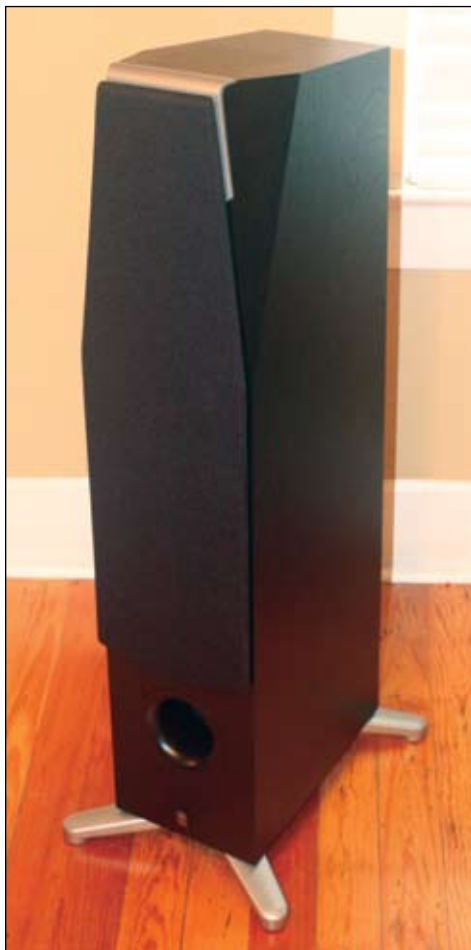


review
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Yamaha Soavo-I Loudspeakers Review

Review by Clint DeBoer of Audioholics.com



Introduction

Yamaha isn't necessarily known for their amazing home theater speakers. This is a shame, since they have such a good reputation with making fine instruments and some of the most popular near-field speakers ever to hit the recording industry. Just try to find a studio without some flavor of Yamaha NS-10s - everyone uses them as the gold reference standard for midrange evaluation. When I unpacked the Soavo-I speakers into my living room - I honestly had no idea what to expect, so I began at the beginning: with a clean slate, an open mind, and lots of good music.

Build Quality & Setup

Unpack the Soavo-I speakers and you'll instantly realize that Yamaha didn't skimp on the aesthetics or the build quality. The finish on these speakers was flawless, with tight corners and manicured lines. The front face has a beautiful bevel that sets apart the tweeter and gives the speaker an imposing look. I also loved the cast outriggers - which came pre-attached to each speaker and gave them an unshakable stance. The biampable binding posts are conveniently located on the back of the speaker at the bottom and are of the high-quality gold-plated variety. Each speaker weighs in at an impressive 59.5 lbs. I instantly wanted to disassemble these speakers - I almost couldn't help myself. As it turned out, a lot of this weight is due to

Executive Overview

Considering Yamaha has such a good reputation with making fine instruments and some of the most reliable and accurate monitor speakers ever to hit the recording industry, it's astounding that they aren't equally appreciated for their home audio speakers. This past year Yamaha aimed to change that with the introduction of their new Soavo series loudspeakers. We were fortunate enough to get our hands on a pair of Soavo-I towers - their flagship product and a magnificent-looking specimen to be sure. We got a sneak peek at these speakers during the 2007 CEDIA Expo, but now we actually get a chance to put them through their paces in one of our reference listening rooms.



the almost ridiculously thick front baffle and the large magnets present on the twin bass drivers. Let's back up a bit, however and take a look at the components piece by piece.

The tweeters are mounted to an 1/8-inch thick metal plate that is both as decorative as it is damped. The 1-inch aluminum dome tweeter is secured against this cast metal frame through the use of four machined screws. The cast frame itself is damped and is secured to the 1-inch thick front baffle of the Soavo-I via four coarse thread screws. I couldn't believe the heft of this tweeter assembly when I held it in my hand. If

you look at the pic, you'll quickly see the overbuilt front baffle thickness which almost certainly allows no resonance from the drivers. Having removed all the drivers, I can tell you that it continues all the way down the speaker in the same thickness.



The 5-inch poly cone midrange driver showed off an indestructible-looking cast basket – there is no allowance for the use of stamped aluminum in this system. While I would have expected to see a somewhat larger magnet structure on this driver, it is at least shielded so people with legacy CRT-based systems can place these speakers closer to the screen before they experience any negative effects. Given that most people buying speakers in this price range are likely to have flat panel displays, this is one area I would have love to see some cost-savings on the part of Yamaha. This could either have lowered the price of entry, or allowed for a more capable midrange driver.

In my next adventure in disassembly, I pulled out the two bass drivers. These were monstrous things, which explained a lot of the capable low-end I heard later. The magnets on these drivers almost dwarf the cones, though half of the mass is simply video shielding. Hold them in your hands and you'll realize you're holding a serious driver, not the wimpy drivers and stamped baskets found in lower cost products. The Soavo-I speakers have ample depth, which is crucial for ensuring that these drivers have enough room to be installed correctly and provide enough box volume for the necessary frequency response.



I was able to sneak a peek at the crossover network which is mounted to the back of the cabinet towards the bottom. Yamaha chose to go with electrolytic caps - not the best choice in our opinion, but a budget consideration to be sure and one shared by many speaker manufacturers (both online and traditional). The issue is that typically these types of capacitors don't exhibit linear frequency response at high frequencies due to variations in impedance and a potential for higher distortion. We'd almost wish they'd upgrade the caps and dump the video shielding in future models. By placing the crossover near the bottom of the speakers and positioning them at the rear of the cabinet, Yamaha has kept the inductors away from the drivers. Some companies don't provide enough separation and thus negatively affect performance due to the interference of these systems.

About the only thing you'll need to concern yourself with during setup is removing the binding posts to get access to the plastic caps which cover the banana jack holes. If you're using banana plug terminations on your cables then this will affect you. These plastic covers are put on because the spacing of the banana jacks actually matches the Schuko-style power plugs in some European countries. As a

Soavo-I Loudspeakers Review Summary

Manufacturer: **Yamaha Electronics**

Overall Rating: **4/5 Stars**

Value Rating: **3/5 Stars**

MSRP: **\$1799.99/ea**

<http://www.yamaha.com/yec/>

Pros

- Above par build quality
- Beautiful finish
- Plays low and smooth
- Magnetic grills
- Outriggers standard
- Biampable

Cons

- Midrange could feature more detail
- Uses electrolytic caps
- Moderately narrow sweet spot



Specifications

Soavo-I Loudspeakers

Enclosure Type:	3-Way bass-reflex floor-standing
Veneer Options:	Black, Dark Brown, Brown Birch
Speaker Impedance:	6-ohms
Video Shielded:	Yes
Woofer Size:	Dual 6-1/2" (16cm)
Woofer Type:	Advanced PMD Cone
Mid Size:	5" (13cm)
Mid Type:	Advanced PMD Cone
Tweeter Size:	1" (3cm)
Tweeter Type:	Aluminum Dome Biampable
Frequency Response:	35 Hz - 50 kHz
Power Handling:	200W
Sensitivity (1W/1m):	89 dB/2.83 V/1 m
Dimensions (HxWxD):	41-3/8" x 13-3/4" x 19-3/16"
Weight:	59.5 lbs





result, they don't want people using that connection type lest they accidentally plug a banana speaker cable into the wall outlet (certainly there is a Darwin Award for someone who's done this, no?).

The speaker grills for the Soavo-1 speakers are magnetically attached. This makes them very easy to remove and ensures that you're not going to break off any little plastic protrusions - the likes of which can be found (most likely broken) on most loudspeakers these days. I never felt the grills interfered with the sound reproduction, though I did all my eventual listening tests with them off just to be sure. I actually preferred the grills on, simply because they offer some level of protection against dust build-up and they deter little inquisitive hands from pushing on things they shouldn't. The grill covers removed easily and seemed to "lock" in place once positioned correctly. It never felt as though they would damage the finish at any time, especially since the fastening point were the same screws that anchored the drivers into the cabinet.

Listening Evaluation

I pulled a few of my favorite reference material for this listening session. Overall the comments I would make include the fact that these speakers play very low and smooth. For music purposes, there is no reason you would need to add a subwoofer to get the most enjoyment out of your system. Additionally, I found that the Soavo-1s tended to sound better toed-in a bit more than most speakers I've listened to. The sweet spot wasn't excessively wide (about two seats held together well) when the speakers were toed in, but it wasn't like listening to as pair of electrostats either. If anything, this is where I felt the speakers could benefit from additional tweaking - the drivers require extra care in placement if you want them to sound just right. Beyond that I quickly realized that these speakers were extremely musical and sounded good with nearly all types of music, provided the dynamic range was intact. Compressed MP3s

can make even good speakers sound bad, so if you're doing loudspeaker evaluations, be sure to know what you're putting into the system.

CD: Yello *The Eye*

The closer you are to these speakers the more you will want to toe them in for best imaging. They image incredibly well - it's almost uncanny. You'll



know you have it right when the speakers disappear, melting into your listening room. If you're sitting less than 9-10 feet away, go ahead and point these puppies almost straight at you.

Though track 14 is titled "Planet Dada (Flamboyant)" I think the "click and pop" track describes it nicely. There is nothing analogue about this track and it lends itself to an incredible opportunity to hear some really wild and dynamic imaging. I now use this as one of the track to dial in any speakers I am reviewing.

Near the end of this track a harsh digital phone ring sound pops out that actually made me jump and turn my head to look back into the other room! Now two things need to be said here. One, I knew that I was listening to a bunch of electronica music so I should have been prepared, and two I don't have a wireless phone that sounds anything remotely like this. And I still jumped and looked and had to actually think about it for a few seconds - it was that well imaged.

The last minute of this track makes a good set of speakers, and I'm now including the Soavo-1s in that designation, image in full 3D space. Sounds pop and sweep behind you as if you were listening to a full 5-speaker surround system. Take into account the ability of these speakers to play down incredibly low and I could upgrade that to 5.1.

In track 5 "Junior B" harsh female vocals dominate, but they come across as though you are listening live, with a hot, breathy vocalist standing right in the room with you. There is a lot of powerful but smooth

"The finish on these speakers is flawless, with tight corners and manicured lines..."

Clint DeBoer

bass in this track, including some nice sweeps that never once caused the Soavo-1 speakers to chuff or break a sweat. When they ran out of frequency below 35Hz, they simply bowed out gracefully. Given what I heard I'd have a hard time wanting to add a subwoofer for music reproduction. Cranking the system up on this track there was plenty of tactile energy and it didn't sound artificial. If anything, adding a sub or two might simply help compensate for deficiencies in your room acoustics.

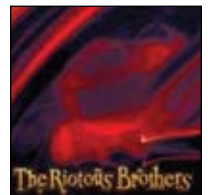
CD: Steely Dan *A Decade of Steely Dan*

Track 6: "Hey Nineteen" has long been a reference track of mine to hear how well a system recreates the feel of a wide studio recording. When the choral backing vocals came in, I found that the soundstage extended well into the room, making for a very pleasing and realistic sound. The snap on the kick drum was firm and you could almost feel the guitar being played - so clear was the string noise. Vocals were as clear as could be expected given the recessed nature of this mix and overall positioning of images within the soundstage was accurate and wide. I did note that the midrange sounded a tad thin during some of the more solo vocal lines, though I am a midrange snob and it's tough to make me happy.

Despite my comment about midrange, I noted that the tenor saxophone in "FM" was stunningly realistic and came though as if Pete Cristlieb were hanging out about 10 feet in front of me. I like having musicians play in my living room, so a good set of speakers is imperative for this experience. I felt that the Soavo-1's had a nice punchy midrange that didn't refrain from pushing out the parts of the music often lost by speakers that don't have enough cone area dedicated to this task. It certainly seemed as if the Soavo-1's dedicated 4-1/2" midrange was excelling at its given duties.

CD The Riotous Brothers *The Riotous Brothers*

This band was mastered by a friend of mine in Orlando Florida who was one of the Engineers on the Eagles' Hotel California album. While a bit hot,



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there are some awesome guitar and vocal tracks within this album that really show the detail in any speaker system. Track 1 “Deja Voodoo” features an accentuated guitar and some nice Hammond B3 organ as well as clear stage-mixed drums that sound authentic and live. The entire mix feels like the Brothers are quite literally playing on a stage in front of you. There are no excessively wide pans and the drums don’t jump across the soundstage as if they were 30 feet wide.

The guitar intro in track 2 “Real Mother for Ya” is one of the cleanest electrics you’ll ever hear. I love the texture of the snare in this track and it really came through clean, telltale ring and all. The male vocal had an edge to it that didn’t break up or have any nasally sound. The rhythm guitar panned left had some very nice staccato picking sounds and you felt as if you could reach out and grab the medium plastic pick as if it were right there for the taking.

The bass open of “Strange Face of Love” was smooth and clean, while the electric guitar and accompanying vocal both had this gritty sound that again had that absolutely ‘live’ sound you hear when checking out a band at a small, intimate pub. Being from England, this is probably the way you would most commonly experience The Riotous Brothers, so that was a good call on the part of the mix engineers. I don’t recall hearing such a live album in a long time that wasn’t compressed flat. The Soavo-I’s really allowed this CD to emulate a late evening music performance that had me closing my eyes and feeling as if I had left my living room. What I loved best was getting the sound of a night club performance without all the smoke.

About Yamaha

Yamaha Electronics Corporation (YEC), USA, based in Buena Park, California, is a wholly owned subsidiary of Yamaha. YEC offers Home Theater components and systems, featuring A/V Receivers, Amplifiers, DVD/CD, Speakers, Mini-Systems, Video Projection, as well as A/V & IT Convergence Products.

Conclusion

Yamaha has made some really nice speakers in the Soavo series. These towers are some of the nicest looking speakers I’ve seen and the build quality of the Soavo-I’s is enough to make me wonder if they aren’t slightly overbuilt (meaning they could probably cost a little less without sacrificing performance). They exhibit a very clean soundstage, though you’ll have to play a bit with the toe-in for best results. I found the low frequency extension of these speakers to be accurate and not boomy - important with a full-range system. There wasn’t anything I threw at it that caused the

bottom end to waver or the ports to chuff - it simply plays back everything it can and does it reliably. I think that listeners with an ear for good sound and an eye for good aesthetics could do a lot worse than the Soavo-I’s. Yamaha has clearly put a lot of their musical instrument-making skills into these towers and it shows.

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Score Card

The scoring below is based on each piece of equipment doing the duty it is designed for. The numbers are weighed heavily with respect to the individual cost of each unit, thus giving a rating roughly equal to: **Performance x Price Factor/Value = Rating**

Audioholics.com Note: The ratings indicated below are based on subjective listening and objective testing of the product in question. The rating scale is based on performance/value ratio. If you notice better performing products in future reviews that have lower numbers in certain areas, be aware that the value factor is most likely the culprit. Other Audioholics reviewers may rate products solely based on performance, and each reviewer has his/her own system for ratings.

Audioholics Ratings Scale:

- ⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️ Outstanding (reserved for features or areas that exceed market norms)
- ⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️ Above Average
- ⬆️⬆️⬆️ Average
- ⬆️⬆️ Below average
- ⬆️ Very poor

METRIC	RATING
Build Quality	⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️
Appearance	⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️
Treble Extension	⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️
Treble Smoothness	⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️
Midrange Accuracy	⬆️⬆️⬆️
Bass Extension	⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️
Bass Accuracy	⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️
Imaging StarStar	⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️
Soundstage	⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️
Dynamic Range	⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️
Fit and Finish	⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️
Performance	⬆️⬆️⬆️⬆️
Value	⬆️⬆️⬆️

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