

Review

Hands On: Atlantic Technology PowerBar 235 H-PAS Soundbar

Not a soundbar, a sound system

December 07, 2012 | by Grant Clauser
Picture this—a family, one member, we'll call him "Dad," likes big sound, strong bass and an overall killer sound experience to go with the TV the size of a kitchen table. Half of the family, we'll call them "Lazy Slackers" don't want to bother with a receiver, speakers, sound modes, universal remote or any of that fun stuff that Dad thinks is important. Dad is tempted to cancel the cell phone services of the Lazy Slackers if they don't stop whining, but then someone else, we'll call her "Mom," would make Dad sleep in the shed, and there are mice in the shed.

Mom can also be trouble, because she doesn't like remotes, speakers or wires, and her opinion counts more than the Lazy Slackers, so our family finds itself at an impasse.

Hey, that's why soundbars were invented, right? Soundbars are family problem solvers, crisis control devices that allow Dad (Ok, we're talking about me) to enjoy better audio for the TV but without the complications that full surround sound systems introduce—my wife says basements were invented for surround sound. I think they were invented for storing potatoes and the ladder I "borrowed" from the neighbor, but we're getting off topic.

Anyway, the soundbar market has gotten a bit bloated lately. Every company that knows how to stick a brand on a box offers a home theater soundbar. Unfortunately most of them aren't much better than the TV speakers they're supposed to replace. Real innovation in a soundbar means taking a look at the speaker concept from scratch and developing something that solves the real problems—getting large, accurate sound with concussive bass out of a single speaker that fits under a television.

Atlantic Technology is one of the companies that did just that. They started with a concept, called H-PAS (Hybrid Pressure Acceleration System), which uses an internal pressuring matrix to produce more bass from the speaker enclosure, thereby eliminating the need for a subwoofer. The system first debuted in tower speakers, but a soundbar is a perfect application.

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The PowerBar 235 is actually a bit bulkier than a lot of the soundbars you'll find on the market. Most current soundbars are just a few inches deep, while the PowerBar is 6.5 inches deep. The size issue partially explains why so many of the other soundbars sound so anemic. The PowerBar requires the large cavity for the H-PAS system to work. It's also 26 pounds, which includes the built-in 80 Watt amplifier plus four drivers (two woofers and two tweeters). My wife thought the whole thing looked like a really large center channel, so she was relieved when I told her this was everything, and not part of a 7.1 system.

The PowerBar sets up easily. Hook up your main audio sources to the two digital optical inputs in the back of the control panel. There's also a set of analog inputs, one digital coax input, a subwoofer output (more on this later) and a mini jack in the front, which I used for my iPhone. It can be placed on a table or mounted on a wall with the built-in keyhole ports.

The PowerBar comes with a very small remote—about the size of something you'd expect to see with a boombox, but it offers all the functionality you need including volume, bass/treble adjustment, speaker mode and source. My only problem with the remote is that its size makes it vulnerable to getting easily lost in the depths of sofa cushions. I think we've misplaced pets that way. Most users will want to port all their IR controls onto a universal remote anyway, since juggling TV, speakers, cable and Blu-ray remotes gets old fast. The PowerBar uses remote codes for Marantz receivers.



I used the PowerBar for a week with a variety of media, from Blu-ray movies, to TV shows and even streaming music. In short, it sounds impressive. Atlantic Technology recommends that you skip a subwoofer and only use the soundbar, and they're right. With test tones I could get usable bass down to 40Hz with the PowerBar, and that's something a lot of soundbar/subwoofer combinations can't do. The unit's subwoofer output jack (mentioned earlier) may come in handy for very large rooms, but I didn't need it in my 15- by 21-foot room.

On music the PowerBar delivered. There are four listening modes: 2 channel, 3 channel (enhanced vocals), 5 channel (virtual surround) and 5 channel enhanced (more surround effects). Personally I preferred the 3 channel mode for everything. I wasn't so impressed with the surround modes, but on any system, virtual surround is usually heavier on the virtual than the surround. Still, the idea is to be a replacement for your wimpy TV speakers, and the PowerBar does that. Zombie attacks during The Walking Dead sounded grisly and gritty, while dialog was clear. Music, especially when I was listening to Nicholas Lens' Flamma Flamma opera, sounded imposing the way it's supposed to. Particularly notable was the range between the high nasals and the deep bass in Sumus Vicinae.



I like this speaker a lot—it sounds impressive and is easy to use, still, I'd like to see it do a little more. Specifically I'd like to see some wireless connectivity for smart phones. Adding either Bluetooth or AirPlay would make using the PowerBar with my iPhone much easier than plugging into the front mini jack. I'd also like to see HDMI inputs. This would cut down on the wires, which is something soundbar users would appreciate.

So is this the kind of system that will satisfy the family in my opening scenario? Yes. It offers very good audio performance without unnecessary complications or clutter.

Atlantic Technology H-Pas PowerBar 235
<http://www.atlantictechnology.com>
\$899

Pros

- Easy setup
- Excellent bass
- Simple to use
- Wall mountable

Cons

- No HDMI input
- No wireless connection