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## RATING

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## BUILD QUALITY



## VALUE



# Baby Boomer

By David Vaughn



**ACCORDING TO** Merriam-Webster, a fathom is a unit of length equal to six feet that's used to measure the depth of water. But for JL Audio, Fathom is a family of subwoofers that dig deep into the lower depths of the audio spectrum. The company, which has been around north of forty years, was started by Jim Birch and Lucio Proni, who started building loudspeakers during their summer break back in the 1970s and never stopped. I had the pleasure of reviewing a pair of JL Audio's entry level Dominion d110 subwoofers a few years back and loved their performance. The company's Fathom line of subwoofers are considered in home theater and hi-fi circles to be some of the best, though, so I could hardly wait to put a Fathom f110v2 through its paces when the company offered to send a pair.

The Fathom line consists of the f110v2 (10-inch driver), f112v2 (12-inch driver), f113v2 (13-inch driver), and F212v2 (dual 12-inch drivers). With an MSRP of \$3,500, the Fathom f110v2 is the most expensive subwoofer I've ever reviewed. As one would expect from something in this price class, build quality is second to none. It sports a flawless gloss-black paint job and tips the scales at 69 pounds—definitely not a light-weight by any measure.

While some may balk at the f110v2's price tag, it's a model that caters to a high-end audience seeking powerful bass in a highly compact package. Heck, by JL Audio standards, the Fathom f110v2 is a relative bargain compared with the company's super-premium Gotham v2 subwoofer, which checks in at \$16,500.

**"SIZE MATTERS NOT"**  
— JEDI MASTER YODA

The Fathom f110v2 arrives double-boxed to protect it from the rigors of ground shipping. There are instructions on the box for unpacking—a common thing with subwoofers these days. You open up the top—or, in this case, the top of two boxes—and then slip the boxes over after lifting them off the sub. This makes it easy on your back and keeps all of the packaging intact in case you ever need to ship it again.

Along with the Fathom f110v2, the box contents consist of a power cord, a calibration mic, an extremely well-written user manual in English and Spanish, and white gloves that I recommend wearing when setting the sub up in your room since its gloss black paint finish reveals every fingerprint. Yes, that gloss black looks absolutely beautiful, but it's also a major dust magnet—be prepared to dust regularly to maintain a factory fresh look.

As I stated above, the Fathom f110v2 weighs 69 pounds, so maneuvering it around the room

is quite a workout. Its compact 12.9 x 15.6 x 17.3-inch (WxHxD) sealed enclosure is constructed of CNC-cut MDF material with extensive internal bracing. The driver, which is sourced from JL Audio's W7 design platform, boasts extensive peak-to-peak excursion capabilities and is powered by a 1,100-watt switching amplifier that employs patented feedback technology. JL Audio's stated frequency response (Anechoic) for the Fathom f110v2 is 27-111Hz.

**"Every Impact was realistic, with a visceral quality that I felt in my chest."**

One expects a few bells and whistles at this subwoofer price tier and JL Audio doesn't disappoint. The f110v2 employs a powerful Digital Automatic Room Optimization (D.A.R.O.) system that deploys eighteen bands of digital equalization to tame room acoustics. Furthermore, you can link two f110v2's together using a balanced XLR cable and set one

as the master and the second as an extension. When doing this, the master takes control of all functions—including the room correction software—and all the controls on the extension sub are disabled.

Controls are hidden away behind a removable cloth grille on the subwoofer's front, but are easily accessed. They include a power switch (on/off and auto), low-pass filter (20-130 Hz) and variable phase (0-270 degrees) dials, a 0/180 degrees polarity switch, e.l.f. (Extreme Low Frequency) trim knob, and a master level control. Rear panel connections include stereo balanced XLR and RCA inputs and a balanced XLR output.

**DOUBLE TROUBLE**

My theater is approximately 5,000 cubic feet and screams for multiple subs, so I was thankful that JL Audio sent two of them. Setup took a bit longer than normal because I wanted to experiment with different placements of the compact subs—something that the lack of room size constraints

**At a Glance**

- + Powerful output for a compact model
- + Onboard Digital Automatic Room Optimization
- + Dual-sub setup option
- Lacks below-20Hz extension
- Gloss black finish attracts dust

**Price:** \$3,500

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gave me the freedom to do. I decided to use XLR cables for the connection between my Anthem AVM60 preamp/processor and the f110v2 as well as to link the two subs together. AudioQuest was kind

**Features on the f110v2 include JL Audio's Digital Room Optimization (D.A.R.O.) with 18 bands of digital EQ to tame room acoustics.**



## JL AUDIO FATHOM F110V2 POWERED SUBWOOFER

enough to provide two 8-meter Husky XLR interconnects for this review, and the well-built cables didn't disappoint.

Following the guidance in JL Audio's user manual, I ended up placing both subs at the front of my room about two feet from the side walls beneath my M&K S150 L/R studio monitors. Outside of placing one of the subs behind me (an option vetoed by "She Who Must Not Be Crossed" since it blocked a walkway), these locations offered the smoothest response. The audio room correction was a breeze to use—plug in the mic, place it at ear-level in the money seat, press the Calibrate button on the Master sub, and the software starts to do its thing, with the entire process taking about 3 minutes. The before/after results that I measured with REW (Room EQ Wizard room acoustics software) showed a bump in the 20-25Hz range but a 2dB dip at around 35Hz. If the subwoofers were being permanently installed, I'd take the time to do an EQ myself using REW and a MiniDSP, but that would take substantially longer than 3 minutes and the results wouldn't be a huge improvement. Needless to say, D.A.R.O. will be more than adequate for the vast majority of listeners.

## PERFORMANCE

*John Wick* is a movie that gets better every time you watch it, especially on Ultra HD Blu-ray. Also, the plethora of gunshots and other bass-heavy effects in *John Wick's* Dolby Atmos soundtrack makes it particularly good for evaluating subwoofers. In the film, Wick has to come to grips with a new reality, one that forces him to literally dig up his past by breaking through a slab of concrete in his basement to retrieve a cache of weapons. Every strike of the sledgehammer is not only heard but felt in this scene, and the pair of

f110v2s were more than up to the challenge. While my reference subs deliver more output below 20Hz in comparison, they don't measure up to the quality of bass I heard from the JL Audio drivers. These babies hit hard, really hard: Every impact from the f110v2 pair was precise and realistic, with a visceral quality that I felt in my chest.

Next up: *Hacksaw Ridge*, one of my favorite movies of the last 10 years. Not only is this an inspiring story about a World War II hero, but it has an Atmos track to die for. I queued up a sequence where our boys are about to hit the battlefield for the first time and the Navy destroyers off the coast join in the fray. Average subwoofers can't handle this intense scene at reference level and end up bottoming out, but the pair of f110v2s didn't shirk their duty. When the guns moved into position, the subs proved able to shake my subfloor. And when the overhead barrage began and all hell broke loose, I was transported straight to the battlefield with explosions rocking the room. I used this sequence as an opportunity to turn the sub's e.l.f. Trim setting to +3dB, and I ended up

## Specs

**AMPLIFIER:** 1,100 watts RMS (short-term)  
**CONNECTIONS:** Stereo balanced XLR and RCA inputs; balanced XLR output  
**DIMENSIONS:** (WxHxD): 12.9 x 15.6 x 17.3 in  
**WEIGHT:** (pounds) 69

"I was transported straight to the battlefield, with explosions rocking the room."

leaving it there for the rest of my audition—that extra 3 dB really helped with low-end impact, and it also didn't cause any negative audible effects that I could detect.

Some of my go-to music tracks for subwoofer testing include "Fidelity" by Regina Spektor, "Blank Space" by Taylor Swift, "Baby" by Justin Bieber, and "Sleep Like a Child" by Joss Stone. These songs each test a subwoofer in a slightly different way, and I was impressed with how the bass on each of them was conveyed by the f110v2s. I was also impressed with how well the subs blended with my reference M&K S150 studio monitors

(crossed over at 80Hz). I wrote down the following in my notes: tight, fast, clean, quick, deep—all the qualities you look for in a subwoofer.

## CONCLUSION

I've been impressed with 10-inch subwoofers in the past, most notably JL Audio's own D110, but for me there's now a new pint-sized sub champion. I was blown away by how well the f110v2 performed, and while \$3,500 is undoubtedly expensive for an average consumer, you will get what you pay for if you can afford it. I was never left wanting when listening to even the most strenuous and LFE-intensive movie soundtracks, and I also heard plenty of bass heft and weight in the 20-50 Hz range when listening to music. Furthermore, the f110v2 might just be the fastest-sounding woofer I've ever encountered, and it was able to move a ton of air for such a small footprint. This experience has whetted my appetite to hear how JL Audio's larger offerings perform—I wouldn't object if the company sent me a pair of its F113s to test (hint-hint)! If you can afford the high cost of entry for one or, better yet, two f110v2 subwoofers, you won't be disappointed. This subwoofer's small size and great looks give it a high spouse acceptance factor, and having the ability for two units to work in tandem is a powerful bonus.

## The Verdict

The f110v2 lacks the output and extension of a larger sub, but packs quite a punch given its modest size.

