

HomeTechTell Review: Paradigm Cinema 100 & 200 Speakers and Cinema Sub

by [Dennis Burger](#) Sep 5, 2011



I'm not a spooky minded thinker. Which is a good thing, because a more superstitious scribe would probably have been prone to viewing my first few hours with Paradigm's new Cinema 100 and Cinema 200 speakers as an ominous omen, indeed. And hey, after stabbing myself while attempting to trim 14-gauge wire into the 200's tight binding posts, followed by dropping one of the speakers on my foot and breaking a toe, I'm sure no one could blame me for holding a bit of a grudge. [Agency attribution](#) is a bitch.

But I have to think that even the most woo-addled of souls (and I almost feel the need to coin a new word here—*credulite*, perhaps?) would be quick to forgive this new system its imagined transgressions after a mere few moments of listening.

I'm not only rambling, though; I'm getting ahead of myself.

Paradigm's [Cinema 200](#) and [Cinema 100](#) (along with its new [Cinema Sub](#), which we'll also look at here, and the [Cinema 400](#), which we won't) represent a renaissance of the company's popular Cinema line. The 200 is an on-wall LCR, which also comes with a kick-stand for table placement when implemented horizontally as a center channel, but no such non-mounted options for vertical placement as a main left/right channel. The 100 is the littler

sister in the line: a petite and perky model that serves double duty as a bookshelf or on-wall, and is equally adept as a surround channel, or as any main speaker in a [smaller surround sound setup](#).

At first glance, the most obvious thing about the new speakers is their aesthetic—a sleek, curvilinear look that positively screams, “We’re classy, and you really want to take our grills off, big fella.”



Or maybe that’s just in my head.

Less obvious is the fact that a lot of drive and crossover technology from Paradigm’s much pricier Reference series has been borrowed for the new Cinemas, leading to a trickle-down performance effect that doesn’t ruin the economy of the Cinema line. And that’s kinda magical, when you think about it.

Oddly enough, although Paradigm is known for its [unconventionally sexy subwoofer](#) shapes, the Cinema Sub is a pretty straightforward cube. A cute cube, mind you, with curvy corners and a cloth grill that extends around the exterior of the sub that ameliorates much of the cubeiness. But let’s face it: love or hate the look of the Sub (I kinda love it, myself), you’re probably just going to stick it in a corner, anyway. It’s the 200s (and 100s) you’ll be looking at the most once you get them installed and there’s no denying that they’re a hoot to gaze upon—in much the same way an old [Alfa Romeo 33 Stradale](#) looks like it’s doing 160 sitting in the driveway.

Getting the 200s on the wall, though, is a little tricky without an extra set of hands (or at least eyes), though, so sucker a friend or significant other into assisting, if you can. The mount is simple enough: stick a couple of screws in the wall (those are included; the mollies aren’t), thread the speaker wire through the center hole, hang the speaker, Bob’s your uncle. It sounds straightforward enough on paper, but the fit is tight and the tolerances are tiny, especially if you’re not running the speaker cable inside the wall. So prepare to curse a little.

Speaking of speaker cable, as I mentioned above, the binding posts for the Cinema 200 are recessed to accommodate the tight fit, and there’s simply no room for banana plugs, so I’d recommend 16-gauge speaker wire. If

Jesus were alive today, I'm convinced his parable about getting into heaven would revolve around 14-gauge wire and these binding posts instead of camels and needles. But Jesus would still love these speakers.

In terms of the sacrifices we make for the sake of beauty, the mounting fussiness is definitely not in the same league as whalebone girdles, but it's definitely the same sport. With the added benefit of actually being worth it, though. The Cinema 200 simply looks smashing on the wall. And keep in mind: you're only going to do this once.



The Cinema 100, on the other hand, looks delectable without all the fuss. If you're using it as a bookshelf, it's simply a matter of screwing the included stand into place. If you're going the wall mount route, a simple metal plate anchors to the wall (screws not included), and a proprietary bracket, which slips over the plate like a glove, bolts to the back of the speaker itself.

The beauty of it is, the Cinema 100 swivels laterally on its bracket, so if you have to mount the surrounds a little further back than you'd like, you can easily aim them forward before locking the bracket down. And if you have to mount them higher than you'd prefer (as is the case in my secondary room), simply install the little plate sideways and aim the speakers downward.

Because of the startlingly wide dispersion of the 200s and 100s, even less-than-optimal speaker placement results in an incredibly cohesive, unified soundstage. That dispersion isn't the thing that really stands out about their sound, though.

I always fret about new speakers before I actually unbox them. Barring the occasional funky folded tweeter or other technologically interesting talking point, my brain always wanders into what-the-heck-could-I-possibly-have-to-say-about-another-traditional-cone-and-tweeter-speaker territory. And for all the talk about S-PAL thisses and WaveGuide thats, the new Cinema speakers are, at their heart, an elegant refinement of pretty standard speaker technology.

I didn't even make it all the way through the first chapter of *Hanna* on Blu-ray before my ears locked onto what really sets these speakers apart. Sure, they're detailed. Incredibly so. Yes, they're wonderfully tonally balance. I've heard other speakers in this price range for which you could say exactly the same thing, though. What really sets this system apart is its downright thrilling capacity for dynamic range. *Hanna* is a film whose soundtrack runs the gamut from meekness to outright calamity. Some scenes build their atmosphere wholly out of blowing wind and hushed whispers, while others slam you back into your seat with brutal blows, kablamming guns, and a pulse-pounding Chemical Brothers score. It's the sort of movie that'll have your mum clamoring for the volume button every couple of minutes.

Not with the Cinema 200, though. Even in the quietest of moments, the speaker never fails to positively teleport the subtlest of sounds into the room, with no loss of frequency dynamics or detail. Yet push them into positively scary territory moments later, and they never exhibit the sort of distortion and loss of clarity that has your brain screaming, “Oh em gee, turn it down! Turn it down!”

The Cinema 200 also boasts so much mass for its size—a fact to which my poor crippled hind paw can attest—that even if you have to install the foot and rest the center channel upon a stand instead of the wall (something I did as much out of necessity as curiosity; I use [OmniMount's CMK system](#) to hide the wires running up the wall, so there wasn't room to mount the Cinema 200 beneath my display), the speaker never suffers from the yucky muddiness that can result from cabinet resonance.

You'd almost expect the Cinema 100 to struggle to keep up with its bigger sibling, but even at its surroundiest—and *Hannais* as surroundy as any film I recall in recent history—the 100 never fails to deliver the same unrelenting dynamic range and clarity, no matter the volume.

I almost wish I had installed the system in a larger room, just to see how well it handled an even harder push. But in my ~1560 cubic-foot secondary system, I wussed out long before the Cinema 100s and 200s did.

The Cinema Subwoofer, on the other hand, seems a perfect fit for said small-to-medium-sized room. And again, one feels like there's not much to say about yet another 8-inch, 300-watt sub. After spending a few days with this one, though, I feel like shouting about it. Even in my smallish secondary room, I always feel like something is lacking when only using one sub of this size, more from an equal-coverage point of view than one of volume. There's a definite sort of oh-the-sub-is-over-there feeling I always tend to forgive most subs of this size for. Sure, there are other 8-inch subs in this price range that deliver more oomph than you'd expect, and even sound nicely musical. But they almost always tend to draw attention to themselves.



My apologies to manufacturers whose subs I review in the future, but that's just not something I'm going to be able to forgive you for anymore. Paradigm has officially spoiled me. With movies, the Cinema Sub delivers the sort of weighty omnipresence that subwoofers should exhibit in theory, but rarely do at this size. And none of that comes at the expense of power. Forget wattage ratings. In terms of pure sonic output, I'll put the Cinema Sub up against competitors with many multiples of rated power handling and dare them to keep up.

And you can't attribute all of that to the Anthem Room Correction of my [MRX 700](#) receiver. It certainly helps—it helps a lot!—but I've run ARC on more than my fair share of little subs in the past six months or so, and none of them sounded this consistently good.

The Cinema Sub also blends beautifully with the rest of the system, even in 2.1 mode. With everything from Björk to the Beastie Boys, I found myself struggling to listen for the point at which Sub gave way to Cinema 200s, and failed miserably. And in stereo-and-a-half mode, the 200s really reveal themselves to be as adept at music as movies. The funky whalesong-on-helium strings that open [Thomas Dybdahl's "A Lovestory"](#) simply saunter out into the room, and the soundstage is so deep and wide that I find myself honestly wanting to remove the speakers' magnetic grills just as a reminder that there really isn't any kind of wonderfully weird and wacky driver technology at play here.

What else can I say, really? These speakers stabbed me and broke my toe, and I still adore them to itty bitty pieces. And I'm not usually into that sort of thing.

Estimated MSRP:

Cinema 100: 2-driver, 2-way—1" tweeter, 4" bass/mid driver (\$299/pair, \$449/trio)

Cinema 200 3-driver, 2-way—1" tweeter, two 4" bass/mid drivers (\$249/each)

Cinema Sub: 8" high-excursion driver, 300 watts Dynamic Peak, 100 watt RMS sustained (\$349)

Cinema 100 CT: Five Cinema 100 satellite speakers and one Cinema Sub (\$999)

System as reviewed: Cinema 200 x 3, Cinema 100 x 2, Cinema Sub (\$1395)