

Hit the high end

Computer speakers with tons of class



We live in a world crammed to the gills with multimedia speaker systems, so it takes a lot to stand out.

You need great sound, top build quality and fine design, and there aren't that many systems on the shelves that meet all three criteria. The XS, from high-end French audio company Focal, is one of these rare beasts, and adds a reasonable price of a tad under \$1000 into the bargain.

It's a 2.1-channel system, which means it consists of two satellite speakers and a powered subwoofer. Setup is simple: the power goes into the sub, two high-class cables lead off from there into the sats, and a cable leads into your Mac.

But wait, as they say in the classics, there's more.

The right speaker has an iPod/iPhone dock set into the base, just

behind a power button and two volume buttons. Whack your iPod in there, hit Play and you're away – charging and synching included.

Even better, there's no need to have it connected to a Mac, which alone makes this one of the best standalone iPod speaker systems you'll find – while most systems are a single unit with speakers about 30cm apart, you can place the XS speakers a lot further away from each other and widen the soundfield considerably.

Looks-wise, the XS set is a winner. The design of the sats is classy, and they're finished in jet black and anodised aluminium to match the new generation of iMacs and MacBook Pros. And though it's boxy, even the jet-black sub looks good enough to have on display.

The XSs come out of China, unlike Focal's more expensive



Focal XS Multimedia Sound System

Focal, www.focal-fr.com
www.audiomarketing.com.au

Pros Great sound, looks and build quality

Cons Slightly bright treble

RRP \$999



“For the price, they have a pure, clean sound.”



offerings which are made in France, but build quality is top-class.

For the price, they have a pure, clean sound with great definition. There's also an accurate soundstage, which is tricky in speakers designed to sit near your head.

They performed well both at low-volume, short-distance listening and at across-the-room party volumes, so they're pretty versatile.

The 70W RMS sub performed really well, providing all the boom that was needed without revealing its position under a desk. You could feel the waves on your feet, but that was actually quite pleasant. The bass level can be controlled via a volume knob.

The XS's treble is a little bit bright – high notes from violins or voices like

Christina Aguilera's can sound a bit thin. But here I'm judging the speakers from an audiophile standpoint, not as \$999 computer speakers.

Focal has a background in pro audio, so it comes as no surprise that the XSs are engineered for those working in the audio and video fields.

Australian Macworld's buying advice. Definitely worth a look if you're in the market for a lovely-sounding, accurate set of multimedia speakers. The price might seem a little high, but the only ones I've preferred are the B&O BeoSound 3s – and they cost six times as much. ☞

— DAVE BULLARD