

Time to take five

Klipsch is targeting the soundbar market as well as stereophiles with its latest Heritage Wireless powered speaker pair. **Ed Selley** listens in

AS WELL AS a strong line in passive speakers, Klipsch has been producing powered versions of some of its bookshelf models for quite a while. Yet The Fives, tested here, takes the basic idea of an active stereo speaker and really runs with it.

The system comprises two cabinets, both featuring a 1in Tractrix horn-loaded titanium woofer and 4.5in woofer (with Tractrix rear port). Power, rated at 160W, comes from a pair of amps built into one of the speakers.

What sets The Fives apart from more affordable active models is connectivity. Klipsch has fitted its system with digital optical and USB inputs, plus a line input that can be switched to a moving magnet phono stage for direct hookup to a turntable. There's also aptX Bluetooth. But perhaps most significant is the inclusion of an HDMI ARC connection that slaves The Fives to a TV and makes it a rather interesting soundbar alternative.

True, there's none of the multichannel decoding or virtual surround DSP of the soundbar competition but the ability to install the two speakers wide apart (a 4m cable is bundled to connect the passive speaker to its active partner) gives The Fives the

potential to deliver a soundstage that most single-chassis devices can only dream of.

The hand-crafted real-wood cabinets are well finished and feel suitably robust, and while they look a bit severe in Klipsch's matte-black iteration, the walnut veneer finish (pictured) is far smarter.

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Basic control can be achieved via source and volume dials on the top plate of the powered speaker; a supplied remote offers more in-depth operation regards bass performance. A neat touch is that the powered cabinet, which has the input board, can be set to the left or right channel, depending on what is simplest for your connections.

Stereo supremacy

Using The Fives to enjoy a re-watch of *The Bourne Supremacy* (4K Blu-ray) is an extremely enjoyable experience. Placed two-and-a-half metres apart, the soundstage created is nicely enveloping – I didn't really focus on the lack of surround channel info because there was a decent level of immersion to the performance – and Klipsch's horn-loaded tweeters do an excellent job of pulling fine detail out of the soundmix, even when there is a great deal going on. During the film's climactic car chase, the intentional sensory overload is unpicked into the individual effects that make it up without losing overall cohesion.

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVERS: 2 x 1in Tractrix horn-loaded tweeters; 2 x 4.5in fibre-composite cone woofers **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 160W (2 x 40W + 2 x 20W) **CONNECTIONS:** Analogue phono input; MM phono; optical digital audio input; USB input, HDMI ARC; subwoofer pre-out; 3.5mm aux input **DIMENSIONS:** 165(w) x 305(h) x 235(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 5.35kg (active cabinet); 4.85kg (passive cabinet)

FEATURES: Remote; aptX Bluetooth; can be switched between left and right; 192kHz/24-bit decoding; Dynamic Bass EQ; 50Hz-25kHz claimed frequency response

The speakers connect via a 4m cable

No less useful is the system's bass response. This is rated down to 50Hz, but with the promise of greater extension via a Dynamic Bass EQ setting, which is on by default. That's not good news for music but with film and TV content it ensures The Fives has an effortless low-end shove, even when running at low volumes. Meaty, weighty effects sound like ...well, meaty, weighty effects. Obviously, turning Dynamic Bass EQ off and adding an external woofer will be more effective, but there's enough grunt here to fill a standard-size lounge without struggling.

If you're listening at high levels, I'd suggest turning the EQ off because the system's natural bass extension is generally sufficient. And if you leave it off, the other area where The Fives excels is music replay. Not merely good for a soundbar alternative, it's a creditable rival to two-channel audio systems. It blasts its way though Telepopmusik's *Everybody Breaks the Line* with drive and enthusiasm, showing the same directness Klipsch's other speakers are famed for. The USB input offers the highest-quality performance, feeding into a 192kHz/24-bit DAC, but both the aptX Bluetooth hookup and phono stage put in a solid showing.

This is perhaps the The Fives' USP. It can compete with two-channel soundbar designs thanks to the stereo width that it possesses. It goes on to be far superior to almost any of them when it comes to listening to music. If you want a compact but talented all-rounder, it takes an awful lot of beating ■

AV INFO

PRODUCT: Active stereo speaker pair with HDMI ARC connectivity

POSITION: Premium model in Klipsch's Heritage Wireless range

PEERS: KEF LSX; Edifier S3000 Pro

HCC VERDICT



Klipsch The Fives

→ £850 → www.klipsch.com

WE SAY: This system offers sparkling performance with film and music material, plus superior connectivity and a neat aesthetic.