

## Soundbar

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### Atlantic Technology PB-235 Powered Soundbar

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### Introduction to the Atlantic Technology PB-235 Powered Soundbar

When I was asked to review the Atlantic Technology PB-235 Powered Soundbar, I jumped at the chance since this would be a new product category for me. I had never spent any length of time auditioning such a unit either for professional or personal use. It wasn't for lack of desire; rather, I just wasn't ever in the market nor asked to review one. This product category has grown in recent years as more and more companies have jumped into the arena. I was excited to see how Atlantic Technology's offering would fare, considering how good their home theater speakers are (I reviewed the 8200e system a few years ago). So when the opportunity presented itself, I jumped at it.

### ATLANTIC TECHNOLOGY PB-235 POWERED SOUNDBAR SPECIFICATIONS

- Drivers: Two 0.75" Soft-Dome Tweeters, Two 4" Woofers
- Amplifier Built-It
- MFR: 47 Hz - 20 kHz
- Inputs: 1 Analog Mini-jack, 2 Toslink Optical Digital Connectors, 1 Coaxial Digital Connector, 1 Analog L/R Input
- Codecs: DTS, Dolby Digital
- Dimensions: 6.5" H x 42.75" W x 6.5" D
- Weight: 26 Pounds
- MSRP: \$899 USD
- [Atlantic Technology](#)
- SECRETS Tags: Atlantic Technology, Soundbars, Audio

### Design and Setup of the Atlantic Technology PB-235 Powered Soundbar

The PB-235 arrived at my home, and the first thing I noticed is that it was extremely well packed. Multiple squares of foam complimented the end pieces to ensure safe delivery to my home. The power adapter and cable was in a separate cardboard box, which was taped to the side of the main box - ensuring that it would not move in transit. Finally, the sound bar itself was clothed in a cloth sleeve, adding another layer of protection - as well as a nice touch.

The unit is about 43" long, almost matching the width of my 55" plasma HDTV, 5.5" high, and 6.5" deep. The top and bottom are finished with a black semi-glossy finish, while the back and sides are matte. The grille cloth is attached to a wood frame that has plenty of supports throughout - making it feel very solid and unlikely to break when trying to remove it. It sets into the sound bar with pegs that are long enough to again

give the feel that it won't budge once attached properly. The control and input sections occupy the front and back, respectively, of a raised arch section centered on the top (or bottom if mounted upside down) of the unit. All-around good construction.



There are several options when it comes to positioning the Power Bar. It has the necessary keyhole brackets in the back of the unit to allow for direct wall mounting, and includes a nice large template to ensure proper placement of the wall screws (not included). In this configuration, Atlantic Technology recommends that you mount the bar upside down. They include a separate control panel label for this purpose, and the speaker grille can also be flipped so everything looks proper. The HDTV in my living room is mounted in the center of a large built-in shelving unit; so in my case, I placed the PB-235 on the shelf underneath it, control side up. For reference sake, the room is roughly 15' long, 17' wide, and has 9' ceilings. I attached the small rubber footpads near the corners of the base of the unit to provide stability and to keep it from fully resting on the wood shelf.

The PB-235, like many sound bars, replaces any need for a separate A/V receiver, though all video switching would be done with the display device since it doesn't have any video capabilities. In fact, this is exactly what I did – connected my sources' audio outputs to the sound bar and video outputs directly to my HDTV. I attached my old Toshiba HD-A2 HD-DVD player to one of the optical digital inputs, my CD source to the other, plugged in the power, and was ready to start breaking it in. The unit also has a mini-jack input (which can be used to connect an iPod or Android phone, for example), a digital coaxial input, and an analog stereo input. Additionally, though the PB-235 is marketed as the first sound bar that is "subwoofer optional", it still has a line out for a dedicated subwoofer. In my testing, I did not attach a subwoofer so as to test the aforementioned claim.



In fact, the noted feature of this sound bar is its ability to reproduce very deep, engaging bass (rated down to 47kHz) using AT's H-PAS technology. H-PAS is short for "Hybrid Pressure Acceleration System" which, according to the company, combines "acoustic suspension, inverse horn, bass reflex, and transmission line" technologies in a proprietary algorithm to create extremely satisfying, deep bass without the need for that subwoofer.



The remote control included with the unit is a small, flat device that has all the controls you need. Since the unit is IR controlled, I checked to see if there was already support for my Harmony 900 remote, which unsurprisingly, there was. I programmed the device in, and added it to my activities, which was quick and easy. In fact, one benefit I noted from doing this was that instead of having to cycle through the inputs to change them as you do with the included remote, the Harmony could directly select the proper input based on the activity I ran

## The Atlantic Technology PB-235 Powered Soundbar In Use

For my music listening I used two sources. Starting with SACDs, I set up my Sony SCD-CE775 using its standard analog audio out since the player does not output SACD audio digitally via the optical digital output. Furthermore, since the PB-235 only accepts a single L/R input for its analog in, I set the player to 2 channel direct mode, which also allowed the full range signals to be sent to the sound bar.

I began with the SACD Deluxe Edition of The Who's *Tommy*. One of my favorite parts of the classic album is "The Amazing Journey" into "Sparks". As the drums build, the psychedelic sounds move through the music, and the gradual volume increase all makes for a beautiful sound, which the PB-235 rendered wonderfully.

"We're not going to take it", one of the last numbers in the Rock Opera sounded fantastic from the sound bar. The vocals came out clear and crisp, standing out in front of the music. The epic finale "Listening to You" came through beautifully and with the power it deserves for a concluding overture.

Next, I fired up some tracks from Aerosmith's *Oh Yeah!* - a collection of their greatest hits. Starting with the radio version of "Just Push Play" I noticed the unit producing very well balanced, melodic bass. In addition, I noted some very good blending from the mid-range into the bass. For this track, I also tested out the two surround modes (5 channel and 5 channel enhanced), just to see how they worked with music. I actually felt that how it creates a simulated surround field was pretty impressive. I noted that it doesn't quite push the sound "behind" me, but fills the room very well. If I had to choose between the two surround modes for music listening, I'd probably stick with the non-enhanced 5C version most of the time.

Next, I played the seminal classic "Walk This Way". I tried pushing the system to higher volumes and found that it maintained clarity with no distortion through any reasonable volume. However, as the volume got marginally beyond where I would normally listen, I started noticing some volume separation between ranges that I wasn't hearing at lower levels. I was not concerned though since this was only noticeable at dangerously high volumes.

Then I moved to another favorite, "Sweet Emotion". This track featured some very good bass, though I realized here that I really needed to engage the tone controls to equalize the sound. Making some small adjustments definitely helped. Obviously, a more granular equalization control would be great, but that is not something typically found on such a unit.

Moving to a couple of CDs, I dusted off my excellent Sony DVP-S7000 DVD player, which happens to function as a fairly high quality CD transport. I began with one of my favorite Beatles tunes, "Happiness is a Warm Gun" from the stereo remaster version of the *White Album*. The bass was reproduced warmly and delightfully as the harmonic tones of backing Liverpool Lads were placed perfectly.

Next I put in Phish's first return album, *Round Room*, using the final track "Walls of the Cave" which includes sections in which each instrument takes a turn at being the lead. The track starts off with bass and cymbals being featured. I really applaud the crispness with which the latter was rendered, and of course bass being the strong suit of the PB-235 allowed the instrument to have a full, rich sound.

Arguably the most important use case for a sound bar is to produce great sound for television and movie viewing without the need for a full complement of speakers. As mentioned earlier, the PB-235 has a 3-channel mode, a 5-channel mode, and a 5-channel enhanced mode. The first one generates a phantom center channel, while the latter two project the surround channels derived from the internal DSP system so that they appear to come from the sides and behind you. I was quite excited to see how well this was accomplished for Dolby Digital and DTS soundtracks.

The other interesting feature of the unit is a speech mode. I spoke with one of the engineers at Atlantic Technology to get a better understanding of the speech feature (he was very helpful and you could tell he cared a lot about the technology). Not surprisingly, it "punches" the dialog up by enhancing those frequencies associated with human speech. At first I felt the effect was not working correctly, but after getting a bit of an education, I realized that it was doing exactly what it was supposed to do (hint: it is not meant for music!). The engineer suggested some heavy dialog-driven programming that would most benefit from this feature, such as Aaron Sorkin shows. As it so happened, I was just ready to begin the second season of *The Newsroom*. I watched the first episode all the way through with the speech feature on, and then went back and tested a few of the scenes with and without the feature engaged. I was immediately convinced of the benefit - it really improved the experience. As anyone who has seen any of Aaron Sorkin's shows can

attest, the dialog is not only heavy, but also rapid and rhythmic. If you miss any part of it you can get lost very quickly. The speech feature seemed not only to boost the volume but also push it closer to me as I was enjoying the show.

I proceeded to test some of my favorite ear-candy scenes from various movies with the PB-235. I started with the launch scene from *Apollo 13*, and tried it in various combinations of using the speech feature with the various surround modes. I settled on 5-channel enhanced with speech disabled as my preferred configuration. The roar of the engines was deep and powerful, and the enveloping surround was quite impressive. I did notice that as the volume got to very loud levels there was a small amount of clipping, but I wouldn't normally watch films quite that loud.

Next, I played the scene from *Batman Begins* where Batman rescues Rachel from Arkham Asylum in the Batmobile. Again, I was impressed with the imaging panorama. The sound filled the entire front of the room adequately. The engine of the Batmobile took center stage though, as it drove across the rooftops of downtown Gotham. All the while the score blended beautifully to the sides and above - more example of the great imaging of the unit.

Finally, I threw in one of the ultimate surround scenes - storming the beach at Normandy in *Saving Private Ryan*. As the explosions began in the distance, the PB-235 did another fantastic job of creating the surround effect - pushing those explosions to the back and sides of my head. Meanwhile as the action escalated on screen the sound of machine gun fire was reproduced magnificently; projecting out and up front. The clanging of the bullets off of the Czech hedgehogs was precise. As they took the beach, the sound of gunfire and bomb explosions in the background was truly an impressive feat for the sound bar. Yes, it passed these tests with flying colors.

## Conclusions about the Atlantic Technology PB-235 Powered Soundbar



The Atlantic Technology PB-235 Sound Bar is a very impressive unit. For a single audio device that combines the functions of an audio receiver, subwoofer, and 5-channel speaker system, I was very impressed at the overall performance. The room in which I tested the sound bar normally has a full 5.1 channel surround setup, powered by a 135W/channel receiver and a dedicated powered sub, so while I cannot say that I would replace that configuration with the PB-235, I can say that during my testing I was very happy to sit and enjoy whatever it was I was watching or listening to. I was not saying to myself "Boy, I can't wait until I am done with this review so I can get back to my real system". Rather, I took the time to enjoy the PB-235 and the sound it provided. The unit lives up to its claim of not requiring a subwoofer, so it truly is the perfect offering for a room where multiple speakers and a subwoofer simply isn't feasible. I'd actually go so far as to say that even for rooms where that type of configuration is an option, I would choose this unit over a cheap 5.1 system lacking in audio quality. I imagine I will be spoiled if I do get the chance to review another sound bar, because this entry will be hard to live up to.