

SHORTWARE

A Sub Named Hsu Hsu HRSW12V Powered Subwoofer

WHEN YOU LISTEN TO THE SONIC KICK in the pants they give your home theater system, you have to agree that subwoofers—those wood-clad, bottom-octave-producing howitzers—are wonderful things. Unfortunately, they look way out of place in anything but a full-fledged media room: Too large to hide easily, too squat and unsuitable to act as a bona-fide piece of furniture, most subwoofers inhabit a cosmetic nether region and can pose a threat to the livability of your living room. Hsu, a small but well-respected company that specializes in subwoofers (which are only available through the manufacturer), has attacked that challenge head-on with the HRSW12V.

The 12V (\$850) is a two-piece powered subwoofer system (a one-piece version costs \$800). The business end is the speaker cabinet. It resembles a truncated column, standing 22 inches tall and 23 in diameter. The top sports a granite-like finish, and the column is wrapped in black fabric. All in all, it's a simple, tasteful design. The terrific part is that you can plant it in your room as if it were an end-table with little sonic compromise.

The column houses a single 12-inch paper-cone woofer with a foam surround. A 4-inch port fires down at the floor, and three black spiked feet give the port about 2.5 inches of clearance to work with; they provide stability, too, especially when the 12V is asked to perch on a carpeted floor. Connections are made via solid binding posts.

The other half of the system houses the ampli-

fier, a crossover, and other electronics. It's got the same granite-like finish as the 12V woofer and measures 7.5 x 9.5 x 5.5 inches (h/w/d). The amplifier is rated to deliver 150 watts, and the crossover is a "24-dB-per-octave Linkwitz-Riley" device—all you need to know is that that's an audiophile-approved design. The actual crossover point, which restricts the subwoofer's operating range to match your home theater system's other speakers, is set by little modules that plug into the amplifier/crossover unit. My review sample came with the standard 91-Hz "cutoff"; optional modules with cutoffs of 28, 34, 43, 62, 75, 108, 131, and 155 Hz are available for \$15 apiece. You can feed signals to the 12V via RCA-type cables or speaker wire, depending on your system setup, and there's an unfiltered RCA-type output for passing the signal along to the amplifier that'll power your system's "main" speakers. Controls include ones for subwoofer level, an on/off switch for the crossover, and a two-position "phase" switch. [See "Game Set, Matched," page 46, for a brief discussion of phase.]

One other item of note is the "soft clipping" circuit. It has two goals: to keep the 12V sounding clean and "invisible," and to protect it from self-destructing in the event that the system's volume knob get's cranked up. This is a great feature that should help the 12V enjoy a long lifetime of subwoofering.

Wiring the two-piece 12V into your system isn't difficult at all. Link your system's "electronics" (A/V receiver, preamp/processor, what have you) and the woofer/amp module using one of the standard methods, which requires either speaker wire or RCA cables (the manual spells out the gory details). Then run speaker wire from the woofer/amp module to the sub column and plug in the module's AC cord.

After you've deposited the amp module on a shelf, your equipment rack, or some out-of-the-way place, it's time to position the sub column. Hsu recommends putting it near you, the ideal spots being right in front or directly behind you; behind or to the side of you sounds the most practical, in real-world, real-living-room terms. The fact that this sub isn't a short cube vastly multiplies your options, decor-wise.

Any way you look at it, you'll get terrific per-

formance. My subwoofer-torture test discs, which feature lots of bass-heavy special effects, all sounded deep, clean, and mighty loud, and there were no traces of noise, rattles, or distortion. Both electric and acoustic music were beautifully rendered. And none of it drew my attention to the column, making the 12V sonically invisible.

Measurements were equally thrilling. Hsu's column reached down to 24 Hz. And the laserdisc sequence I use to test loudness—*Terminator 2's* opening gate crash—produced 110 dB SPL, a prodigious figure for a sub employing a single 12-inch woofer. No problems here. I did notice that the 12V performed at its best when it was positioned in a corner of my room, but the difference wasn't dramatic.

Hsu's HRSW12V is a wonderful subwoofer. It's good-looking and simple to use, and its performance invites nothing less than superlatives, especially given its price. Getting down usually isn't this easy. —Tom Nousaine

Hsu HRSW12V

COSMETICS

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EASE OF USE

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PERFORMANCE

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VALUE

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PHOTOS BY TONY CORROZZA