



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
GROUP TEST WINNER

Considering the fun aspect of the XS, we were surprised to learn you can't buy it in colours other than black or white

Boston Acoustics SoundWare XS 5.1

★★★★★

£350

'PLAY SMART' IS Boston Acoustics' catchphrase, designed to convey that the company's products are cheeky and fun, but also serious in the performance stakes. Sure, it might just be marketing baffle, but the SoundWare XS 5.1 does actually combine both elements impressively.

In the box you get a fairly large subwoofer and five identical satellites. The angular little speakers are solidly built, and thanks to the clean lines and unfussy styling (as well as an extremely flexible wall bracket), will happily blend into most living spaces.

Audio quality equally impressive

The polyhedral casing is actually also designed to reduce standing waves, and like the Jamos (but unlike the Teufels) the Boston satellites are two-way, each boasting a 64mm woofer and 13mm tweeter.

Of course, it's all well and good for a manufacturer to claim it's taking sound quality seriously, but the proof is in the listening. The good news is that listening to the SoundWare XS 5.1 system is an absolute pleasure.

↑ FOR
Thoughtful, flexible design; cohesive, controlled, detailed and solid delivery

↓ AGAINST
Nothing of note

→ VERDICT
Flexible, affordable and brilliant – the Boston's a brilliant all-rounder

Playing the cemetery scene from *Law Abiding Citizen*, the opening conversation between the attorneys proves the Boston can deliver dialogue with focus and detail, while the strings of the score and general ambient effects spread around the room to deliver a palpable sense of immersion.

“For a style system of this size and price, it delivers mighty big movie sounds”

When the action starts, it's absolutely thrilling. The treble sparkles brilliantly and always remains controlled, leading to realistically shattering glass and dramatic bullet ricochets.

Pleasingly, the subwoofer keeps pace, lending each gunshot a genuine degree of heart-thumping solidity and weight. The surround field is full of effects, but the system avoids getting confused and allows bullets to travel around the listening position without falling into any unseemly gaps. For a system of this size and price, it delivers mighty big movie sounds.

And music? Also impressive. The 5.1 PCM version of *Rocket Man* from Elton John's *Live at Madison Square Garden* Blu-ray is reproduced with far

greater scale than you'd expect from such dinky speakers. The spaciousness of the delivery successfully conveys the vastness of the huge venue, while the enveloping crowd noise increases the feeling of being there.

But none of this undermines the importance of Elton's vocals and the band's instruments, which are delivered with natural weight and solidity. This is thanks in no small part to the impressive rhythmic integration of the subwoofer.

True, there are a couple of ways in which the others here outperform than the Boston – the Teufel is even more cohesive, while the Jamo delivers slightly tauter bass – but there's no doubt that this is the best all-rounder.

Double option

Boston Acoustics includes two types of bracket with the SoundWare system. The first is the standard, straight-on type, and because the satellite can pivot 20 degrees to each side and 40 degrees down, it allows very flexible positioning. If that still doesn't suit, there are also corner brackets in the box.



If you want great surround sound from affordable, tiny speakers, the **Boston Acoustics** system is best

JAMO'S A102HCS5 package has for the last few years proved to be one of home cinema's great bargains. A flexible, brilliantly built and punchy system for (often under) £300, it's won many Awards and many more fans. It's still good today, too, but its new rivals prove that if you can stretch your budget just a little, you can now buy a more cohesive and controlled surround experience.

Cohesion is exactly the Teufel's main area of success. It offers the most enveloping and three-dimensional surround sound field of any style system we've seen at this price point. True, the subwoofer can't quite keep up with the satellites, but taken as a whole, if we had the extra money, we'd probably take the Teufel over the Jamo.

Boston is an all-round gem

Of course, if you can stretch to the Teufel, you've got more than enough for the Boston Acoustics, which is absolutely the best here. It combines most of the punch of the Jamo with most of the cohesion of the Teufel, and beats both for detail and dynamic ability – making it a fabulous all-rounder.

“The Boston Acoustics beats both its rivals for dynamic ability”

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★★★★★
£350

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NOW ADD THESE

HOME CINEMA AMPLIFIER DENON AVR-1910
★★★★★
£ 450

BLU-RAY PLAYER SONY BDP-S370
★★★★★
£ 170

40in LCD TELEVISION SONY KDL-40EX503
★★★★★
£ 900




True, you can pick-up receivers for less than this these days, but the Denon is worth the extra stretch, thanks to its immaculate build quality and amazingly punchy and detailed sound. It loves being driven loud but still gives you fantastic insight at lower volumes.

The affordable Blu-ray player market is as intensely fought over as ever, but Sony's new budget BDP-S370 is the one to get. Combining stunning pictures and sound with a feature list that includes BBC iPlayer and Lovefilm, it's great value. See p40 for a full review.

Sony's first 2010 television is an absolute blinder, offering a stunningly detailed picture and Freeview HD tuner. It's excellent value for money, even at £900. What's more, there's no backlight clouding in sight.

TOTAL SYSTEM £1870

FACTS AND FIGURES

	Boston Acoustics SoundWare XS 5.1	Jamo A102HCS5	Teufel Motiv 3
PRICE RANGE	£300-£500		
SPECIFICATION			
PRICE	£ 350	£ 300	£ 460
CENTRE/SATELLITE SENSITIVITY	85dB	86dB	82dB
CENTRE/SATELLITE IMPEDANCE	8 ohms	6 ohms	4 ohms
CENTRE/SATELLITE POWER	100W	80W	70W
SUBWOOFER POWER	150W	200W	150W
SUBWOOFER ORIENTATION	Downwards	Downwards	Forwards
CENTRE DIMENSIONS	9 x 9 x 11cm	9 x 17 x 9cm	12 x 12 x 14cm
SATELLITE DIMENSIONS	9 x 9 x 11cm	9 x 9 x 9cm	12 x 12 x 14cm
SUBWOOFER DIMENSIONS	31 x 28 x 38cm	30 x 23 x 43cm	26 x 26 x 32cm
FINISHES	Black, white	Black, white	Black
HOW THEY RATED			
SOUND	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
FEATURES	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
VERDICT	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★