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Hands On: Dayton Audio AST1200 TV Stand Soundbar Review

Dayton Audio delivers something to put your TV on and listen to it. Read this TV stand soundbar review to find it it measures up to both tasks.

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Soundbar and sound bases (or pedestal speakers, as some companies call them) are practical ways to upgrade the audio performance of your TV viewing without investing in the space and wire setup negotiation of a full surround sound speaker system. The problem with most soundbars is that, if your goal is to limit the amount of A/V gear in your room, you've still got a speaker sitting out in front of everyone in the room. The Dayton Audio AST1200 TV stand/soundbar reviewed here solves that problem [by hiding the speaker away \(http://www.electronichouse.com/daily/home-audio/great-ways-hide-soundbar-soundbase/\)](http://www.electronichouse.com/daily/home-audio/great-ways-hide-soundbar-soundbase/), completely, inside a TV stand with room for a couple of components underneath.

But wait, who is Dayton Audio? It's a manufacturer of budget speakers, mostly sold online through Amazon and Parts Express. While they're generally very ~~cheap~~ inexpensive products, they also have a pretty decent reputation for sound. Even CNET's resident audiophile, Steve Guttenberg, frequently [has nice things to say \(http://www.cnet.com/news/dayton-audio-sub-1500-a-maximum-fun-subwoofer/\)](http://www.cnet.com/news/dayton-audio-sub-1500-a-maximum-fun-subwoofer/) about the company's products.

This speaker TV stand is sort of like a soundbar which a shelf and casters attached. Like a soundbar, it puts multiple drives, spread out in a three channel array, into one cabinet. Unlike a soundbar, being that it's almost 16 inches deep and the speaker shelf is five inches thick (well, hollow of course), you have a lot more room for good acoustics to play out than in a slim little whip of a soundbar.

Searching for the best home music system? Get expert guidance FREE in this special report, **[Beyond Home Stereo Systems: How to Choose the Best Sound Bar, Audio Receiver, Music Server & More](/free-reports/how-to-build-a-home-audio-system-an-expert-guide-to-choosing-your-components/)**

The AST1200 comes with quite a bit more drivers than you'd expect in this size and price. The system has six 3-inch mid-range drivers, three soft dome tweeters and a 6.5-inch, down-firing, 7-watt ported subwoofer (which projects down to the shelf below). The left and right channels each are driven by their own 20 watt amps while the center channel gets 30 watts. A black cloth grill covers the speaker section, and a small LED window displays volume, mode and EQ settings, all controlled by a little IR remote. The TV stand itself appears to be constructed of speaker MDF rather than standard furniture particle board.

The TV stand comes unassembled, but it goes together pretty easily, like an Ikea cabinet, but with better instructions.

Once the system was assembled, I positioned under my TV, wedged a Blu-ray player and cable box into the bottom shelf and plugged everything in. The rear of the system includes two digital optical ports and two sets of analog RCA ports for hookup (the system comes with an optical cable and a set of RCA cables). There's no HDMI. The most common connection method is to take the optical audio output from your TV and connect it to the TV speaker stand, that way all your sources get plugged into the TV first. You can also hook your sources up directly.



<http://cdn.electronichouse.com/wp-content/uploads/ast1200-1.jpg>

ALSO READ: [Soundbase vs Soundbar: Which Speaker Style is for You?](http://www.electronichouse.com/daily/home-audio/soundbar-or-soundbase-which-speaker-style-is-for-you/)

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My first experience with the system/s sound was just a lazy night of TV watching. I wasn't doing any serious listening or running test tones—just watching the *Big Bang Theory*. It was clear right away that the sound coming from the Dayton Audio system easily blew away the little speakers in my TV. For one thing, there was bass. The subwoofer level and main volume can be controlled separately, so you want to be mindful of overdoing it. There's a fine line between a rich deep voice and an artificially-flavored radio announcer tone.



<http://cdn.electronichouse.com/wp-content/uploads/ast1200-2.jpg>

The system includes EQ modes for TV, Movie, Music, SRS and Night. The TV mode is pretty laid-back and flat. Movie mode kicks in the bass and adds a wider soundstage. The SRS function enhances the depth and faux surround effect fairly convincingly without distorting the rest of the audio. When I ran a subwoofer crossover sweep and the THX Deep Note tone I found the subwoofer and the main speakers blended nicely, considering the price and size of the system. When playing the boat sinking scene from *Life of Pi*, with SRS on, the system created a sense of 3D depth you can't get from TV speakers. Later when watching the final installment of *The Hobbit* movie trilogy, bass proved to be a true room-shaker in the opening scene when the Dragon Smaug is destroying the village. Sure, I've heard better-sounding soundbars, but keep in mind, this system sells for \$199, and it's a speaker AND a TV stand.

There are two things that would make me like the AST1200 a lot better. The first should be pretty easy for the company to fix—**add Bluetooth**. Nearly every soundbar or soundbase on the market today includes Bluetooth so the user can play music off their smart phone or tablet. Bluetooth would expand the product's usefulness beyond just TV audio. Second, the entire table could be a little bigger. At 47 inches wide and 14.5 inches high, it looks small under a lot of TVs. As a stand, it doesn't lift a TV up to the proper viewing height, and extra width would allow even more stereo separation and probably better faux surround too.

Dayton Audio AST1200

\$399 MSRP (\$199 (<http://www.parts-express.com/dayton-audio-ats1200-home-theater-31-channel-digital-audio-tv-sound-stand-with-srs-surroun--185-3100>) average selling price)

More info at [Dayton Audio \(http://www.daytonaudio.com/index.php/ats1200-3-1-channel-digital-audio-tv-stand-lcrs.html/\)](http://www.daytonaudio.com/index.php/ats1200-3-1-channel-digital-audio-tv-stand-lcrs.html/)

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