

Here Aego again

Acoustic Energy updates its Aego compact speaker line to include a soundbar/subwoofer duo. **Mark Craven** wonders if good things can come in small packages

ACOUSTIC ENERGY'S AEGO Sound3ar (so named because it's part of the company's third-generation Aego range) makes a great first impression. This £200 audio booster has the style charm to appear more expensive. The black grilles, aluminium trim and rounded edges on both its subwoofer and soundbar mix together well.

Where it does betray its price tag is in terms of size. This is a compact combo, easily dwarfed by the likes of Sony's HT-NT5 (p72). You can wield the soundbar in one hand. Clearly, Acoustic Energy has set its sights on mass-market buyers wanting a sonic partner to a mid-sized living room display or second room TV. Those after largescale sound thrills should probably take their business elsewhere.

Passive aggressive

This setup is slightly unusual (or dare I say, old-school) in that the soundbar is essentially a passive speaker, with all amplification and connectivity housed in its subwoofer brethren. This makes sense when you consider that elsewhere in the Aego range is a 2.1 system using the same sub, and the same 2in oval-shaped speaker drivers in its stereo pair. That product (Aego³) is the same price, too.

The soundbar measures 50cm across, and sits on your TV cabinet at an upfiring angle. Alternatively, it can be wall-mounted to face directly outwards. It's a two-channel design, and wires to the sub via a supplied phono cable. The subwoofer is similarly svelte (19.5cm wide) and will slip into all but the most cramped of systems unnoticed. Just remember that the sub, rather than the 'bar, offers the system's display panel and will need line-of-sight to receive commands from Acoustic Energy's tiddly remote. Around the back of the woofer are optical



SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVERS: 2 x 2in oval midrange drivers
AMPLIFICATION (CLAIMED): 70W
CONNECTIONS: 1 x optical digital audio input; 1 x stereo minijack input; 2 x phono speaker-level outputs
DOLBY TRUEHD/DTS-HD MA: No/No
SEPARATE SUB: Yes, 6in driver.
REMOTE CONTROL: Yes **DIMENSIONS:** 70(h) x 500(w) x 70(d)mm (soundbar); 350(h) x 195(w) x 307(d)mm (subwoofer)
WEIGHT: N/A

FEATURES: Bluetooth; bass level adjustment; optical, phono and 3.5mm cables supplied

The subwoofer acts as the connections/power hub

Nor is the subwoofer a one-note wonder – the disco/funk tracks that litter the *Beverly Hills Cop* soundtrack find it carrying the tuneful basslines and kickdrums.

Sticking with that '80s actioner, the Sound3ar shows a nice balance between sub and bar, and enough clarity in the mid and upper frequencies to make the truck chase in the opening act, and the mansion shootout towards its end, engrossing movie moments. It's eager to please too, favouring dynamic punch over subtlety, to the point where it can sound a little brash.

A drawback to the Sound3ar is that there's little users can do to tweak its output. A four-step bass-level adjustment (plus volume, obviously) is all you get, and as the maximum setting is overblown with some material and the minimum too thin, you're really only going to be switching between two options. And the sub simply doesn't have the muscle to impress in terms of depth.

Additionally, the soundstage here is predictably narrow. While I like the energetic feel of the system, I wouldn't have minded more horizontal dispersion and stereo imaging. This is perhaps a bigger shame with music, as it certainly has the punch and tone to work well with streamed tunes.

These limitations don't detract much from the Sound3ar's positives, which are its robust dialogue, well-rounded lows and neat design. Worth checking out if money/space is tight ■

digital audio and 3.5mm stereo minijack inputs for source hookup. Bluetooth connectivity is also an option; HDMI, on the other hand, isn't.

Up to the job

While I wasn't expecting room-shaking, ear-searing sonics from the Acoustic Energy, I was hoping for something that sounded clearly better than the in-built speakers in my TVs (both a 65in Samsung and a 32in Panasonic). And, happily, that's what I got.

This little system has the low-end weight that modern tellies generally only dream of, and bolstered by the rumblings of the subwoofer, the speaker bar, which comes in at 250Hz, manages to craft a sound that feels bigger than its dimensions suggest. With my bedroom set, everything from breakfast news to late-night Olympic broadcasts suddenly sound more real, with voices gaining authority.

AV INFO

PRODUCT: 2.1-channel compact soundbar system

POSITION: Joined by a 2.1 stereo speaker system in the Aego range

PEERS: Bose Solo 5; Samsung HW-K450

HCC VERDICT



Acoustic Energy Aego Sound3ar

→ £200 → www.acoustic-energy.co.uk

WE SAY: Smart design, agreeable dimensions and a decent performance make this 2.1 system a solid second-room option.