

FIRST TESTS

Castle's compact cracker

Castle Compact CC3

Multichannel speaker system
£1000

★★★★★

FOR

Surprising power and integration for speakers so small; beautifully finished

AGAINST

Nothing of any significance

VERDICT

A really classy little subwoofer and satellites system, available in a range of luscious wood finishes and as excellent with music as it is with movies

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

Drive units

20mm soft dome tweeter, 11cm glass-fibre cone woofer (2x in centre speaker), 25cm high excursion paper cone woofer in sub

Power handling

70w satellites, 100w centre

Sensitivity

86dB/w/m

Impedance

8 ohms

Connections

Combination terminals (satellites/centre); stereo speaker terminals and RCA phonos (Cube) Cube subwoofer controls crossover, level, phase

Finishes available

11 wood veneers

Dimensions

(WxHxD) 20x14x16cm (satellites); 14x32x16cm (centre); 35x35x36cm (Cube)

SO YOU WANT a multichannel speaker system, but you don't want hulking great black boxes? And you're not too sold on having those high-tech silver speakers all over your nice traditional living room? Oh, and you want it to sound good with music, too? Well, this system could be just the thing.

The CC3 system is from Castle, one of those British hi-fi companies that hasn't lost track of the fact that speakers have to be seen as well as heard: it's available in a wide range of furniture-grade real-wood veneers, from light maple to rich and dark antique oak and a striking slate-grey birds-eye maple. And the speakers are all still made in the company's factory in Skipton, Yorkshire, whereas many rival designs use overseas production to keep costs down.

This is a remarkably dinky system, with the four main speakers just 20cm tall, and the Cube subwoofer around 35cm on each side. There's a dedicated centre speaker, and should you want to use dipole rears rather than conventional satellites, matching units are available. The package price is £1000, but the components are available separately: the satellites are £230 a pair, the centre £180 and the subwoofer just under £400.

The most striking thing about the sound is how even-handed and well-balanced it is, and how well the small speakers integrate with each other and the sub. We tried various crossover settings, settling eventually for 100Hz, and in the absence of the wall-mounts for the speakers (see below), we used them on stands right against the front and rear walls of

“This system combines style with a winning sound, whether with music in stereo or movie soundtracks”



our room, the sub down beside the left speaker and the centre sitting below the screen in the TV stand. After a couple of days' use to let the bass fill out and tighten, and the treble smooth off a shade from its initial slight sharpness, the Castle system was ready to give off its best.

This is a remarkable system, combining style with a winning sound, whether playing music – stereo or multichannel SACDs – or movie sound from DVD. With the beautifully detailed soundtrack of *Finding Nemo*, it allows the enveloping underwater ambience to wrap around impressively while keeping the voices crystal-clear and having all the slam you could want. It's just as good with *Pirates of the Caribbean*, revelling in Johnny Depp's excellent Keef impersonation and powering out the battle sequences.

With music, too, it sounds excellent with just the front pair of satellites and the sub running in stereo, and really comes into its own with multichannel sound from SACD. Roxy Music's *Avalon* had superb ambience and presence, with good rhythmic drive, fine bass power and crisp, vibrant instrumental timbres, and the same attributes also served well Channel Classic's set of Vivaldi violin concertos, *La Stravaganza*. The playing of soloist Rachel Podger was described by our sister magazine

Gramophone as 'crackling with vitality' and when you play it on the Castles you can hear what was meant.

Castle started from a musical approach, and developed a fine system: this is an excellent all-rounder.

Keeping the Castles musical

THE 11CM MID/BASS units used here have a glass-fibre cone, a copper cap in the magnet system and an aluminium ring to compensate for inductance variations. Meanwhile the 20mm fabric dome tweeter is designed for wide radiation of sound and extended response up to 40kHz.

The Cube subwoofer uses a 25cm bass unit, front-firing and with a downward-venting port, and has its connections and controls on the rear panel. The onboard power amp is 150w, using a large toroidal transformer and a variety of strategies,

including a Real Time Power Sense Limiter and a driver induction compensation circuit to allow accurate, powerful bass.

Sealed enclosures are used for the sats and centre speaker, Castle taking the sensible view that it's likely that the speakers will be wall-mounted – it even pre-drills the rear of the cabinets to accept a bracket from B-Tech – the BT33 – and tunes the speakers to suit this kind of mounting. Castle suggests using a crossover point between 80 and 100Hz, but the setting will depend on your room and taste.



The five main speakers' 11cm mid/bass drive unit uses a glass-fibre cone