TITAN • CC-170
ADP-170 • PDR-10

Paradigm®

"... this system should be VERY HIGH on the short-list to be auditioned."

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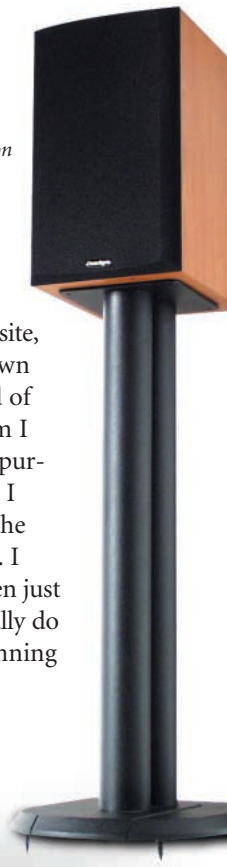
SnR HOME THEATRE

"... a very competent system ... it gets my recommendation."

by Nigel R. Pond



The New Titan
(Improved over version reviewed for even better sound.)

INTRODUCTION:

Paradigm Electronics Inc. has product offerings to fit most budgets. They cover the whole spectrum of mini-monitors, centre speakers, floorstanding towers, surrounds, subwoofers and in-wall models. They also produce three control units (basically external crossovers) to ease system integration in more complex set-ups. In this review I will be looking at a complete 5.1 system from the medium budget end of their range. The main front channel speakers are a pair of Titans; the centre is the CC-170, the surrounds, a pair of ADP-170's and the sub is a PDR-10. Most of the major speaker manufacturers have offerings in the same price range as this system, so competition is hot.

INSTALLATION:

I must admit that it was with some trepidation that I took my Von Schweikert speakers out of my system and installed the Paradigms. First, because this was the first speaker ensemble I had ever had under review for this site, and second because I had grown very accustomed to the sound of my own speakers in the system I intended to use for evaluation purposes and was concerned that I would be constantly judging the review samples against them. I decided to set them up and then just listen to my system as I normally do for a week or two before beginning the critical listening.

CONSTRUCTION:

All the speakers in this system appear to be well constructed. The Titan main front pair and the PDR-10 subwoofer are finished in a natural cherry effect vinyl, the other speakers in black. I must admit that the wood effect vinyl, while attractively done, does not really appeal to my tastes, I much prefer the black finish. The main pair also rang rather hollow on the knuckle-rap

test and could probably do with a little more internal bracing and resonance deadening. The CC-170 centre speaker is in the usual mid-tweeter-mid configuration. The ADP-170 surrounds are a little unusual in design. As you will see from the picture they have no front firing drivers but have their drivers mounted on their side baffles in what appears to be a dipole configuration.

> *"For anyone just in the market for a centre channel speaker, the CC-170 should be close, if not at the top of the list."*

Mark Aling, Paradigm's Marketing Manager has explained to me their somewhat unusual design—they operate in bipole mode at frequencies up to 200 Hz and in dipole mode above that (for an explanation of the differences see "Mono/Di/Bi - Polar Disorder or Order, You Decide!" on the SMR Home Theatre website).

The PDR-10 sub is a bass-reflex design, with, no surprise here, a 10-inch driver and 100-watt amplifier. The cloth grilles of the centre and surrounds are removable, those of the Titans and the sub are not (at least they are not designed to be, a chisel may rectify that!).

SET-UP:

Setting these speakers up was very straightforward. Paradigm kindly supplied a pair of speaker stands for the main speakers, which I placed slightly closer to my TV than my own speakers, because of their smaller size. The Titans can also be wall-mounted with the supplied fixtures. The centre fitted easily on the top of my television, angled down slightly to point at my listening position. The surrounds replaced my own on stands at the side of my listening position (they can also be wall-mounted). With dipole/bipole speakers correct placement is essential for proper operation—the "null" zone between each set of side-firing drivers should point directly at the listening position. My own surround speakers are capable of dipole operation and are set up in this way, so it was easy to swap them out and the Paradigm surrounds in. It took me a little while to find the optimal position for the sub, but, with a little trial and error, I found that it produced its tightest, least boomy, most effective, bass in the corner about 18" from the side and front walls of my listening area, which is a little closer to the corner than my own sub. Five-way binding posts provided easy hook-up for all the satellite speakers to my Sunfire Cinema Grand power amp, with the sub connected to the dedicated sub output of my Lexicon DC-1. In the DC-1's speaker configuration menu, I set up the fronts, centre and surrounds as SMALL with 80 Hz crossovers, with subwoofer set to ON and the sub out crossover also at 80 Hz. A few minutes with the test tones from the DC-1 and a Radio Shack SPL meter and I had the levels dialled in correctly. The output level of the surrounds in dB looks like it is too high compared to the other speakers, but that is a factor of their design and mode of operation.

To make it a fair test of this system on its own, without my other tweaks, I turned off the power amp that drives the Clark Synthesis tactile transducer in my couch, and de-activated the rear speakers that I normally use in my 7.1 system with the DC-1. Then I just used my system normally for a couple of weeks, allowing the speakers time to break in if they needed it, before critical listening.

The New CC-170
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> *"[The CC-170] reproduced the dialogue … effortlessly, without a hint of sibilance on the female voices and with no sign of any chestiness or over-pronounced bottom end on any of the male voices. … It also blended very nicely with the left and right speakers …"*

PERFORMANCE:

The arrival of the Paradigm system coincided with the release on DVD of one of my favourite films from the past couple of years, *The Truman Show*, which is not only an excellent video test disc, but has plenty to put a speaker system through its paces—it has a lot of dialogue, male and female, to stretch a centre speaker, a nice musical score for all three front speakers and some subtle (rather than crash, bang, wallop) ambient effects for surround speakers. When my wife and I saw this movie at the theatre we were extremely disappointed, both with the quality of the print and the poor audio that we experienced. We were therefore eagerly looking forward to watching the DVD in the comfort of our own home. We were not disappointed.

My initial impression, which remained unshaken throughout the review period, was that the centre speaker was the star performer of this group. It reproduced the dialogue from *The Truman Show* effortlessly, without a hint of sibilance on the female voices and with no sign of any chestiness or over-pronounced bottom end on any of the male voices. It also blended very nicely with the left and right speakers on the musical score, preventing the "hole" that can sometimes be apparent between left and right speakers if the centre does not match them well. The dipole/bipole configuration of the

surrounds dealt very nicely with the ambient effects to which their design is well suited. There is not much to test a subwoofer in *The Truman Show* except perhaps the storm scene at the end and the PDR-10 was more than a match for it.

My initial impressions of this ensemble were confirmed with material that was a little more testing, such as *Ronin*, *Tomorrow Never Dies*, *Armageddon*, and the DTS® DVD version of *Daylight*. The centre channel continued to impress and was not thrown by any dialogue or other centre effects that I threw at it and it provided an effective centre anchor for the front soundfield. The left and right speakers blended well with the centre in front pans and musical scores. I am used to the diffuse surround effects produced by dipole surround speakers so the effects produced by the ADP-170s were not unfamiliar to me. Those used to direct radiating surround speakers might need some time to adjust to the effect. I found these surround speakers to be effective performers on the whole range of movie soundtracks I tested them on. I did miss the luxury of switching to direct mode (see below), but in this price range that would be expecting too much.

A few words about the choice between dipole and direct radiating surround speakers are in order here. Some purists argue that because of the full range, discrete nature of the surround channels in Dolby® Digital 5.1 or DTS® soundtracks, the surround speakers should be full range and direct radiating. My own surround speakers are switchable between direct and dipole modes so I have had the opportunity to experience surround channels reproduced both ways. In my view each has its pros and cons and at the end of the day the issue all boils down to a matter of taste—some prefer the more obvious effect of direct surrounds, others the more subtle dipole effect. For me it depends on the mood I am in and the nature of source material. I would advise that anyone considering the purchase of a speaker system incorporating dipole surrounds should audition them carefully with a wide range of source material to ensure that the effect is to their taste.

"The left and right speakers blended well with the centre in front pans and musical scores. … vocals were nicely reproduced …"

I was in two minds about the subwoofer. My listening area is a fairly large space to fill, being about one-third of an unfinished basement. Sometimes I think my own subwoofer has a problem providing adequate bass and the PDR-10 showed some of the same symptoms, basically a lack of oomph and definition on the lowest or fast moving bass. For most movie material this was not a great problem and in a smaller listening space I am sure that this subwoofer would be up to the task. An upgrade to the larger PDR-12 or a sub from the PS series may be required for a larger listening space—or of course (purists look away now) one could help out the sub with a tactile transducer!

I could not pass up the opportunity to test this system on some music only material. Regular readers of the SMR Forums and my other reviews will be aware of my eclectic and catholic taste in music—from Jimi Hendrix to medieval choral music, from modern composer, John Tavener to his almost namesake, Renaissance composer John Taverner, from Blondie to John Blow, from … well, you get the idea. I have a CD-RW of some of my favourite test pieces and I listened to it in my DC-1's MUSIC SURROUND mode and bypassing the DC-1 completely, in full SURROUND the results were similar to movie music scores in the movie modes—vocals were nicely reproduced and instruments reasonably well defined. The sub had some difficulty with the very deep pedal bass on my CD of organ music played by Leo van Doeselaar on the 1733 Hinsz organ in Leens, but I suspect that much more expensive subs would have difficulty with this material—sometimes there really is no substitute for a long, fat organ pipe for shifting the large volume of air required to create kick-in-the-gut bass! The design of the surrounds lends itself well to listening to music in this mode—I find direct radiating speakers too obvious for the ambience that the Lexicon algorithms generate, the less obvious reproduction of these by the ADP-170s worked very nicely.

"I found these surround speakers to be effective performers on the whole range of movie soundtracks I tested them on."

In straight, full range, 2-channel mode some limitations of the Titans became a little more apparent. While they coped more than adequately with unaccompanied female voices from some of my Tallis Scholars' CDs, the bass voices lacked some definition, but this is to be expected as the mid/bass driver only measures 6-1/2 inches. Most drivers of this size would have trouble with these bass voices, particularly with the added resonance of some of the venues in which they were recorded. I was in fact a little surprised that the Titans reproduced my test material as well as they did. In the scheme of things I would not rate any of the limitations of this system on music only material as a particular problem. My guess is that most potential buyers of this system will be evaluating it mainly for use in a home theatre system where such minor shortcomings will not be an issue.

The New ADP-170
(Improved over version reviewed for even better sound.)

"With a system of this quality in this price range, I look forward to the opportunity of reviewing in the future some of Paradigm's higher-end offerings!"

CONCLUSIONS:

Overall, I was favourably impressed by this system and it gets my recommendation. It is certainly a very competent system in its price range, with the centre speaker an exceptional performer. I would suggest that for a potential purchaser looking into a receiver-based system in the medium budget price range for a small- to medium-sized listening room, this system should be very high on the short-list to be auditioned. For anyone just in the market for a centre channel speaker, the CC-170 should be close to, if not at the top of, the list. The PDR-10 should also be a candidate for anyone with a higher level system looking to supplement the bass on their surround channels with a second (or second and third) subwoofer. Used in conjunction with one of Paradigm's X-20 (speaker level, high-pass) control units this would be a very flexible combination for this purpose (I have been considering it for my system). With a system of this quality in this price range, I look forward to the opportunity of reviewing in the future some of Paradigm's higher-end offerings!

The New PDR-10
(Improved over version reviewed for even better sound.)