

B&W VM6 5.1-channel speaker package inc. PV1 sub



Bowers & Wilkins has, over the past few years, been delivering loudspeaker models clearly designed to work well with modern display equipment. Essentially the challenge is to reduce the size of the speakers so that they can be placed nearer to plasmas and LCDs without poking out from the wall. With the VM6 loudspeakers, B&W has achieved just this.

Equipment

As supplied, this system consisted of five VM6 loudspeakers, one PV1 subwoofer and two floorstands to suit the loudspeakers. The VM6 speakers cost \$599 each, the PV1 subwoofer \$2200, and the combined price here omits the cost of the floorstands (\$449 for a pair).

Each VM6 loudspeaker carries a single 25mm 'Nautilus' tube loaded aluminium dome tweeter, and a 130mm Kevlar cone bass/midrange driver. These are placed in a long, flattish panel of a speaker enclosure — notwithstanding that they are bass reflex loaded — that stands 660mm tall, 180mm wide and only 105mm deep. A wall-mounting bracket and a desktop stand are supplied with each unit. B&W specifies their impedance at eight ohms, their power handling at 100W and their frequency response as 55Hz to 22,000Hz (± 3 dB).

The subwoofer is B&W's radical PV1, the 'PV' standing for 'Pressure Vessel'. That's because the enclosure is a near-spherical aluminium construction with no holes whatsoever. On horizontally opposite faces of this are two 200mm mica/aluminium long-throw drivers. These have to do a lot of work to overcome the internal resistance to their movement, given the sealed and small nature of the enclosure, so a 500W power amplifier is included.

Be a little careful with placement of this unusual subwoofer. The drivers are fully exposed and there are no grilles to cover them. Damage is almost inevitable if it is placed in a well-trafficked area.

B&W rates the subwoofer's frequency response at 21Hz to 110Hz ± 3 dB, with the -6dB point at 18Hz.

Performance

Inside each VM6 carton you find the speaker, along with an accessory box. Inside the accessory box is the stand. In bits. And the wall bracket. In bits. So it looks like a bit of construction to undergo here, in part because these speakers don't actually connect directly to your speaker cables. In fact our first speaker took about five minutes to put together, the rest significantly less. Each speaker has a pair of bare metal posts recessed into the area of the cabinet shaped for the insertion of the stand post. A device slides over these two posts, and on the other side has two grub-screw-equipped receptors for your speaker cables. So you screw your cables to this, and plug this into the posts. Although it seems there's a danger of reversing polarity, notches inside the aluminium support make that almost impossible, particularly if the instruction diagrams are carefully followed.


These speakers are obviously intended to please décor-loving users who may possibly be less technically inclined than the average AV enthusiast. Does this design ethos lead to compromised performance? How did it sound?

Very good, we reckon. The PV1 subwoofer was extraordinarily powerful, and had excellent bass extension, though with a peak (about six decibels up) at around 70Hz; if your receiver has EQ, you might allow it to operate. Ignoring this peak, the response was 17.4Hz to 128Hz (± 6 dB), and aside from that peak the whole signal was clean, fast and tight; the subwoofer sounded as good with music as with LFE from movies.

Location, location, location! That's all important with all loudspeakers, and no less so with the VM6 units. On their stands in the customary test location — a good metre forward of the rear wall — they lacked impact.

But these are décor-friendly designs, specified for use *against* the rear wall, not a metre away. Repositioned, they suddenly had punch, with a sound really quite extraordinary for speakers based around one tweeter and one small bass/midrange driver. There were some limitations. The voicing seemed very smooth, the zing of cymbals less tight than with comparable speakers. Still, this made the speakers seem, if anything, nicely refined. So when dealing with a company as experienced in the art of building loudspeakers as B&W, it's a good idea to pay attention to its suggestions. We would recommend that you use the included wall brackets to attach the speakers to your wall.

Conclusion

The pictures don't do justice to the looks on offer here — these are solid and attractive speakers that work wonderfully as a compact, attractively styled and fine-sounding surround speaker system to accompany a high-quality panel display. 

B&W VM6 PACKAGE WITH PV1 SUBWOOFER

Price: \$5195
Warranty: Five years (two on sub)



- Excellent match with large panel displays
- All hardware required for wall mounting included
- Good sound quality with very extended bass



- Subwoofer a bit peaky in mid bass

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