

Paradigm Shift Soundtrack Soundbar with Wireless Subwoofer Review

Paradigm treads yet more new waters with a slice of convenient class

Introduction

Here, again, we have something new to the Paradigm repertoire in the shape of the Canadian Manufacturer's Soundtrack Soundbar package, which forms part of their Shift Series of products that exists to cater for those that value ease of use but won't compromise on quality. Paradigm has already got off to a flyer with their more traditional 2.1 systems in the [MilleniaOne CT](#) and entry-level Millenia CT, so it will be more than a little interesting to see how they've tackled the challenges of the more confined speaker-bar environment. The Soundtrack contains much of the audio circuitry present in the separate speaker systems, so we're expecting another joyride - hop on and join us.

Summary

There's no denying Paradigm's Soundtrack Soundbar stands a little taller than most; or should that be prouder? As it packs in drivers most of the rest can only dream about. Still, it is a matter for consideration so it would be wise to ensure you'll have enough clearance from your sitting position if you're not wall-mounting. The only other real consideration is if the Soundtrack has ample enough connections for you; with choices of a single optical digital, stereo and 3.5mm analogue it means you have to forego the HDMI and Bluetooth offered by others in the sector. Paradigm does provide a lot of flexibility in terms of where you can sit the subwoofer, however, and its cunning dual ported design allows for placement under a sofa, table or even in your AV unit, whilst not skimping on power. Once again, the Paradigm remote control fails to please but we can bring ourselves to get over it, for the rest of the package on offer.

Paradigm has brought to bear its formidable engineering resources to deliver a soundbar package equally at home with music as it is with movies and TV. The Soundtrack, by its very nature, isn't able to afford as wide a soundstage as its Millenia CT cousins but the same precise mids and highs are all there and it's all under-pinned by convincing, pulsating bass notes. If anything the Soundtrack leans to the warmer sound present in the Millenia CT, as opposed to the MilleniaOne, but whatever the weather, it's beautifully composed and impressively capable of providing precise effects localisation. We can fully appreciate, that at

around £800, the Paradigm Soundtrack is still in the aspirational category for many - that's a sum considerably more than most are willing to pay for a television but quality costs and if audio is fifty percent of the AV experience - which we would argue it is - then it's not that high a price to pay. We'd still lean toward the Paradigm Millenia CT, in this sort of price bracket, but the Soundtrack does present more varied placement options and will suit many. In fact, for our money, it's quite possibly the best sub-one-thousand pound Soundbar package, bar none.

Scores	N/A	Very Poor	Poor	Average	Good	Excellent	Reference
Build quality	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Connectivity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ease of use	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Audio - movies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Audio - music	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Value for money	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Overall	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Paradigm Soundtrack



Reviewed 29th March, 2013 by Mark Hodgkinson

Key Features

- ▶ Active Amplification
- ▶ Wireless Subwoofer
- ▶ Fast and Easy Setup
- ▶ Low Profile Sub Design
- ▶ Digital Optical Audio Connection

Pros

- ▶ Excellent with both movies and music
- ▶ Lovely workmanship in the finish
- ▶ Would fill most rooms with sound
- ▶ Easy set up

Cons

- ▶ Lack of HDMI and Bluetooth might put some off
- ▶ Remote wouldn't win any prizes
- ▶ Might sit too high for some set-ups
- ▶ Could be considered expensive - but it isn't really

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What's in the Box

Besides the obvious inclusion of the two speaker units, the Paradigm Soundshift's (quite hefty) packaging contains two each of soundbar feet and wall mounting brackets; a power pack and appropriate cords; RCA and Digital Optical audio cables and the palm-fitting remote control. Also in the box is a cradle and feet - which are screwed in - to tether the subwoofer in either vertical or horizontal orientation. Should you wish to hook up the sub in a wired configuration - rather than the default wireless setup - you'll need to provide your own RCA-RCA interconnect so presumably Paradigm is confident you don't need to.



Setup and Operation

We might as well get this out of the way at the offset, if you're the owner of a sleek, low-slung TV, you're not going to want to place the Soundtrack soundbar on your AV Rack directly beneath it, unless you sit in an unusually elevated position. Measuring in at just under 14cm, in height, with feet attached, it's quite a lofty number so due caution is issued. There's a reason for its comparatively elevated standing, of course, you simply couldn't accommodate the four 4-inch midrange drivers, comfortably, in anything significantly smaller. There is, of course, the option of wall-mounting courtesy of a couple of (supplied) wall brackets but make sure your fixings are of the appropriate grade as the Soundtrack is also relatively heavy, tipping the scales at slightly under 3.5kg.



In addition to the four main drivers, the bar also has a couple of 1-inch tweeters placed at either extremity and there's the option of showing off all of the main speaker drivers by removal of the, surprisingly strong, magnetic grille - it literally jumps out of your hands and snaps in to position in impressively efficient fashion. As usual, for maximum fidelity we'd prefer to go **sans grille** but the considerations of keeping your kit fully intact are all too familiar concerns for some folks (read parents).



The Soundtrack provides a little more in the way of connectivity than its Millenia CT brethren in that it also has a set of stereo jacks to add to the singular 3.5mm Auxiliary analogue and S/PDIF Digital audio inputs. Many of the more mainstream manufacturers boast HDMI connectivity in their upper tier soundbar packages and the inclusion of Audio Return Channel (ARC) technology is probably HDMI's biggest win, in terms of operability and (whisper it) wife-friendliness. Some might lament the absence of Bluetooth, also, and although it does have its issues, it's undoubtedly a connection option with lifestyle audio market appeal. The only other drawback to the limited input array is the fact you'll need to choose what source goes where but we'd suggest if your TV diet is mainly broadcast based, use the optical for that or if your consumption is more disc orientated, connect your player that way. In a nutshell, what we're trying to say is that your most important source is best served by the optical connection, whichever that may be.



Operationally, most will be using the supplied remote control that is of vaguely credit card proportions and not particularly blessed with a wide range infra-red output, so you'll need to take aim at the centre of the bar with a degree of unnecessary precision. Paradigm has endowed the Soundtrack System with the ability to learn commands from other controllers, for example you could 'teach' it your TV's volume codes; the process involves holding down the corresponding control button(s), that are mounted in somewhat ungainly fashion on top of the speaker bar, whilst pressing the corresponding button on your chosen devices' remote until a light flashes to tell you the job is done. Given, to put it generously, the fact it's not a particularly impressive controller we don't expect many will bother with that feature. As if to underline just how small and 'looseable' the remote is, Paradigm has issued warning in the manual that if you do happen to irretrievably misplace it, then it's not a warranty matter and a replacement will require financial outlay. So don't say you weren't warned.

Technical Info

Probably the most interesting thing about the Soundtrack System's design comes in the form of the ultra-compact subwoofer that still manages to pack in 8-inches worth of driver with its polymer-composite cone and 1.5-inch voice coil. To facilitate the very low profile design – when arranged horizontally – the sub features dual, 'oversized' ports that, along with the driver are arranged in a perpendicular array, with the dual ports intended to promote timely response. The sub unit is also where the Class-D amplifier sits that features Paradigm's own Digital Sound Processing (DSP) to shape frequency response. The subwoofer is so low-slung, in fact, that it could fit on a shelf in many AV units but we prefer it out in the open, where it can breathe.



The main speaker bar is of a more standard design but the 4-inch main drivers are a class above the, typically, 2.5 to 3-inch versions we've seen in more mainstream products recently. The soundbar also features 4-inch passive radiators and two high-frequency 1-inch drivers that are just as good as those in the Millenia CT products. The passive radiators are a mineral filled polypropylene for a low-mass yet high-stiffness cone composition and help promote extension in the lower frequencies. All of the driver components are physically separated within

the speaker cabinet to prevent crosstalk and provide a sense of channel separation. Well does it, work? See below...

Audio Quality

Simply by virtue of the Soundtrack System reaching us in daylight hours, its first task was to entertain us with music. Often we find that whilst being pretty serviceable for TV and movies, many soundbars lack proficiency with the slightly different demands of music. By its very nature, the soundtrack isn't able to offer the stereo separation on offer with even its - slightly less costly - drinking buddy, the Millenia CT, but that's not to denigrate its performance because it most assuredly is a superb listen and especially if you're flush on.

Paradigm gained a lot of their early reputation in the subwoofer market with big bruising war machines of ground-shaking capabilities and whilst the unfeasibly neat sub in this package can't lay claim to that kind of performance, it does shock in just how accomplished it is. It seemed somehow appropriate to start with a spot of Public Enemy, and even more, that their **Bring the Noise** was the first track we chose to play through the Soundtrack - after all, with any luck, you could make yourself the former and achieve the latter if the system is up to the job. The first thing we noted was that the Soundtrack's sub isn't quite as commanding as that of the Millenia CT duo but, whilst a natural association, that isn't necessarily fair. If we take an apples versus apples approach and compare with other subwoofers that form part of a soundbar package, then the Paradigm Soundtracks' is a Granny Smith as opposed to a Golden Delicious - crisp and mouth-watering against superficial and slightly insipid. That's not to say there's anything wrong with a good Golden Delicious, just that a Smith is ultimately more satisfying. There endeth the fruit analogies.

So, with the low frequencies far more than adequately taken care of, the rest is joyously reminiscent of what the Millenia CT's are capable of. The beautifully taut tweeters seemingly never quaver, even when taken to the extremes of electric guitar or the top-end of a good falsetto; case in point would be Radiohead's **Paranoid Android** - Thom and the gang would be suitably impressed. On a slightly different tack, but similarly indicative of the mid and high range performance, the guitars and harmonics in The Eagles' **Peaceful Easy Feeling** emphasised a relationship with the Millenia CT's internals (rather than MilleniaOne) by way of that added touch of warmth. Where some would bemoan the lack of DSP modes, who needs them when the one-fits-all DSP of the Soundtrack is so good?



Looking up, we've expended quite a lot of page space to the Soundtrack's musical capabilities when the likelihood is that, for most users, its primary designation will be to replace those shameful little wimps, masquerading as speakers, that populate your flat panel TV. Do we really need to tell you? OK, silly question, but it's surely far from flabbergasting for you to learn that the Soundtrack System is an absolute peach (enough with the fruit, already) when it comes to movies and television.

With lights suitably dimmed we repositioned the Soundtrack in front of the TV and sat back to listen. As we had a 3D television to hand, we subjected the Soundtrack to a bit of Dredd with its pulsing, mesmeric techno score and multitudinous weapons effects, Paradigm's slice of superior sound was able to demonstrate its full versatility, never losing it with the bass notes and locating effects with admirable precision and immediacy. For those wondering if a wired sub arrangement might be preferable to the default wireless configuration, we'd say it seemed to matter little, if any. We at no time sensed any latency between mid/high and low frequencies with the sub putting up a performance of expertly timed thud and thunder.

We gave high praise to the room filling abilities of the Millenia CT series, with their size-defying ability to knock it out loud and very clear and whilst, ultimately, the Soundtrack isn't so capable of bringing the noise without a little distortion, you would really need to like your audio at serious volumes, in the typical living room, for you to ever notice. There's also no denying that the sweet spot is dead centre and if you're expecting any simulated surround effects, the Soundtrack is not what you're looking for. Paradigm's Soundtrack simply nails the basics and, in all honesty, that's all we need.

Our feedback for Paradigm

- Go on, give us a better remote
- Some extra connectivity will open up the market further
- The buttons on the unit are a bit cheap and tacky feeling
- Perhaps an option to tilt slightly when on its feet would be useful for those with low-slung TVs

If you are interested in buying the Paradigm Soundtrack, we hope you will use our [advertisers](#).