

## Atlantic Technology FS-5000 FrontStage Home Theater Speaker System

Review By Cliff Darroch for *BigPictureBigSound*

Overall Rating ([out of four](#)): ★★★★★

### Putting the "Home" in "Home Theater"

For years, I've been looking for speakers - the "perfect" speakers. Not necessarily the perfect sound, although good sound is important. Not the most visually stunning of speakers, although an aesthetic which is pleasing to the eye is also important. Size matters - nothing too large and nothing too small. Basically I wanted a system that fit discretely into the most popular room in the house (the family room) but without obvious compromises in performance. Soon enough my attention was captured by Atlantic Technology's FS-5000 FrontStage Home Theater System. Does it fit the bill? Read on to find out.

#### Harmony at Home

I started with a general idea: reduce the clutter and remove the overt presence of technology, allowing my interior decorator (aka "the wife") the freedom to furnish the room in the manner she saw fit. But the room still needed to be a fun place to relax and enjoy a movie.



Atlantic Technology system (as reviewed) - FS-5000 LCR speaker bar, 10e CSB subwoofer and 2200 SR surround speakers.

First to go was the huge-honking CRT TV, replaced with a sexy flat panel. Today this seems like a no-brainer, but three years ago, plasma panels were still very expensive, and LCD panels left a lot to be desired in image quality. Rear projection TVs were affordable, but didn't really fit the aesthetic I was working toward. So I bit the bullet and bought a plasma.

Next I had to ditch my old vertical equipment stand in favor of a model which worked visually with the flat panel display. This was all working to plan except for the speakers. I had invested in a traditional set of mid-sized stand mounted main speakers, a large but very effective center, bookshelf rears, and a very large, very powerful subwoofer to make sure I wasn't missing any of the bottom end. The system did occasionally provide me with plain old stereo music reproduction, but it was assembled primarily for multi-channel surround sound. It sounded pretty good but it was hard to miss visually, and that's not necessarily a good thing.

#### Surround In a Box

In the recent past a number of companies have taken the approach that maybe there is no need for five distinct speakers, designing virtual surround systems which look like a single large center channel speaker. An example of this would be Polk's

SurroundBar. This single box is mounted below (or above for that matter) the display. This type of speaker plays games either with phase, time delay, EQ or directionality (or all of the above) to create the illusion of sound behind you. The end result is a simple and elegant aesthetic, to be sure, but I haven't quite bought into the idea that a bunch of small drivers and some electronics can match the three dimensionality and realism of five discrete speakers physically placed in front of and behind the listener. So simulated surround was not an option.

Was it really too much to ask for a system which could satisfy my taste for clean powerful reproduction of video soundtracks, perform well in two-channel playback of CDs or FM, and do so without dominating the decor? Everything I could find that met all three criteria (good for music, good for movies, tastefully designed) was out of my snack bracket, and the systems I could afford never seemed to excite me. I came to believe that systems designed to be architectural or "lifestyle-oriented" in nature - a fitting match for flat panels displays - would always require compromise: inexpensive, high quality, visually pleasing - pick any two. And that was when I discovered the Atlantic Technology on-wall series of speakers.

### A Sound Bar of a Different flavor

OK, I'll spoil the surprise. After living with the Atlantic Technology system for a number of weeks, it seems to be just what the home theater doctor (and the marriage counselor) ordered. My particular review system mated the **FS-5000** LCR speaker, with the **2200** SR bipole/dipole surround speakers and the **10e CSB** corner subwoofer. The system rings up at slightly below \$2900 (MSRP) for everything, which isn't the least expensive I've seen, but is far from the most expensive.

Atlantic Technology's FS-5000 (for "Front Stage") has taken design cues from the one-box surround bars mounting the left, center and right channels within a single low profile box but they leave the surround duty to separate rear or side speakers. From a design perspective this is great because now I have a choice of mounting the FS-5000 on the wall directly below the display, or in the cabinet that houses the rest of the equipment - the same choices I would have with a standard center channel speaker. There is no need to consider the placement and mounting of the left and right channels and no need for stands or floor space for tower speakers.



FS-5000 with grille removed - three two- way speakers in one sleek cabinet.

Because the FS-5000 was designed for stereo music listening as well, the tweeters have been placed in a mirror fashion at the extreme outside edges of the speaker bar. This placement enhances imaging and soundstage width. But that's not the end of Atlantic's attention to detail. As per the documentation, "In the FS-5000, each speaker utilizes two high-power 4 ½-inch GLH woofers and the 1-inch (25mm) soft-dome tweeter. The drivers are mounted in an acoustically inert, heavily braced MDF enclosure and are magnetically shielded so they may be placed close to any type of video monitor without concern of video interference. Note also that the tweeters are mounted above the centerline of the woofers. This arrangement results in a smoother in-room frequency response, for greater clarity and detail." In other words, the Atlantic Technology guys are smart, so you don't have to be.

A very interesting approach that Atlantic Technology has taken is to take a 10-inch subwoofer and design it to fit in a corner. Loading the sub with a corner placement gives it the ability to impersonate a 12-inch subwoofer with ease. My own sub, the Paradigm PW2200 (of the 12-inch persuasion) had nothing on the 10e CSB. Sure it could move more air (there still is no replacement for displacement), but it was not noticeably louder, and in no way was it quicker than the smaller, lighter and less obtrusive 10e CSB. This is one nice sub.

Atlantic Technology has chosen to go back to basics in the design of the 10e subwoofer, using an acoustic suspension (sealed) design. This design, although less efficient in terms of maximum SPL, is quicker and punchier than its ported counterparts. I noticed this right away after switching from my Paradigm, thinking that something was missing. It seemed as if this sub wasn't doing the job, but after a few days of break-in and some time for my hearing to readjust, what was "missing" was actually two things: the thud in my chest, and the boominess that went along with it. For years now a good friend of mine in the HiFi business has been trying to convince me to get rid of my big sub in favor of a less colored smaller sub. I guess I'll have to give him a call to tell him he was right. Hmmmm... I wonder what a pair of these would sound like?



The 10e CSB downward-firing subwoofer is designed specifically for corner placement.

### The Set Up

The FS-5000 LCR speaker bar was made specifically to match the look and size of a flat panel television. Dimensions of the FS-5000 match nicely with the width of a 50-inch display. If you have a 42-inch display, Atlantic Technology makes a FS-4000 model which is sized accordingly.

Set up and installation of the system was remarkably simple. Atlantic Technology included everything in the box. For the FS-5000, this meant a keyhole slot on the rear for mounting on the wall, straight and angled brackets for wallboard mounting with a plug and screw, a special mounting plate if stud placement didn't work with the location of the display and a two piece adjustable plinth for mounting on top of a cabinet. The 2200 SR rears came with keyhole slots a 1/4-20 screw hole for using standard adjustable wall mounts. The 10e CSB even came with two sets of feet, rubber and spikes. The spikes even came with custom metal blocks to protect delicate flooring from scratches (and still benefit from the isolation afforded by spiking).

The FS-5000 has switches located on the back which allow individual control of each speaker's response. These allow you to optimize the speakers for placement (wall-mount or free-standing in a cabinet) and for the specific acoustics of your room. The 2200 SR has a switch located on the rear for switching between bipole and dipole modes.

In dipole mode the 2200 SR's produce an ambient and diffused sound field with minimal localization (which I liked best for most movies and video soundtracks). In bipole mode, soundstage precision was enhanced - you can hear exactly where different sounds originate (better suited for multi-channel music playback). Switching between dipole and bipole mode is easily accomplished using a toggle switch conveniently located in the speakers' rear terminal cup so you can listen back and forth and decide which option works best for your specific tastes.

The setup of the 10e CSB was typical for a sub. Adjustments are available for phase, cross-over and volume. Because placement in a corner has been predetermined by design, the trial and error of placement to eliminate boom or other nuisances has been minimized. It's still worth experimenting with placement however: moving a subwoofer a few inches left or right can make the difference between bass nulls or boom and can greatly influence your overall enjoyment of movies and music. Check our tutorial on [subwoofer setup](#) for more details.

### Hearing is Believing

Most of my testing was done with movie soundtracks, and for home theater use, this system ROCKS!!! Clean, detailed un-restrained sound was its hallmark. Voices were rock solid and natural sounding. Sound effects on surround sound tracks had great placement in the space of the room, leading me to forget that the system was even there. This system had no problems with dynamic soundtracks like "Transformers" or "Pirates of the Caribbean."

Perhaps more surprising was the FS-5000's ability to convincingly reproduce the softer dialog-rich soundtracks from the many of the dramas that we watch. British movies and television shows seem for some reason to have the most difficult soundtracks to reproduce without playing with the center channel levels, but with the FS-5000, I never found myself adjusting



The 2200 SR features the same drivers as the FS-5000 in a selectable dipole or bipole configuration.

the volume except to stop my ears from bleeding when I went a little crazy on the volume levels testing the system's dynamic range (it has plenty).

I have been a closet audiophile for a long time, so I was skeptical whether a system obviously designed for home theatre was going to cut it for two-channel music listening. I must admit I was pleasantly surprised. But the system does need some time and possibly some tweaking to be fully appreciated.

I first auditioned the system with only the FS-5000 active (no sub or surrounds). The first track I listened to was ELO's *Mr. Blue Sky* from the "Afterglow" box set. I was a little disappointed at first as the sound lacked some bottom end. Not that ELO's Beatlesque sound is going to be particularly bass-heavy, but there seemed to be a fullness that was missing. That being said, Jeff Lynn's vocal were spot on and the upper registers were detailed and well placed. The placement of the instruments was good, although again the soundstage wasn't as wide as I was used to with the bigger boxes, more widely placed in the room. I know I am being picky, but I have always liked a wide soundstage when listening to stereo music.

I next moved to something a little more down and dirty, Big Sugar's "Hemi Vision." Big Sugar is a straight-forward guitar rock band, and the FS-5000 showed it could rock with the best of them. Gordie Johnson plays and sings amazingly on this CD and the FS-5000 showed the same rock-solid midrange that was so evident on video soundtracks. The acoustic guitar opening on *Solsbury Hill* from Peter Gabriel's first solo album was also presented as if the player was right in the room. Peter's voice, which can be screwed up by more colored speakers sounded as clear and engaging as ever.

I wanted to see what the FS-5000 would sound like if it had some help down low, so I connected the 10e CSB to one of the main channel outputs on the back of the receiver. What a difference! The reproduction definitely benefited from the addition of the bottom few octaves, and those octaves and the music were dramatically enhanced by the speed and precision of the sealed 10e CSB.

After it was set up with the subwoofer in the mix, I threw on something more challenging. Mike Oldfield's "Tubular Bells III" is an interesting mix of new age, electronics and both acoustic and very distorted/processed electric guitars. Though not to everyone's taste, it does present some interesting challenges in instrument placement, bass reproduction and sound staging. I was very impressed with how the Atlantic Technology system was able to present this recording with proper depth and detail, with both power and finesse. The FS-5000 sounds good enough on its own, but adding the 10e CSB brings the sound quality to an entirely different level.

If your receiver has a two-channel-plus-sub setting (some receivers leave the subwoofer active in "pure stereo" mode), then definitely give this a chance for stereo music listening, before you resort to any of the ambiance enhancement surround modes. You might just find that you like it better. If you receiver does not have this mode, then you may be better served by connecting the subwoofer to the main speaker outputs of your receiver, set your front speakers to "large" and set subwoofer to "off" in the receiver's speaker set-up menu. In this mode, your receiver will automatically send the LFE (Low Frequency Effect) and bass information to the main speakers, which directs them to the subwoofer and you won't be missing anything in movie or music listening.



The FS-5000 stands out only where you want it to - in high-quality sound reproduction.

### Final Thoughts

Ultimately a speaker system must be more than the sum of its individual parts. And this package from Atlantic Technology is exactly that. It performed well with all of the movie soundtracks I threw at it, it was more than competent as a music system, and it fit easily and for the most part inconspicuously, into my living environment.

I know that home theater typically falls under the domain of the men in most of my friends' households, but if you listen, you can hear muffled muttering (from their more gracious other half) about how ugly the stuff is or how much room it takes up. With the FS-5000 and the 10e CSB my wife doesn't even notice them and has been able to decorate the room as she desires.

I'm happy to say that my hunt is over: I have found a system that can meet my desire for a system whose primary task is the delivery of great sound, at a reasonable price, and gets kudos from my wife for not making her family room look like an audio store. Hats off to you, Atlantic Technology! Now where do I send the check?

### **Specifications**

#### **FS-5000 MSRP \$1500**

- Type: 2-way, with six high-performance woofers
- Drivers: Woofer (6) Heavy-duty 4 ½" (115mm) GLH Tweeter (3) 1" (25mm) soft dome
- Frequency Response: 70Hz – 20kHz ±3dB
- Nominal Impedance: 8 Ohms
- Crossover Frequency: 3.75kHz, 3rd order
- Sensitivity: 89dB
- Recommended Power: 10 – 150 Watts RMS per channel
- Magnetic Shielding: Yes
- Dimensions: 50 x 6 9/16" x 5 ½" (1270 x 167 x 138mm)
- Weight (ea): 35lbs (16kg)

#### **2200 SR MSRP \$460/pr**

- Type: Sealed-box, Dipole/Bipole surround speaker
- Drivers: Woofer (2) 4 1/2" GLH Tweeter (2) 1" soft dome
- Frequency Response : 90Hz 90Hz – 20kHz ±3dB
- Nominal Impedance : 8 Ohms
- Crossover Frequency: 3.5kHz, 2nd order
- Sensitivity: 90dB
- Recommended Power: 10 – 140 Watts RMS
- Magnetic Shielding: No
- Dimensions: 11.4 x 10.4 x 7.5" (283 x 265 x 191mm)
- Weight (ea) 7.5lbs (3.4kg)

#### **10e CSB MSRP \$899**

- Type: Sealed enclosure, down-firing
- Bass driver : 10" (254mm) long-throw
- Frequency Response: 30-250Hz, +/- 3dB
- Recommended Power: 180 RMS
- Peak Output: 106dB in 2000 cu.ft.
- Dimensions: 22 x 19½ x 12" (559 x 496 x 305mm)

- Weight : 35 lbs (16 kg)

**Manufacturers Contact Details**

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OVERALL	★★★★
VALUE	★★★★
PERFORMANCE	★★★★
FEATURES/ERGONOMICS	★★★★