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Samsung HT-X810 soundbar speakers

Will this deliver that home cinema experience?

by Chris Hall published on 11 September 2008

The Samsung HT-X810 is clearly styled to match their TVs, the bottom curve matching a number of their models. We tested it with a 40in M87 model with which it partners nicely. The dimensions are not the smallest at 998mm wide (slightly more than the TV), whilst sitting 190mm high and 165mm deep, so would perhaps look out of place with any screen smaller than 40in. The unit is also bowed across the back, so when wall-mounted has that slimming effect. With wall mounting in mind, you'll find a fairly substantial bracket in the box.

The unit is a typical 2.1 arrangement, so features a separate large (240 x 410 x 322mm) subwoofer, which in this case is wireless (5.8GHz), again bringing that minimalist approach to the fore. The subwoofer is practically a featureless box, glossy black plastic with only a small LED at the base to indicate status.

Out of the box, set-up is fairly straight-forward. In terms of connections you get a single HDMI or Component video connections to hook the in-built upscaling DVD player up to your TV. There is also the standard analogue video output for those going old skool. For audio you'll find digital optical and analogue options, allowing you to bring audio back from your TV.

The optical connection is the default when not using the DVD player and we found this was the simplest route, preferable to the analogue connection, allowing all other sound sources to be routed through the soundbar with minimal fuss (TV digital tuner, PS3, Xbox 360, PVR, etc).

The subwoofer failed to connect the first time, but a simple glance into the manual corrected this with only momentary delay, a solid blue LED confirming the connection. When the subwoofer is not connected the soundbar's display will scroll



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across a message to let you know. We did find some subwoofer drop-out, rectified by re-siting the unit elsewhere in the room.

Control of the soundbar is mostly through the supplied remote control, which is the typical Samsung effort of being mostly compatible with their TV, but not entirely so. The Anynet+ connection is something of a mixed blessing, but we found that it meant our TV remote would handle most functions - play controls for the DVD player, volume and power, which after set-up, should hopefully be all you need. The downside of Anynet+ is the synchronised standby feature, so if you don't want the screen on whilst listening to a CD, it takes some fiddling to get the TV off and the soundbar on.

There are control buttons across the top front of the soundbar which give a touch of class. All are touch-sensitive icons, but only offer you basic power, play, "function" (input) and volume controls. However, with these icons you can do most things you'd want to whilst standing at it, such as skipping tracks on a CD or your MP3 player.

Yes, around to the right-hand side is a 3.5mm jack and a USB connection. The USB host will support Mass Storage v1.0 devices, so a wide range of music players, digital cameras, external HDD and even some USB card readers. Basic on-screen menus allows file and folder navigation, but the experience will differ from device to device. File formats supported include JPG, MP3, WMA, WMV and DivX.

If the connection options covered so far aren't enough, you'll also find Bluetooth on-board, meaning you can simply bypass all the wires and play from your phone or notebook, again without wires. There is also an FM radio.

The upscaling DVD player (supporting CD/CD-R/CD-RW, DVD/DVD+R/DVD+RW) provides good all-round performance for DVD playback

At a glance

What is it?

2.1 soundbar

Good

Slick design: looks great, good quality DVD playback, versatility: plenty of connection options

Bad

Can be overly bassy, slow to switch inputs and load discs, standby hum

Verdict

While we like the design and the range of functions, the overwhelming bass makes this one soundbar that just doesn't quite get the basics right

Price £350

Our score

7/10

Your score

?/10

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and differs little from other Samsung upscaling players, providing good, clean crisp images with great balanced colour. However, we did find some problems with the 1080p option, so settled for 1080i, despite having a 1080p capable TV. Can you tell the difference?

With 300 watts RMS power (75W x 2 + 150W), the system certainly delivers the volume. Sound quality we found was good, a vast improvement over the standard TV speakers. You get support for Dolby Digital, Dolby Pro Logic and DTS. Of course, it is really the subwoofer that makes the largest noticeable difference. And this is where things perhaps start running out of control: the powered subwoofer is potentially too much.

We found that overall the system was too bass heavy, turning the bass down as low as possible gave a better account for itself, but it was still strong. The Audio Upscale option, we found, put too much emphasis on the bass again, making normal television a little comical. I'm no prude when it comes to bass, but when your internal organs are shaking to the soundtrack to a kids' programme, you know something is amiss.

When it comes to movies, of course, this might be what you want, but again, we found that had to keep the bass right down. There is something of a conflict between the ground-shaking bass and the rest of the film's soundtrack and we found that delivering the "cinema experience" was perhaps to the detriment of balanced sound. We also tried out the subwoofer playing Battlefield Bad Company, and found the subwoofer did lose itself (an unfortunate RPG meets tank incident) delivering a huge boom, scaring Mrs Pocket-lint who thought the ceiling was falling in. We couldn't repeat the problem, so it remains something of an anomaly.

The maximum distance for the wireless connection is cited as around 10 metres a claim that is difficult to test without such a distance to test it across - we found that the signal became

intermittent once we moved the subwoofer into another room, with walls adversely affecting the connection. There is no wired option as a backup.

We also encountered an unfortunate case of standby hum, so with the unit turned off, it still made itself known.

In terms of replacing (or mimicking) your 5.1 system, there is a virtual surround option which does help to widen the sound to give a little more atmosphere to your film, helped out by the subwoofer, but you'll need to push up the volume to take advantage of this.

VERDICT

The Samsung HT-X810 certainly looks good with the slick touch controls and the smart slot-loading DVD player delivering impressive results. The sound is also good once you have tamed the bass, which you never really can do to a great extent.

The connection options are a real bonus, providing an offering for other media, outside of just your TV or DVD. One minor downside of these inputs is that they can be a little slow to switch, so it is a while before your sound emerges. Equally, that slot-loading DVD player, whilst it looks good, can be a little slow to change disc.

While we like the design and the range of functions, the overwhelming bass makes this one soundbar that just doesn't quite get the basics right.