

Everything Is Illuminated

Everything But The Box makes it clear with its series name, styling and sonic performance that they are unusual. Being reviewed for the first time by AV MAX, we accept them more as a star than a planet

Bulgaria isn't one of the countries that come to your mind when you're thinking 'audio'. When you're thinking 'audio manufacturer from Bulgaria', 'Everything But The Box' or EBTB is probably not a name at the top of your mind either. And while we're on the subject of quick recollection, Pluto was recently rejected from our solar system's prestigious list of planets due to its diminutive size. What does this last fact have to do with anything? Well, the curvaceous model of speakers we're going to talk about today are called 'Pluto' and what the planet lacked in size, these guys have made up for in aesthetics alone.

OUT OF THE BOX

When you unveil the Pluto bookshelves, the Pluto F floorstanders and last but definitely not least, the SubTerranean subwoofer, a feeling of roundness goes through you. They all possess what's possibly the roundest cabinets bathed in gloss black (or red, brown, etc up to 16,000 colors) we've ever laid eyes on. The bookshelves come in two pieces, the driver unit and a leather covered pad that's concaved to efficiently accommodate the spherical speakers. What's incredible about this design is that you can change the tilt angle of the speaker to a point where the tweeter and the mid-bass drivers are at the same height. The Pluto F's top unit that houses the mid-bass driver looks identical to the Pluto; however,

the tweeter in this case has been embedded into the surprisingly light tower stand the speaker sits on. The stand itself has been placed on long screwable spikes allowing you to change the height of the speakers to suit your needs.

What takes the cake is the SubTerranean. It is, quite easily, as big as the planet. It's shaped exactly like a globe on an aluminum plate that prevents it from rolling around the floor. To add to the globe effect, EBTB has engraved a map above the level knob on the aluminum base plate. There are hints of silver aluminum lining the widest perimeter of the globe like it was Saturn's disc. All you see from the top is a deep black hole that's lined with more silver aluminum, giving it a gothic feel. And this subwoofer is heavy as hell! With so much of aluminum and an amplifier parked under the base plate, what do you expect?

TECHNOLOGY

All three of these planets have been given die cast aluminum* houses that keep them sturdy enough to stay put while having to generate some really low frequencies. Both the Plutos and the Pluto Fs come with 5.5" Kevlar cone woofers that need a rigid cabinet to vibrate. We can tell for sure that the leather pad will hold the Pluto bookshelves in place, but were a little doubtful about the Pluto F's hollow cabinet being able to provide the same kind of security. As for the tweeters, both of them come housing 1" silk dome tweeters, which are pretty

Specifications

Pluto Bookshelf

DESIGN 2-way Vented
DRIVERS 5 1/2" Kevlar Driver, 1" Silk Shielded Dome Tweeter
FREQUENCY RESPONSE 50Hz-22kHz
NOMINAL IMPEDANCE 8Ω
POWER HANDLING 50W
SENSITIVITY 88dB
WEIGHT 5.5kg
DIMENSIONS



Pluto F Floorstander

DESIGN 2-way
DRIVERS 5 1/2" Kevlar driver, 1" Silk Shielded Dome Tweeter
FREQUENCY RESPONSE 50Hz-22kHz
NOMINAL IMPEDANCE 8Ω
POWER HANDLING 50W
SENSITIVITY 88dB
WEIGHT 5.5kg (Without Stand)
DIMENSIONS





standard in this price range. The SubTerranean subwoofer holds a massive 12" driver that's down-firing so that it doesn't come in the way of the globe design. It fires into about 1" of space before it hits the base plate that holds a 200W class D amplifier, and since we have the Model 2 of the SubTerranean, we get two additional 180W class D amplifiers. Its cabinet is 10mm thick and you can literally stick your hand right down its reflex port at the top until it hits the division between the driver and the rest of the cabinet.

The speakers have been designed to work as single pairs with one another or as a 5.1 speaker setup, in which case their frequency response and power handling has been matched to each other. The bookshelves and the towers are exactly the same as on their spec sheets. Both can crank out 50Hz to 22kHz, which seems quite hard to imagine judging by the speakers size, all at an impedance of 8 ohms. The subwoofer on the other hand, covers all frequencies between 18Hz and 200Hz with no variable frequency knob. This means that all the crossovers need to be done in the AV receiver. But the sub does come with professional grade XLR connectors along with the standard RCA.

WHAT IS *Die Cast Aluminum
Die Cast Aluminum is a process of forcing molten metal under high pressure into a mold cavity. Most castings are made from non-ferrous metals primarily zinc, copper, aluminum, magnesium, lead, pewter and tin based alloys. Die castings provide a very good surface finish and dimensional consistency, both of which are more than enough reason to use them in speaker construction.

All of these cabinets have been hand processed to give them all the attention they deserve. Round cabinets can go horribly wrong and precision is the key to their success. Take for instance, the Pluto's tweeter enclosure. Although you've seen the tweeters before, the enclosure they sit in has been designed for high dispersion by sinking the tweeters deeper and giving the enclosure the same degree of curve as the bottom. This will cause no phasing as both the tweeter and the driver resonate from the same type of enclosure.

PERFORMANCE

It does take a little time to get these guys up and running on your terms. We had them hooked up to the Anthem MRX 700 AV receiver that has a pretty complex automated setup procedure using a high-grade microphone. We were told that you don't need to redo this procedure when you change the speakers connected to the receiver, just so long as you keep the speaker position the same. However, with the need to specify crossover points for these speakers, this setup couldn't be used and we had to resort to manual, which we anyway prefer.

With the first trace of movie magic coming from our 'Dark

Knight' Blu-ray, we knew these speakers had something more than just aesthetics going for them. These guys had an ability to disperse sound in a way to present a wide enough sweet spot to cover our entire listening area. Even though the sound came at us from all angles, its source could still be located thereby, giving us precise imaging. The soundstage was initially overruled by the emperors of the SubTerranean kingdom, so we had to turn its level knob from its 3 o'clock position to about 2 o'clock. Sounds ridiculously low? Yes, but when you're talking about the over 400W of power, extreme measures need to be taken to give the rest of the speakers a chance to be heard. The action sequences throughout this film were rich in sonic saturation with a high frequency twinkle that would surely flatten out over time.

Pluto bookshelf was used as a single centre channel, which makes perfect sense on paper, but doesn't quite do it in reality. The problem was that dialogues always need extra attention in the 5.1 surround stage because that's what drives the film along with the visuals. Everything else should be below it, and that can only happen when the centre speaker has an extra mid driver. Nevertheless, by simply

THE ACTION SEQUENCES OF 'DARK KNIGHT' WERE RICH IN SONIC SATURATION WITH A HIGH FREQUENCY TWINKLE THAT WOULD SURELY FLATTEN OUT OVER TIME.

boosting the level on the receiver of the centre, you get a rise in level that does enough for intelligibility. It's clear when the rest of the speakers are softer, such as the expository conversations in 'Inception'. During the action sequences, the surrounds really kick in with as much versatility as the Pluto Fs were illustrating as the fronts.

We did notice the soundstage getting a little thinner when we traded in 'Inception' for 'Shrek-The Third'. This led us to conclude that if there's not enough happening in the fronts, a chunk of the mid-range goes missing that neither the centre, the surrounds or the subwoofer are catering to. Again, we were sent to the speaker configuration menu on the receiver to change all the speakers to 'Large' rather than 'Small', thereby letting the receiver send out the entire frequency range to all the speakers except the subwoofer. This helped a great deal, although we did realize that the 50Hz depth the spec sheet had promised was not delivered with enough power to be heard.

Bjork's 'Verspertine Live At The Royal Opera House' was a whole different experience. We got a chance to really hear all the six channels perform with the synergy you find only in hi-end systems. You can tell that EBTB spent a great deal of time in getting these guys to perform with each other as efficiently as possible. Bjork's voice, which emanated from the centre channel, had a reverb tail going into the rest of the four channels that was giving her voice even more size than her already powerful voice was generating. At the same time, when the music would reach its peak in instrumental busyness, everything was allotted the space they required making this concert feel like a

real concert and not just some recording by a bunch of cameras and microphones. For a duration of 40 minutes, our little studio was converted to the Royal Opera House in London.

CONCLUSION

As exquisite as these speakers look, they sound. With a little bit of time spent in getting their levels and frequencies figured out based on your room size and speaker placement, you'll get a 5.1 soundstage that you'll be proud to have purchased for a little under 5 lacs. Their key feature is their synergy with one another, and while dialogue over high action can become a little challenging to understand (that's if you haven't calibrated the centre correctly), full blown action sequences feel like an exercise in enlightenment. Worth your cash is what we believe, no matter what your living room size, color and residents.

Karan Gour

EBTB Pluto F, Pluto and SubTerranean

PRICE	₹ 4,10,700
Pluto F	₹ 127,900 (Pair)
Pluto	₹ 38,450 (Each)
SubTerranean	₹ 2,05,900
WARRANTY	2 Years
CATEGORY	HT Speaker Package
AESTHETICS	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★★
AUDIO	★★★★★
EASE OF USE	★★★★★
VFM	★★★★★

WHAT SAY AV?

When it comes to aesthetics, you aren't going to get better than Everything But The Box's Pluto bookshelves, Pluto F floorstanders and the planetary SubTerranean subwoofer. They look like they were a match made in heaven and sound like the choir of angels that sung during their birth. You need to pay close attention to how you calibrate these guys especially when you're dealing with such an enormous subwoofer and a centre channel that lacks an extra mid-range driver. Nevertheless, once you're ready to go, hearing these guys play your favourite films is nothing short of taking an overwhelming trip around our solar system.

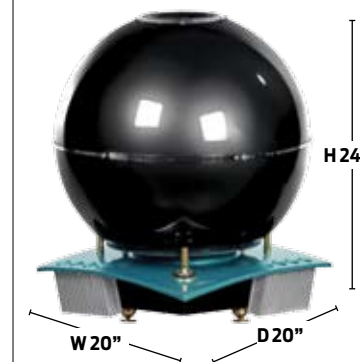
OVERALL ★★★★★

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Specifications

SubTerranean Subwoofer

DRIVE UNITS: 12" Cast-frame Down-Firing Woofer
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 18Hz-200Hz
POWER HANDLING: 200W+180Wx2 RMS
WEIGHT: 43kg
DIMENSIONS



Reflex Port and Speaker Terminal: Back Panel (Pluto Bookshelf)



Level Controller: SubTerranean Subwoofer



Bass Reflex Port: SubTerranean Subwoofer