"FANTASTIC SPEAKERS THAT JUST HAPPEN TO BE IN-WALLS"

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"… among the most musical sounding in-walls I've encountered … slightly upbeat, energetic top end … natural, smooth and agile midrange … lower midrange and bass is quite composed and taut … can play quite low …"

by Andrew Robinson

The in-wall sector of the marketplace is hotter than ever, though one would argue that there is a shortage of true high-end, or at least high-end-sounding, in-walls. Most manufacturers claim that some of their in-walls produce true audiophile-grade sound, but few deliver. However, Paradigm, makers of fine affordable loudspeakers of all types, has several in-wall offerings that stretch the boundaries of the audiophile envelope. The really good news is that you don't have to go to the top of their product mountaintop to do so, as evident in the AMS-350 reviewed here.

"… a solid audiophile performer … coupling near full-range sound and non-in-wall-like air and dimension in a compact, virtually hidden speaker."

The AMS-350, in terms of price and performance, sits just about in the middle of the Paradigm in-wall family tree. The AMS-350 is a three-driver, two-way in-wall/in-ceiling speaker that uses a die-cast chassis and mounting system. The AMS-350 features a single one-inch dome tweeter mated to dual eight-inch bass/midrange drivers, giving it a reported frequency response of 55 Hz – 20 kHz. The AMS-350 has a fairly efficient design, especially for an in-wall speaker, with its 93 dB sensitivity rating and benign eight-ohm load.

The AMS-350 fits in the bays between standard 16-inch on center studs and requires a minimum of three inches of depth in the wall cavity itself. If your wall can support a three-inch deep cabinet and your house was built post-WWII, then the AMS-350 should be easy enough to install for even the most novice of DIYers. AMS-350 can be painted to match any décor; just remember to use a spray nozzle or applicator when applying paint to the grilles to avoid plugging any holes that would keep the sound from traveling to your listening position.

"… considerable air and extension … allows the AMS-350 to actually image and possess a soundstage that sounds and feels more like a traditional box speaker than an in-wall."

RECOMMENDED PARADIGM SUBWOOFERS
Four PCS-80SQ In-Wall Subwoofers with a Paradigm X-300 Amplifier.

"… a dynamic animal … can play as loud as your ears can handle with little to no power behind it, yet it can sound delicate and soothing when needed, making it ideal for both music and movies."

HIGH POINTS

- The AMS-350 is a solid audiophile performer, coupling near full-range sound and non in-wall-like air and dimension in a compact, virtually hidden speaker.

- The AMS-350's are among the most musical sounding in-walls I've encountered. They have a slightly upbeat, energetic top end that is complemented well by the natural, smooth and agile midrange. They can play quite low and the lower midrange and bass is quite composed and taut, though a sub would help in making the AMS-350 truly full-range.

- The AMS-350 has considerable air and extension that most in-walls don't, which allows the AMS-350 to actually image and possess a soundstage that sounds and feels more like a traditional box speaker than an in-wall.

- Because of its rather high efficiency, the AMS-350 is a dynamic animal that can play as loud as your ears can handle with little to no power behind it, yet it can sound delicate and soothing when needed, making it ideal for both music and movies.

"… real musicality that is equally right for music and movies … put 'em behind a perforated screen for movies and you may question the need for anything else."

LOW POINTS

- The AMS-350's are great, though they need a sub if you're going to explore the bottom octaves of a film's soundtrack or, say, a pipe organ. Paradigm offers a variety of free-standing and in-wall subwoofers that should fit the bill nicely and mate seamlessly with the AMS-350's.

- The slightly upbeat and lively nature of the AMS-350 may not go over well with all types of electronics, especially certain receivers. I've been a Paradigm owner for years and have found that neutral components or ones that favor midrange and bass, as opposed to high-frequency energy, mate best with Paradigm, giving the total package a very balanced, natural sound. As with any loudspeaker, regardless of make, model or price system, matching is key and the Paradigms are far easier to mate with a system or components than are most speakers. Just be aware of this.

"… as far as in-walls go, they are among the best you can buy without spending stupid money … highly recommended and worth checking out, not to mention worth every penny."

CONCLUSION

For the price, the Paradigm AMS-350s are fantastic speakers that just happen to be in-walls, which for me (and I'm sure others) is a huge benefit. They possess real musicality that is equally right for music and movies and come closer to the audiophile-grade sound many in-wall speakers aspire to achieve. I won't say that the AMS-350s sound more like traditional speakers than they do in-walls, for they don't, but as far as in-walls go, they are among the best you can buy without spending stupid money. Put'em behind a perforated screen for movies and you may question the need for anything else. Keep the tweeter near or at ear level and you'll have a wonderful two-channel system that just happens to use in-walls instead of monitors or floorstanding loudspeakers, which may go over well with your significant other. Highly recommended and worth checking out, not to mention worth every penny.