



MartinLogan Motion 262 Home Theater Speaker System Review

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High Fidelity, Low Price



The folks at **MartinLogan** have a lot of nerve, mucking around with perfectly good clichés. Everyone else seems to understand that you get what you pay for. It's a truism that holds for everything from dining and haberdashery to haircuts and interns. But not, apparently, for speakers at least not anymore, at least not as far as MartinLogan is concerned. Their new **Motion Series** of loudspeakers flies in the face of traditional measurements of "value" and "performance."

But what do you expect from a company that isn't content to build speakers the traditional way to begin with? The MartinLogan brand is synonymous with highly lauded high-end hybrid electrostatic loudspeakers (ESL), which rely on thin translucent diaphragms sandwiched between perforated metal sheets to move air and generate midrange and high frequency sounds in lieu of stacked circular cones, and which unabashedly fall into "Getting What You Pay For" Territory, with sticker prices running upwards of \$30,000 per pair at the very high end. Even an "entry-level" set of MartinLogan ESLs will set you back over \$2K, and that's just for two!

But despite all of their advantages (incredibly dynamic sound, astoundingly low distortion, startling transparency) electrostatics aren't for every room in every home. They're large and pricey, not to mention power hungry and rather fussy when it comes to placement.



Happy Together: MartinLogan's Motion Series speakers are available in multiple sizes and shapes.

So when I tell my tech-savvier friends that I'm setting up a 5.1-channel MartinLogan system in my bedroom, I get a few raised eyebrows and more than a few blunt inquiries about my sanity. The thing is, the company's new Motion Series speakers are, in many ways, the exact opposite of their bigger brothers.

For one okay -- I just kind of spoiled it, didn't I? -- they're quite compact. The **Motion 262 System** includes four **Motion 2s** as the front left and right and surround channels plus one Motion 6 center channel speaker. The Motion 2 measures in at just 11.3 x 5.3 x 4.5 inches. The smaller of the two center channels in the line, the **Motion 6**, is a mere 5.25 x 17.5 x 3.75 inches and looks positively petite beneath the 40-inch LCD hanging on the wall above it. And if you're pulling out your measuring tape or holding your hands apart and thinking *Those don't seem too terribly tiny*, that's only because you haven't heard them. These things simply have no right to sound as big as they do. When the ratio of sonic size vs. form factor is taken into consideration, they seem positively Lilliputian.

For another thing, the Motion Series speakers aren't hybrid ESLs. But nor do they rely on traditional dome tweeters. (This is MartinLogan we're talking about, after all.) Instead, a Folded Motion driver with eight times the surface area of a typical 1-inch dome tweeter is corrugated into tight accordion shape, and instead of sucking and blowing to generate sound, it squeezes the air between its folds to generate the sort of distortion free audio for which MartinLogan is known and loved. The result is something that approaches, or at least resembles, a scaled-down version of the electrostatic experience without the size or placement concerns.



Where the magic happens: the Motion Series' folded motion tweeter.

And then there's the fact that these beautiful little speakers illicit whatever the exact opposite of sticker shock is. At \$199.95 for the Motion 2, \$299.95 for the Motion 6 center channel, and \$695 for the **Dynamo 700 10-inch wireless subwoofer** that MartinLogan sends to complete the system, you're looking at a less than \$1800 for a complete 5.1 MartinLogan audio system, plus \$120 for the optional wireless subwoofer transmitter (or less than \$1600 if you opt for the non-wireless Dynamo 500 sub instead).

Quite frankly, after spending some quality time listening to the system, I'm almost inclined to think they're entirely too inexpensive.

It Puts the Motion in Its System...

Before we dig too deep into the performance of the system, though, let's focus on aesthetics and hookup for a bit, because once I start yammering about sound quality I'm liable to forget about anything else. Each speaker comes boxed separately, well packed in styrofoam and wrapped in a cloth bag. Also included with each speaker is an assortment of mounting hardware, a mounting template, and a microfiber cleaning cloth, the latter being a nice inclusion given that the beautiful glossy finish doesn't seem to even need to be touched to attract fingerprints.

Around back, each Motion Series speaker sports a proprietary push-style speaker cable connection that I was a bit skeptical about until I actually used it. Why mess with the standard high-quality five-way binding post? Or MartinLogan's trademark toolless binding posts, for that matter? But these simple connections keep the speaker cable close to the speaker, making wall mounting a breeze. And if you want to use banana plugs (which I do in the front of the room, since the speakers up there will be shelf-mounted and I already have three cables cut to length and terminated), all you have to do

is remove a little rubber plug.

At the rear of the room, though, I simply and easily slide 14-gauge speaker cable into each connection and mount the speakers in no-time flat.



The Motion Series speaker terminals can easily accommodate bare wire or banana plugs.

This is where I should probably admit that my surround-speaker placement is less than ideal: more than three feet above my ears and pretty much perpendicular to my head, rather than slightly behind. Honestly, my intention was to pull the surrounds down from their mounts and perch them in a more favorable position whilst working on the review during the day, and hang them back up near the ceiling before the missus got home so as to, you know, stay married and stuff.

That ends up being entirely unnecessary in the end. After running the Audyssey setup routing on the Denon AVR-2807 receiver in the bedroom, I pop in *Avatar* and find myself a bit blown away by how well the system handles the big action scenes. These speakers crank out every bullet whiz, every whooshing air beast, every Pandora-shattering kaboom and ask for another.



Wall-mounting the Motion Series is a painless process using the included wall mounts.

But perhaps even more surprising is how well they handle the ambient elements of the soundtrack: the wilderness sounds at the end of chapter 5 and the beginning of chapters 9 and 10, the delicate rainfall at the end of chapter 15 - the effortlessness with which these sounds flow into the room; the huge, even dispersion pattern of the speakers; the crystal clarity of the high end... it all joins together, even in the face of slightly iffy speaker placement, to create a cohesive, coherent, enveloping soundfield unlike anything I've ever heard at this price point.

A bit tired of turning to the same dialogue clarity test as of late (the scenes at Caradhras Pass and in the Mines of Moria in *Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring*), I turn instead to another vocally challenging flick, *V for Vendetta*, and again find myself pleasantly surprised, this time by the Motion 6's ability to suss out Hugo Weaving's lines from behind

that unmoving Guy Fawkes mask. And again, it handles all of the slashing and shooting and body-slamming in chapter 30, "V's Turn," with more than enough volume. If anything, they sound better the louder I play them, and truth be told they run me out of my rather mid-sized (12-by-15-foot) bedroom long before I hear any significant distortion.

Play That Funky Music, Wookiee Boy

Turning my attention to tunes, I pop in Chesky Records' *Top 10* CD (and not just because my name is in the liner notes, mind you; it's full of amazing test tracks), disconnect the sub, and switch to stereo mode to see how well the Motion 2s would work as a two-channel bookshelf system. That doesn't last long, though. Try as they might, these little fellas really do need a sub. So it's fortunate that they blend as well with the Dynamo 700 as they do. A bit of placement tweaking (made all the more easy thanks to MartinLogan's ridiculously easy wireless setup) and a bit of experimentation with the sub's phase switch is all it takes to dial in some amazingly smooth response on the *Avia Guide to Home Theater* DVD's frequency sweep tests, all the way down to the nether regions of the audible spectrum.

With the sub back in the mix and Chesky's *Top 10* back in the tray, I cue up

Sara K's cover of Fleetwood Mac's "Oh Well" and fall into fits of giddy handclapping over the way the percussion springs out of the front soundstage, the way the notes of the upright bass dance seamlessly between the Dynamo 700 and Motion 2s, the way the guitar sounds like... well, a guitar. And in Pro Logic II music mode, the three-dimensional verisimilitude of Chesky's recording techniques is even more apparent thanks to the way these speakers reach out into the room.

I'll be honest, though, in PLII mode, with music, I can't help but notice that Sara's vocals are a bit chestier, and the Motion 6 overall sounds a bit darker, slightly midrangier than the Motion 2. A quick check of *Avia's* "Pink Noise Match of Center Speaker" confirms my hunch: there's definitely a noticeable timbre mismatch between the two. So just for giggles I grab one of the Motion 2s from the back of the room and pop it in place of the Motion 6, and find that I really prefer it as a center channel, at least for music.

With all of the speakers back where they belong, though, I turn my attention to the DVD-Audio release of Porcupine Tree's *Deadwing* and simply cannot get over the beautiful imaging. The Tesla-coil-esque audio effects at the beginning of "Arriving Somewhere But Not Here" flow like liquid between the left front and rear channels without a hint of jumpiness.



MartinLogan's Motion 6 center channel speaker.

Truth be told, the system performs so well in so many respects that I find myself expecting too much of it at times, comparing the speakers to those costing two, three, five times as much. The slight relative throatiness of Motion 6 sticks with me in a way it definitely shouldn't for a system at this price point, because for the most part, the Motion Series speakers simply don't sound like speakers at this price point. Their clarity is exceptional, their ability to disappear into a room (sonically speaking) is uncanny, and their value is unrivaled. And although the Motion 262 is sold as a package

(four Motion 2s and a Motion 6, no sub), you can also purchase the speakers ala carte, crafting exactly the system you want to match your budget. You could experiment with a smaller or larger Motion Series center channel if space permits, including going with five or even seven identical Motion 2 series speakers, if you're so inclined.

I absolutely cannot wait to audition the rest of the line.

Turn Ons

- Ridiculously high fidelity for the price
- Many of the advantages of electrostatics without the fuss
- Beautiful form factor
- Proprietary speaker terminals actually serve a purpose!
- À la carte pricing allows you to build the system that's right for your room and budget
- Wide vertical and horizontal dispersion leads to consistent performance throughout the room, even with less-than-perfect speaker placement
- The speakers really come into their own at higher volumes

Turn Offs

- Slight timbre mismatch between the Motion 2 and Motion 6
- Motion 2s generate insufficient bass to be used as a stereo bookshelf speaker without a sub
- The speakers really only come into their own at higher volumes

Final Thoughts

MartinLogan's Motion 2 and Motion 6 loudspeakers are gorgeous little overachievers (seriously, pictures do not do them justice) that you absolutely must audition if you're in the market for speakers in this price range. Heck, you should really audition them if you're in the market for speakers costing two or three times as much. Do they compete with MartinLogan's more expensive hybrid electrostatics? No, not really. But it wouldn't be fair to expect as much.

Do they offer the same approach to sonic purity and inventive loudspeaker construction on a vastly reduced budget? Absolutely. This is what hi-fi on the cheap should sound like.

System Specs (as reviewed):

Motion 2 (x4, front left/right and surround left/right)

- **MSRP: \$199.95** ([Buy on Amazon](#))
- **Frequency Response(+/- 3dB)** 110-25kHz Dispersion 80° x 80°
- **Sensitivity** 86 dB @ 2.83 V/m
- **Compatible Impedance** 8 Ohms
- 2.8 kHz
- **Maximum Power Handling** 50 watts
- **High Frequency Driver** 1" x 1.4" (2.6cm x 3.6cm) Folded Motion™ Tweeter with 5.25" x 1.75" (13.3cm x 4.4cm) diaphragm.
- **Low Frequency Driver** 3.5" (8.9cm) poly cone with stamped steel basket.
- **Low Frequency Driver Properties** Non-resonant asymmetrical chamber format. Rigid structured dust cap to reduce cone break-up modes.
- **Cabinet Sealed**
- **Crossover Components** Custom air core coil and low DCR steel laminate inductors. Polyester film capacitors in series and low DF electrolytic capacitors in parallel. Overall system thermal/current protection.
- **Binding Post Inputs** Push style with banana jacks
- **Weight** 4 lbs. (1.81 kg)
- **Dimensions (HxWxD) in** 11.3" x 5.3" x 4.4"
- **Dimensions (HxWxD) cm** 28.6cm x 13.3cm x 11.4cm

Motion 6 (x1 - center channel)

- **MSRP: \$299.95** ([Buy on Amazon](#))
- **Frequency Response (+/- 3dB)** 120-25kHz
- **Dispersion** 80° x 80°
- **Sensitivity** 89 dB @ 2.83 V/m
- **Compatible Impedance** 8 Ohms
- **Crossover Frequency** 3.3 kHz
- **Maximum Power Handling** 65 watts
- **High Frequency Driver** 1" x 1.4" (2.6cm x 3.6cm) Folded Motion™ Tweeter with 5.25" x 1.75" (13.3cm x 4.4cm) diaphragm.
- **Low Frequency Driver** Two 3.5" (8.9cm) poly cones with stamped steel baskets.
- **Low Frequency Driver Properties** Non-resonant asymmetrical chamber format. Rigid structured dust cap to reduce cone break-up modes.
- **Cabinet Sealed**

- **Crossover Components** Custom air core coil and low DCR steel laminate inductors. Polyester film capacitors in series and low DF electrolytic capacitors in parallel. Overall system thermal/current protection.
- **Binding Post Inputs** Push style with banana jacks
- **Weight** 6 lbs. (3.2 kg)
- **Dimensions (HxWxD) in** 5.25" x 17.5" x 3.75"
- **Dimensions (HxWxD) cm** 13.3cm x 44.5cm x 9.5cm

Dynamo 700 (x1)

- **MSRP: \$695.99** ([Buy on Amazon](#))
- **Frequency Response** 24-200 Hz \pm 3dB; Anechoic through LFE effects input
- **Wireless Receiver Built-in receiver** (SWT-1 transmitter sold separately)
- **Low Pass Filter Frequency** 35-120 Hz
- **Low Frequency Transducer** 10" (25.4cm) high excursion, poly cone with extended throw drive assembly; sealed non-resonant cabinet design
- **Amplifier** 300 watts rms (600 watts peak)
- **Impedance** Line level RCA: 20,000 ohms
- **Controls** Low Pass Filter Switch: Bypass (LFE In), Variable (Left and Right In)
- **Inputs** Left and Right/LFE RCA line level
- **Power Draw** Standby: 1W; Idle: 15W; Max: 400W
- **Compatible Products** SWT-1 Subwoofer Wireless Transmitter, sold separately
- **Resolution** 16-bit
- **Sampling Rate** 48kHz
- **Wireless Band** 2.4GHz uncompressed digital self-sensing design constantly adjusts for best connection.
- **Error Checking** Bidirectional feedback constantly monitors integrity of data stream.
- Antenna Internal
- **Subs Per Transmitter** One
- **Maximum Wireless Range** 30-40 feet (10-12.5 meters)
- **Weight** 26.5 lbs. (12 kg)
- **Dimensions (down-firing orientation)** 12.54" x 11.69" x 12.53" (31.9cm x 29.7cm x 31.8cm)
- **Dimensions (front-firing orientation)** 13.47" x 11.69" x 12.31" (34.2cm x 29.7cm x 31.3cm)

Manufacturer's Contact Information:

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On the Web: www.martinlogan.com

Where to Buy:

- ***[MartinLogan Motion 262 Home Theater Speaker System \(Amazon.com\)](#)***

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