

“**VALUE-FOR-DOLLAR JUGGERNAUT**
... packing insane levels of performance into a small, attractive cabinet that even a kid with a paper route could afford.”

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by Andrew Robinson

Ask any audio/video reviewer for a list of best bang-for-the-buck, under-\$500 speakers and I am betting each and every one of them will have Paradigm’s Atom Monitor speakers on it. Since its inception, the Atom has been a value-for-dollar juggernaut, packing insane levels of performance into a small, attractive cabinet that even a kid with a paper route could afford. Just how affordable are the Paradigm Atom Monitors? Try under \$300 for the pair.

“... an attractive, compact speaker with a fit and finish that on its own defies its asking price.”

The Atom Monitor is an attractive, compact speaker with a fit and finish that on its own defies its asking price. The Atom Monitor comes in a variety of finishes, including Wengé, Cherry, Rosenut, Black Ash and even White. The cabinet is solidly constructed and has a few design cues that class the Atom up nicely, making it a much more expensive-looking speaker.

“... produces magic throughout the midrange and upper bass frequencies.”

The Atom is a two-way speaker, featuring a one-inch H-PTD tweeter mated to a single five-and-a-half-inch bass/midrange driver.

The bass/midrange driver is a bit unique-looking by traditional loudspeaker standards in that it bears a striking resemblance to a condom. Paradigm says the speakers are “ribbed for your aural pleasure,” and I have to agree, for the driver produces magic throughout the midrange and upper bass frequencies. The Atom Monitor has a reported frequency response of 90 Hz – 20 kHz, meaning a sub is all but required for full-range listening. The Atom isn’t a pig for power, needing as little as 15 watts to come alive, due to its rather efficient 90 dB sensitivity into an eight-ohm load.



“... so easy to drive it’s not impossible to build a quality system around them for less than \$1,000 ... it’s also not impossible to suggest that, for many listeners, it may be all the system they’ll need.”

HIGH POINTS

- The Atom Monitor is so much fun and musically enjoyable that I know many reviewers, myself included, with top-dollar systems who keep a pair around just to remind ourselves how it all started and how simple our love of music used to be.
- In terms of sheer performance, there is a lot to love about the Atom Monitors. For starters, the upper frequencies are composed, smooth and non-fatiguing and the midrange and upper bass frequencies are warm, nimble and natural. While not the last word in air and detail, the Atom Monitors win you over with their overall “rightness,” letting you enjoy the music, rather than trying to impress you with minutiae.
- The Atom Monitors are so easy to drive it’s not impossible to build a quality system around them for less than \$1,000 out the door. It’s also not impossible to suggest that, for many listeners, it may be all the system they’ll need.
- The Atom Monitors are a great way to get into the audiophile or home theater game. You can buy them for fronts for two-channel listening, then move them to the rear channels when budget allows for larger mains. This said, five Atom Monitors and a decent sub will make for one hell of a home theater in small to medium rooms without breaking the bank.

LOW POINTS

- The Atom Monitors are not the last word in bass authority, so you’ll need a subwoofer to enjoy full-range sound, which will drive the total purchase price up a bit. However, there are a number of subs out there that are great value for the money and will mate nicely with the Atoms without driving the cost north of, say, \$500 total.
- The Atom Monitors sound their best when stand-mounted. Paradigm makes a number of quality stands that will complement and allow you to get the most out of these diminutive speakers. It is true that you can buy cheaper stands, say around \$50 total, and achieve similar if not equal results. If you have a console or bookshelf that will allow for the Atom’s tweeter to be roughly at ear level, you may be able to forego stands, though if you let them breathe a bit, they will reward you.

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CONCLUSION

For the price, the Paradigm Atom Monitor is a no-brainer when it comes to a potential first loudspeaker purchase, for it is possibly one of the best, if not the single smartest, buys going in loudspeakers today. The Atom Monitors sound bigger than they are, more refined than they should be and provide a level of enjoyment that frankly, big-ticket speakers can’t match, for you’re always aware of their price tags. Not the Atom. It is the type of speaker you buy and feel good about weeks and months later, because it’s just so damn enjoyable. If you haven’t heard the Atom Monitors, or don’t already own a pair yourself, you should.

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