the grille on, so I'll just take off a point or two for that.

"The Phantoms threw up an expansive soundstage …"

CONNECTIVITY

The Phantom has a single pair of five-way binding-post speaker terminals, which is all you need and all you can expect in a tower speaker priced this affordably.

"… The PDR-12 can belt out low notes with precision and impact, while the smaller woofers in the Phantom do a great job of reproducing mid- and upper-bass with definition and tunefulness."

LOOK & FEEL

The Phantom tower speaker certainly looks nice in the cherry finish I received, but I have to admit it feels kind of cheap. It's extremely light in weight for a tower speaker, which suggests there is not a lot of internal bracing.

PERFORMANCE

Given this speaker's price tag, most people will use a receiver to power it, so that's what I used (a Denon AVR-3300, to be specific). I started with stereo music. I was delightfully surprised that the Phantom didn't sound as inexpensive as it felt. The Phantom towers recreated stereo music with tons of detail, and an overall musicality that belies their price tag. There was a slight hint of sibilance in vocals, but this is a minor flaw that I could easily live with. The Phantoms threw up an expansive soundstage and the slight roll-off of the tweeters helped to tame bright recordings without sacrificing detail.

CC-170

ADP-170

"While the Phantom is a gracious performer on music, it metamorphoses into a dynamic brute on movies. When pushed hard, it doesn't lose its grip on the action …"

The 6-1/2-inch midrange/woofers in the Phantom produce a decent amount of bass on their own, but I especially enjoyed them when I used a pair of Phantoms with Paradigm's PDR-12 subwoofer. The PDR-12 can belt out low notes with precision and impact, while the smaller woofers in the Phantom do a great job of reproducing mid- and upper-bass with definition and tunefulness.

I had a chance to use the Phantom in a full surround-sound system, adding the PDR-12 as well as Paradigm's CC-170 center speaker and ADP-170 surround speakers. While the Phantom is a gracious performer on music, it metamorphoses into a dynamic brute on movies. When pushed hard, it doesn't lose its grip on the action, and the tweeter's slight roll-off came into play again, helping to tame overly aggressive soundtracks. The use of the same tweeter throughout was a definite asset to this system. Front-to-back pans were seamless; with no audible tonal changes.

"This speaker gets big-time points on value not only because it is affordable, but because it actually sounds good."

Unfortunately, at the time all I had on hand to compare to the Phantoms was a pair of towers speakers that cost more than twice as much as the Phantoms. But, amazingly enough, the Phantom held its own quite well. As I expected, the more expensive towers sounded better overall, but not amazingly so. The differences were not like buying a Porsche over a Hyundai, but more like buying an Acura over a Toyota.

VALUE

While most speakers systems using similar designs with similar materials cost more, Paradigm managed to build this one for far less. This speaker gets big-time points on value not only because it is affordable, but because it actually sounds good. Even though it does feel a little cheesy, I am not going to deduct value points for that because this system sounded so good.

PDR-12