

Somewhere along the way, Atlantic Technology's FS-7.0 Soundbar got its wires crossed.



Is it a soundbar or a full-scale home theater surround system? The FS-7.0 is a long, lean single cabinet, like other soundbars that mount on a wall above or below a television. Unlike others that connect directly to a TV or cable set-top box though, it needs an audio-video receiver—and all the associated wiring—as if it were an actual multiple-speaker surround system.

And move over, fellow soundbars: The FS-7.0 puts out seven discrete channels, not the customary two or three or six. Atlantic Technology positions the FS-7.0 as a no-compromise choice for the household that simply can't, or won't, accommodate a roomful of speakers but insists on high-quality, one-piece sound.

Yes, it is that. It's also a considerable task to mount this 37-pound behemoth on a wall and conceal the wiring or run it behind a wall. The soundbar has keyhole brackets, and Atlantic Technology provides a mounting template, but the rest is left to the owner. Before investing \$800 in the FS-7.0 and \$300 in its partner, the SB-800 subwoofer, consider that installation might require a professional to get it right.

Setup isn't the usual soundbar-simple, because the FS-7.0 cannot use the automatic calibration system in most new audio receivers that set the "delay" so sound from each speaker arrives at your ear at the right time. Instead, Atlantic Technology asks that you measure the distance between the seating position and the soundbar, then enter that number for the front channels in the receiver's setup menu.

Setting the side speakers, however, seems more like a problem on the math portion of the SAT: If you measure the distance from the closest side wall to either side of the soundbar, add 2 feet, then add 6 feet to the distance from the soundbar to your seat, what do you get? If you're lucky, not a headache.

With no worries about building amplification or surround-sound decoding into the soundbar, Atlantic Technology devoted the FS-7.0's entire 40-inch span to replicating the sound of a real surround system. Despite producing seven-channel sound, the FS-7.0 at first look seems to have too few speakers: a pair of 4-by-6 drivers spaced

between three silk-dome tweeters on the front panel and a 3.25-inch driver on each side of the cabinet for surround.

Let's solve this whodunit. Atlantic Technology (www.atlantictechology.com) commits one tweeter to the left, center and right channels, then asks the bigger drivers to multitask. By adding a dual-voice coil, the speaker's designers enable that left 4-by-6 driver to produce the left-channel track and part of the center-channel track. The right 4-by-6 driver, meanwhile, plays the right-channel track and half of the center.

The side-panel drivers, with triple voice coils, produce: 1. Part of the front-channel information to add spaciousness, 2. The surround channels of a 5.1-channel soundtrack and 3. The back surround channels of a 7.1-channel soundtrack.

It's some extreme engineering that succeeds everywhere — the broad soundstage, dialogue clarity and emphatic special effects — except placing the sound behind the listener. That surround technology simply does not exist.

To come close to sounding like a surround system, the FS-7.0 needs a subwoofer. The SB-800, which has an 8-inch driver powered by a 100-watt amplifier, is a safe choice.

