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Earthquake Sound Platine Noiree Speakers

Product Reviews Speakers

January 1, 2004 By Brent Butterworth

Do you dream about speakers? Do you lie awake at night, consumed with desire for a new subwoofer? Do you stare out your office window, unable to concentrate because you cannot bear to be separated from your B&Ws? I doubt it. Only one thing inspires this intensity of lust: the automobile.



Love of the car burns strong in the souls of North Americans. We should not be surprised, then, to discover a speaker line that looks as if it were conceived by Corvette creator Harley Earl. Every model in Earthquake Sound's Platine Noiree line carries the rakish angles that made cars of the 1950s and '60s so appealing. And every one is bathed in two-tone metallic lacquer sure to seduce car collectors. Platine noir is French for "black platinum," but Earthquake's practice of tacking one or two e's and an accent aigu onto noir at random detracts from the name's intended continental allure. *(Click image to enlarge)*

The automotive look seems appropriate for Earthquake, a company known for robust car audio woofers. In fact, certain Platine Noiree speakers use technology originally developed for car audio—the Symmetrically Loaded Passive Radiator, which Earthquake shortens to SLAPS. A passive radiator is a speaker minus the magnet and coil that make the speaker cone move. The air pushed into the speaker cabinet by the other speaker drivers vibrates the passive radiator, reinforcing the speakers' sound. SLAPS refines the ordinary passive radiator design so that the front and back are identical, which Earthquake says produces less distortion and clearer sound. The Platine Noiree line comprises four models, which can be combined to create anything from a tiny bedroom stereo system to a complete home theater speaker package. The PN-4521 tower speaker and the PN-4421 center speaker include a SLAPS; the PN-1411 monitor and PN-2421 surround speaker are too tiny to accommodate one. All use the same 1-inch tweeter and 4-inch woofer in various combinations. SLAPS aside, the drivers are rather generic—the woofers feature stamped metal frames instead of the more robust cast frames found in most high-end speaker woofers.

Having seen Platine Noiree only in photos, I am unprepared for its visual impact. I examine the quality of the finish, looking for telltale imperfections that often accompany such ambitious aesthetics, but I find none. I discover, though, that removing the grilles transforms the speakers' looks from sublime to sub-par, who wants to face a battalion of 18 woofers and tweeters every time you watch a movie? I decide to listen with the grilles intact and suffer the slight sonic degradation that usually occurs when tweeters are hidden behind fabric. *(Click image to enlarge)*



But with Platine Noiree, no degradation occurs: Unlike most speakers, these actually sound better with the grilles on. After playing a few DVDs and CDs, I begin to realize that the Platines Noirees sound excellent. Voices, in particular, are smooth and natural, both through the tower speaker and the center. (With the grilles off, voices take on a slight nasal coloration.) I listen to all my favorite DVDs with the Platines Noirees, and the movie dialogue sounds just right.

Stereo music sounds great, too; the speakers conjure up a warm, pleasing tone that suits rock, jazz and classical music equally. But with the high-frequency-absorbing grilles on and the speakers' mellow-sounding fabric-dome tweeters, these speakers do not produce the highly detailed treble that many audio enthusiasts crave. Nor do they produce as much of the enveloping, wraparound stereo effect I hear from very high-end speakers. Overall, the sound seems wonderfully balanced and well-suited to any music or movies I play.

And SLAPS works wonders—I have never heard slim tower speakers like these produce such pure, deep bass. Even the deepest bass notes in my DVD collection come through clearly, when practically any other speaker of this size would discard the bass or self-destruct trying to reproduce it. The speakers cannot play deep bass as loudly as a good subwoofer can; they will distort when pushed to very high volumes. But in most home settings, the bass of the tower speakers will easily suffice.

I try using the PN-1411 monitors as surround speakers, placing one on each side of the room, and get a nice effect. The PN-1411's sound is quite similar to that of the tower and center speakers. The main difference, obviously, is that it cannot produce bass since it contains only a single 4-inch woofer. Nor can it play as loudly. The PN-4521 towers deserve a more robust playmate.

Many speakers with dual tweeters produce a flat sound, but in the PN-4421 and the other Platine Noiree speakers, the tweeters cover only the very highest audio frequencies, so the sound remains full and natural. *(Click image to enlarge)*



Hoping to improve the system's surround-sound stamina, I replace the PN-1411s with a pair of PN-2421 surround speakers. The PN-2421 provides more bass and reproduces loud sounds more capably; I find it a worthwhile improvement. I am initially excited to discover that Earthquake bills the PN-2421 as a dipole surround speaker, meaning it uses dual woofers and tweeters to create an enveloping, diffuse surround-sound effect. However, I learn that only the tweeters are wired for a dipole effect. As a result, only very high-frequency sounds (i.e., those above the range of the human voice) enjoy the benefit of the dipole effect.

Given the available options—and the PN-4521's stunning looks—I would use PN-4521 towers as surround speakers in lieu of the PN-1411 or the PN-2421. Earthquake should produce a more substantial surround speaker to complement the towers. The Platine Noiree line truly merits such attention.

While I doubt Platine Noiree will inspire the longing that a Porsche arouses, I expect Earthquake's speakers to find many devoted fans among both audio enthusiasts and design mavens.

DESCRIPTION

Home theater speaker system consisting of PN-4521 tower speakers, PN-4421 center speaker, PN-1411 monitor and PN-2421 surround speakers; subwoofer optional

COMPONENTS

PN-4521: Two 1-inch fabric-dome tweeters, four 4-inch aluminum-cone woofers, one SLAPS passive radiator
PN-4421: Same as above
PN-1411: One 1-inch fabric-dome tweeter, 4-inch aluminum-cone woofer
PN-2421: Two 1-inch fabric-dome tweeters, two 4-inch aluminum-cone woofers

CONNECTIONS

PN-4521 and PN-4421: Two pairs of four-way speaker cable binding posts (accept bare wire, banana plugs, spade connectors and pins)
PN-1411 and PN-2421: Five-way speaker cable binding posts

DIMENSIONS

PN-4521: 44.5 x 6 x 11 inches (hwd)
PN-4421: 6 x 28 x 11 inches (hwd)
PN-1411: 10.5 x 12.5 x 7 (hwd)
PN-2421: 10.5 x 14 x 7 (hwd)

PRICE

PN-4521, \$2,697/pair;
PN-4421, \$1,197 each;
PN-1411, \$1,497/pair;
PN-2421, \$1,647/pair

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