



Wireless wonders

If the Silverback 1 active loudspeaker package can straddle music and AV tasks with this much panache, System Audio may have arrived at a magic formula, says **Martin Dew**

DENMARK-BASED SYSTEM AUDIO prides itself on making small speakers with a 'big sound', according to company founder Ole Witthøft. As far back as 1984, he began to craft loudspeakers based on his own decree that competitors' offerings sounded 'boring', arguing that a manufacturer's list of impressive tech specs was never the crucial element – rather, it was the sound that mattered. Oh, and some good old Scandinavian style.

Some decades later his company is on a roll, producing both passive and active loudspeakers across four different series. And one of its most recent arrivals is the Silverback 1 (aka SB1), a compact active, wireless speaker system intended for use both with music and TV audio. Pricing is £1,799, but increases to £2,199 if you choose to add the recommended Stereo Hub. More on that later.

'We all float down here...'

Sporting 'A4 paper size' fronts and thin-backed profiles for easy wall mounting, the SB1 speakers are easy to live with. Yet they feel like thoroughbreds, each with a healthy 5.5kg weight and sleek satin finish. Black is an option, but many

will favour SA's white finish. Either way, these speakers look stylish, helped by a topside baffle displacement along with a gap separating it from the housing. Both lend the appearance of a grille floating in front of the enclosure.

The SB1s can be wall mounted with a built-in bracket and protective pads. The connection panel on the rear side of each speaker is inset to allow for a near-flush mount. This includes ports for both USB service and a line-level input, the latter for wiring each speaker up to a preamplifier.

The speakers can also sit on a shelf or countertop, although System Audio tells me that performance is optimised when the speakers are placed as close to a solid wall as possible. And note that when on a flat surface, the SB1s' angled base means they lean slightly backwards.

As mentioned, System Audio recommends getting the optional Stereo Hub, as this vastly increases the system's functionality. Inputs here include HDMI ARC, optical and coaxial digital audio, minijack and RCA analogue, and a USB-B socket. It can support hi-res audio up to 192kHz/24-bit, and packs Chromecast, AirPlay2, Bluetooth 5.0, UPnP, Spotify Connect and is Roon Ready.

AV INFO

PRODUCT:

Stereo wireless active on-wall/table-top speakers

POSITION:

Mid-point in SA's active wireless speaker range

PEERS:

JBL 4305P;
KEF LS50 Wireless



This hub doesn't need to hook into the speakers, as the SB1 uses the WiSA wireless transmission protocol. This is the HT iteration, rather than the lower-resolution 48kHz/24-bit WiSA E found mostly in TVs, so you'll only be able to use the speakers with the former profile. The Stereo Hub's remote is sleek and formed from steel, and somewhat fancier than the norm for the price category.

After pairing the SB1s with the hub, the remote control unit must then pair with the same device. The SB1s also register on the Google Home app so that the speakers become part of a local Wi-Fi network.

System Audio's Cockpit app (available from Google Play and the App Store) allows you to assign your SB1s as 'left' or 'right'. The app is nicely laid out and enables calibration with the in-built Room Service system for which an external microphone is needed (not used here).

The loudspeakers are two-way designs with 5.5in woofers and 1in soft dome tweeters with patented DXT (Diffraction Expansion Technology) waveguides. With an 80W-rated Class D amp module in both speakers, there's naturally a separate power cable for each unit. Of course, discreet and tailored amplification within each enclosure means that the power output and circuitry are optimised for the speakers. Frequency response is a claimed 45Hz–25kHz.

It's worth mentioning that rather than opting for the Stereo Hub, you can go for SA's Surround Hub, which can introduce any Silverback speaker combination to make a WiSA-enabled Dolby Atmos home cinema with up to eight channels. Fancy a future upgrade?

Music lover

Having auditioned other models in System Audio's portfolio, I was anticipating a full-blooded and size-defying soundstage, but the SB1 still caught me off guard. I landed on Earth, Wind & Fire's 'My Love' from *Raise!* (Tidal) and the scale of the presentation seemed both vast for the speakers' size yet remarkably lucid.



SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVERS: 2 x 5.5in Silverback 3.6 woofers; 2 x 1in soft dome DXT tweeters
ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED): 2 x 80W **CONNECTIONS (SB1):** Wireless WiSA and RCA line input **CONNECTIONS (STEREO HUB):** 1 x HDMI ARC; 3 x optical digital audio; 1 x coaxial digital audio; 3.5mm minijack analogue; RCA analogue; USB-B (computer audio); USB (service) **DIMENSIONS (SB1):** 310(w) x 325(h) x 135(d)mm **DIMENSIONS (STEREO HUB):** 100(w) x 41(h) x 170(d)mm **WEIGHT (SB1):** 5.5kg each

FEATURES (WITH STEREO HUB): 24-bit/192 kHz audio; Google Chromecast; Apple AirPlay 2; Bluetooth 5.0; DLNA UPnP; Spotify Connect; Roon Ready; remote control; built-in WiSA wireless transmitter (up to 16 speakers); Cockpit control app

TESTED WITH



APOLLO 13: One of the films that secured star Tom Hanks' transition from slapstick comedy genius to serious thesp, this Ron Howard-directed drama benefits from superb performances from its ensemble cast and the jaw-dropping nature of its story. Universal's 4K Blu-ray blasts off with a new DTS:X soundmix.

Brass instruments were layered and bounding with vitality. There was also plenty of punchy drum attack to the tightly harnessed rhythm section.

On the remastered 'Dreams' from Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours* album, the drums were warm, weighted and real. The bass guitar plodded away with enough meaningful low-frequency mass, and rigorous detail. The stunning clarity and sparkle of the high vocal registers and swishing hi-hat were also finely resolved. The balance was exquisite.

It is in their penchant for orchestral music and solo voices of classical works where the SB1s also shine. In the Dunedin Consort's interpretation of Bach's *Matthew Passion* (CD), the soprano and mezzo soprano voices were spectacular. Clean and unimpeded, the treble notes glided through the tweeter with no hint of sharpness or break-up.

With the SB1 pair positioned either side of a TV, the launch sequence from *Apollo 13* (4K Blu-ray), with its metallic shudders and growling afterburners, was a treat. Bass response was impactful but perfectly measured for a compact pair of speakers. Keep in mind, though, that the SB1s are just that – small speakers – so don't expect subwoofer or floorstander-type grunt. Apart from that, with their command of effects in the stereo spread and centre-locked dialogue imaging, the SB1s can negotiate movie soundtracks with absolute confidence.

Stage craft

Grilles on or off, mounted to the wall or on a shelf, System Audio's Silverback 1 speakers are sculptures for admiring. And in whichever location they find themselves, the audio performance will not disappoint either. The pair enjoy a rich, musical sensibility bonded to an articulate, deep reaching soundstage at odds with their diminutive size. Shunning a top-of-the-range soundbar this year? System Audio's SB1 package might just be your solution ■

HCC VERDICT



System Audio Silverback 1

→ £2,200 → www.system-audio.com

WE SAY: System Audio's Silverback 1 pair delivers delightfully articulate and warm soundscapes from smartly designed, compact and home-friendly enclosures. What's not to like?

1. Each SB1 speaker features an onboard Class D amp said to be good for 80W

2. Compact at 10cm wide, the Stereo Hub has USB-B, HDMI and analogue/digital audio inputs

3. The remote for the Stereo Hub uses LEDs to signify chosen volume and source

