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Klipsch's THX Ultra2 System Fulfills Our Quest!



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LORD OF THE HORNS

Suspiciously small cabinets. Seemingly archaic horn speakers. Plain-Jane finishes. Can Klipsch's THX Ultra2 system exceed the sum of its parts?

Los Angelinos are spoiled. Routine brush fires, mudslides, earthquakes, traffic jams and Madonna sightings notwithstanding, we have the best movie theaters in the world. Many of them regularly host premieres and screenings, and these elite venues keep their projection and sound systems tuned to perfection. In Los Angeles, we can see and hear movies as they are *supposed* to be seen and heard.

For me, however, this cinematic cornucopia carries a downside: Watching DVDs on my home theater can be a relatively lackluster experience. Since I hear all of the massive speaker systems Editor in Chief Brent Butterworth reviews in his large listening room, I know that getting professional-quality sound in the home *is* possible. Thus began my quest: to achieve the same sound quality in my comparatively modest abode.

After months of scanning through press releases and websites, I stumble on a possible solution—Klipsch's surprisingly compact new THX Ultra2 speaker system, which Brent had just received. I beg him to let me try out the system at home. He agrees, with the caveat that he refuses to deliver it to my home in his SUV. No problem there,

From top to bottom, the KS-525 surround speaker, KL-525 and KL-650 main speakers and KW-120 subwoofer.

though, because unlike most systems that carry the Ultra2 pedigree, this one fits easily into my car.

Klipsch may not be a household name on the order of Sony, Bose or Alex Gonzalez, but it is one of the oldest and most respected speaker manufacturers. For 55 years, the company's main focus has been horn speakers. Placing a horn in front of a speaker driver makes it louder without having to use more power, just as a megaphone amplifies your voice with no extra effort on your part.

Perhaps more important to my quest is that Klipsch has vast experience in commercial theater sound systems. And guess what types of speakers are used behind most movie screens? Horns.

Also promising is the fact that this system has received THX Ultra2 certification. THX Ultra2 is a set of standards created to ensure that a speaker system can deliver the sound level and quality of a professional theater in rooms ranging from 3,000 to 6,000 cubic feet. Given our experience with three other Ultra2 systems, it seems that the certification standards do in fact ensure outstanding sound quality. Few speakers are good enough to meet these standards. We know because we hear so many speaker engineers complain about them.

When Brent first tells me about the Klipsch system, I expect a pile of large, room-dominating speakers. I am pleasantly surprised to find the

BY ALEX GONZALEZ PHOTOGRAPHY BY CORDERO STUDIOS

For the woofers in all of its THX-certified speakers, Klipsch uses its proprietary Cerametallic diaphragm (right), which combines ceramic and metallic materials to create an exceptionally stiff cone.



opposite. Klipsch obviously designed this system for maximum placement flexibility; the speakers are small enough to be installed in many home entertainment cabinets, built into a wall or simply placed around a TV set. For an Ultra2 system, this is a rare feat.

The overall look and design of the system is simple, unobtrusive and straightforward, with a neutral finish Klipsch calls galaxy black. The speakers are obviously meant to be heard rather than seen. Nonetheless, I find the system complements my home's decor much better than my own system does.

The system comprises four different speakers. For front left, center and right speakers, you can choose the KL-650, which has two woofers and a single horn tweeter, or the KL-525, which is similar in many ways to the KL-650, but smaller. For the surround channels, you can use the KS-525, a speaker with two woofers and two horn tweeters that is specifically designed for use as a surround speaker. (You can also use KL-650s or KL-525s for the surround channel.) The subwoofer is the KW-120,

which has a 12-inch woofer; to meet THX standards, you will need two of these. Klipsch also provides a subwoofer amplifier, the KA-1000, which can power one or two KW-120s. With so many options, your installer can design a custom system for you to accommodate practically any need.

From the first moment, the Klipsch system impresses me with its neutrality—the sound is natural, and neither the bass, midrange or treble really jumps out at you. For example, voices never sound harsh, as they do with a system that emphasizes treble, and they never sound boomy, as they do with a system that emphasizes bass. I hear more detail in dialogue from movie soundtracks than I have ever heard before, even on the larger systems Brent reviews. The high frequencies are clear and detailed. In Brent's opinion (but not mine), the treble sounds slightly highlighted, although he agreed with me that the clarity of voices reproduced by the Klipsch system is hard to beat. Also, the KS-525 surround speaker produces the most enveloping and

detailed surround sound I have ever experienced in my home.

Should you use the larger KL-650 or sneak in the smaller KL-525? That depends. In certain places—for example, atop my TV set—the KL-650 simply will not fit. But use the KL-650 if you can. Its larger woofers and ported cabinet give it a deeper, more robust bass response, and it

DESCRIPTION

Home theater speaker system, incorporates various combinations of small and large front speakers, dipole surround speaker and passive subwoofer powered by 1,000-watt amplifier

COMPONENTS

KL-650: Two 6.5-inch Cerametallic woofers, 1-inch titanium dome tweeter with 10 x 6-inch horn

KL-525: Two 5.25-inch Cerametallic woofers, 1-inch titanium dome tweeter with 10 x 6-inch horn

KS-525: Two 5.25-inch Cerametallic woofers, two 1-inch titanium dome tweeters with 5 x 5-inch horns

KW-120: 12-inch Cerametallic woofer

CONNECTIONS

KL-650: Two sets of binding post speaker terminals (connected by brass strap jumpers), biwireable; accepts bare wire, pins, spade lugs, banana plugs and dual banana plugs

KL-525: Same as above

KS-525: Same as above

KW-120: NL2 SpeakOn input

KA-1000: Stereo line-level input and output, two NL2 SpeakOn speaker outputs

DIMENSIONS

KL-650: 15 x 17 x 12.5 inches (hwd)

KL-525: 12.8 x 16 x 12.5 inches (hwd)

KS-525: 13.8 x 13 x 8.5 inches (hwd)

KW-120: 20.3 x 17.8 x 17.8 inches (hwd)

KA-1000: 4.8 x 17.5 x 12.3 inches (hwd)

PRICE/CONTACT

PRICE: KL-650 \$1,200, KS-525 \$625, KL-525 \$1,000, KW-120 \$1,250, KA-1000 \$1,400

CONTACT: 800.KLIPSCH
klipsch.com

blends better with the KW-120 subwoofers.

The subwoofers and the KA-1000 amp produce deep, powerful, intense, frightening bass. In fact, using two subs instead of one helps cancel out some of the acoustic problems in my room. I achieve an even better result than I did with the Velodyne DD-15 subwoofer reviewed in the May/June issue.

Overall, the sound quality I hear from DVDs easily surpasses that of the majority of the movie theaters I have visited—including some of Los Angeles' very best. The Klipsch THX Ultra2 is an extremely well designed, meticulously engineered and thoughtfully executed speaker system. My quest is fulfilled! [HE](#)

Although all of the Klipsch THX speakers include speaker grilles, we think they look better naked. Only the wall-mounted KS-525 surround speaker (below) looks better with its drivers concealed.

