

“... LIKE NOTHING ELSE I HAVE EXPERIENCED ...”
Brian Florton, *Secrets of Home Theater and High Fidelity*



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Subwoofers

Earthquake SuperNova MKIV-15:

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Liftoff

The hardest part of setting up the Earthquake SuperNova was carrying it inside. Even getting it out of the box was relatively painless. The secret was to let gravity do the work: I opened the box's bottom flaps, then put the opened end down. Using my time-tested lazy-man methods, I had the SuperNova up and running 10 minutes after UPS had dropped it off.



And I do mean dropped. Although its shipping box had numerous scars, including two stove-in corners and several deep gashes, the MKIV itself was unscathed. Earthquake uses a thick, custom-fitted, sprayed-in cushion of packing foam to completely protect the SuperNova from the perils of travel. Even UPS couldn't trash it.

After sliding the unboxed SuperNova the last couple of feet to its final resting place, it took only a few minutes to hook it up and set the input levels. The Meridian 568 preamp-processor's built-in low-frequency test-tone generator made this a simple job. Unlike the SuperNova Mk.II, the MKIV doesn't have an Audio/Video switch. These pernicious controls are usually nothing more than glorified midbass boosts that change a subwoofer's relatively flat frequency response into an untidy hump. If you want more subwoofer volume for big-bang movies, Earthquake recommends that you turn up the MKIV's volume control.

Thanks to its remote control, you can adjust the MKIV's volume from the comfort of your listening chair. The only limitation is that you don't knob itself, and it's difficult to see the knob from a listening position. My advice: When you have the proper subwoofer level set, leave it alone. Volume twiddling is for only the terminally nervous or pyrotechnically inclined.

Walking on the Moon

There are four principal criteria for sound quality in a subwoofer: 1) It must produce very low frequencies. 2) It must produce all the frequencies within its operating range at high levels with low harmonic distortion. 3) Group delay should be minimal or nonexistent. 4) It must stop making sound when the signal stops. The Earthquake SuperNova scored high points in all four areas.

Driven by test signals in my large home-theater room, the SuperNova produced audible bass as low as 15Hz. More remarkably, there was no apparent 30Hz doubling. No other subwoofer I've used, including the earlier SuperNova MKII, could even begin to produce 15Hz tones cleanly. Of course, one doesn't hear 15Hz as much as feel it. My room sure felt it—hanging pictures and doors rattled and shook. The Earthquake MKIV-15 did 15Hz with panache and style. Only the passive woofer's extreme excursion hinted at how hard it had to work to put out this subterranean tone. From my listening seat, it just felt like magic.

At more common frequencies, between 20 and 40Hz, the SuperNova was as clean as a freshly washed white tablecloth, and as accurate as a newly graduated aerospace engineer. Whatever the material—full-scale orchestral recordings, small-ensemble jazz, blockbuster movie soundtracks—the MKIV performed with aplomb. To take full advantage of the sub's apparent speed and control, I changed my system's crossover point from 50Hz to 60Hz. Even though my Dunlavy SC-VIs have two 15-inch drivers apiece, the overall low-bass response in my room improved when more of the low-bass duties were shifted onto the SuperNova's shoulders. Bass transients became a bit cleaner and better defined, while the midbass lost some excess bloom and congestion.

Though a reviewer's job is to pick nits, I found precious few on the MKIV. Once I dialed in the setup, the sub did its job unobtrusively, supplying the last octave from 60Hz down while drawing little attention to itself. Only when I turned the SuperNova off was I fully aware of how much it had added to my system's overall sound and balance.

The only fault I found was ergonomic. Much more useful than a 0°/180° phase switch would be a dial by which installers could select the proper phase, which is determined by a subwoofer's location. With an infinitely adjustable dial you could tune in exactly the correct phase to achieve perfect alignment with your main speakers. Perhaps we'll see one on the SuperNova Mk.V.

A Final Swing around Jupiter's Rings

While few people want to experience a natural seismic event up close and personal, having the Earthquake SuperNova MKIV-15 subwoofer in my home theater was an exciting but safe way to make the earth move. Even in my large room, a single SuperNova was able to put out enough low-bass energy for the most bombastic scenes of mayhem and cosmic destruction. More austere films, too, benefited from the MKIV's nimbleness and finesse. Even music's harmonic foundation gained solidity and presence.

If you've priced the most expensive state-of-the-art subs, you could almost buy two MKIVs and still come out ahead. But you shouldn't need more than one. There might be better subwoofers on the planet, but I haven't heard them. I heartily recommend the Earthquake SuperNova MKIV-15 for any system requiring the ultimate sonic boon.

Article Continues: [Specifications »](#)

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