



SVS 13B Ultra



I guess it's easy to underestimate the role subwoofers play in a home theatre system. At least, that's what I've realised, having spent some time having my hair blow back and my skeleton rattled by one of the meanest, bad-ass subwoofers ever to grace the *AV Magazine* listening room.

There really is no other way to describe the 42 kg behemoth that needed to be manhandled into position just behind the right front speaker. The SVS 13B Ultra, finished in a deep, glossy black, and with a huge, long-throw woofer lurking behind a curved metal grille, has a menacing presence that's only partly offset by its classy finish.

That 343 mm driver is already something of a legend among subwoofer cognoscenti. It's been optimised for its application in its thick-walled, heavily braced and meticulously sealed enclosure. Thus, the driver gets a different motor geometry and

a unique voice coil, as well as a custom gap extension plate.

According to SVS, the result is a sub with improved thermal power handling, a more symmetrical force/displacement profile and reduced distortion.

The motor assembly now sports a copper shorting sleeve to reduce the gap between induction and distortion, while the new gap extension plate allows an extended linear stroke. Dual linear-roll spiders and a stitched parabolic surround allow extreme excursion, while the ultra-light, ultra-rigid Rohacell composite cone delivers superior transient response.

Frankly, some of that terminology sounds like it belongs in a weapons magazine, and not an audio journal ...

But wait, there's more. To properly drive that big subwoofer in a sealed enclosure, without the benefit of any port boosting, requires a beefy amplifier.

Needless to say, the SB13 Ultra obliges in that department, too.

Dubbed the Sledge STA-1000D amp, it packs a full 1 kW of continuous RMS power, harnessed by sophisticated digital signal processing. DSP allows a comprehensive array of options and adjustments to ensure optimum system integration, all accessed via a menu-driven interface and an alpha-numeric LCD display on the rear panel.

Options include level control, high-pass and low-pass filtering (including frequency and slope), phase setting, high-pass delay, room compensation (again adjusted for frequency and slope), and two parametric equalisation filters. These can boost specific bass frequencies by up to 3 dB, and reduce specific frequencies by up to 12 dB to compensate for room-related dips and peaks.

To make the most of this, you'll need to measure the room acoustics for anomalies,

but the scope for adjustment is impressive: frequencies can be defined at 31, 35, 40, 46, 50, 56, 63, 70, 80, 90, 100, 112 and 125 Hz points, while the level is adjustable in 1 dB increments. Q settings are at 2.0, 2.4, 2.9, 3.6, 4.8, 5.7, 7.2, 9.6 and 14.4.

The equalisation curve, SVS says, has a gentle roll-off, transient response is rapid, and the group delay is very low. This allows optimum use of the room's own gain profile, which should allow real-world bass extension down to 15 Hz or even lower.

The SVS offers both balanced XLR and single-ended RCA inputs and outputs, the latter aimed at daisy-chaining additional subwoofers – as if one of these monsters wasn't enough!

In the AVSA studio, one SB13 Ultra was certainly more than enough. I ran it with both the Yamaha RX-V581 reviewed elsewhere in this issue, and later with our ageing but trusty Marantz SR6003. In both cases, LFE management was left to the AVR, which meant we disabled the high and low-pass filters. Volume was set to -6 dB, and still needed to be attenuated further at AVR control level.

With all levels set, I was ready for some movie action. *Inception* remains one of my go-to movies, not only because

the action sequences are both compelling and creative, but because I never tire of the storyline.

But I've never experienced *Inception* like this! The bass energy was as much tactile as audible, with a level of authority and sheer power that could be felt through the couch, and through my bones.

But here's the thing: the bass was visceral, intense and punchy, but it was always perfectly, succinctly controlled. You could feel it move the air in the listening studio, but it never got in the way of the sonics further up the frequency ladder. Dialogue remained crisp and clear, effects steering still had the action rushing around the room with directional accuracy, and fine details were still rendered with lucid precision.

In other words, the SVS simply extended the movie experience from engaging to utterly compelling. It made the difference between merely watching a movie, and becoming part of the action. I found myself flinching at the sound of gunshots, and wanting to duck for cover when things started exploding around me.

And that's what I've now come to realise about subwoofers. They have to be massively powerful to move the kind of air that's required if effects are

going to be believable. But they also need the finesse, the adjustability and the authority to move that air effectively, and in a way that allows seamless integration with the rest of the movie soundtrack.

Frankly, it's going to be difficult to do without the SVS 13B Ultra in our listening room. The movie experience will lose its lustre, and we'll be left yearning for that extra dimension, that thrill factor, that the big SVS introduced.

We could always plead that it's just too heavy to extract from our listening room again ...

Deon Schoeman

VITAL STATS

Enclosure type.....	Sealed
Drive units.....	343 mm long-throw woofer, forward-firing
Inputs.....	Stereo XLR, stereo RCA
Outputs.....	Stereo XLR, stereo RCA
Amplifier rating.....	1 kW RMS peak
Frequency response	20 - 460 Hz (±3 dB)
Controls	Level, phase, low pass, high pass, room compensation, parametric EQ
Dimensions (HxWxD)	
.....	442 x 442 x 470 mm
Weight	41,7 kg

Verdict

Welcome to the beast! Be prepared to feel bass with a visceral intensity that makes an Imax experience feel mild. But there's more than just brute bottom end, here - superb system integration and excellent controllability make for a compelling subwoofer experience.

Price R42 990

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OUR RATING: 88/100

