

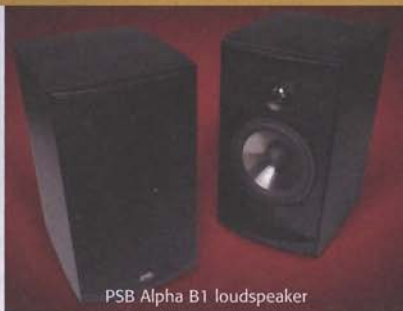
2007 **BUDGET PRODUCT OF THE YEAR****PSB Alpha B1 loudspeaker**

Deep down inside, the "Budget Product of the Year" category strikes a special chord with us all—perhaps because it reminds us of our hi-fi beginnings, perhaps because it has a way of rekindling our enthusiasm. For newcomers to the hi-fi hobby, our category of "Budget Product of the Year" is reserved for components that are absolutely, honestly to god, without a doubt, *affordable*. Meanwhile, for more experienced audiophiles, it's refreshing and exciting to rediscover how much musical pleasure can be achieved for so very little money.

Again, we had a large class of impressive candidates, with seven earning first-place votes—but it was the wonderful little PSB Alpha B1 that won our hearts. The B1 comes from a long line of overachieving loudspeakers; the original Alpha was a runner-up in our very first "Products of the Year" gala, in 1992. Back then it sold for a modest \$199/pair. *Fifteen years later*, the B1's price has risen by a mere \$80, making it actually *less* expensive in real terms than the original Alpha. Now, that's just crazy. More important, it's proof positive that true hi-fi sound can be brought into nearly any home.

Though the Alpha B1 makes compromises in loudness capability and low-frequency extension, its glorious midrange and solid stereo imaging bring a wide range of musical performances—even large-scale orchestral works—into rich, vibrant focus. JA was very pleased, noting "superb measured performance" and marveling at the PSB's ability to stand proud in a system costing more than 200 times its price. He advised audiophiles to buy pairs for friends and family. I took his advice, sort of—I bought a pair for myself.

The PSB Alpha B1 is exactly the kind of product this hobby needs—one that brings the High End down to earth, makes hi-fi attainable for just about everyone, and, beyond all, reminds us how much fun this hobby should be. The Alpha B1 has become my immediate recommendation for anyone seeking hi-fi advice. I'm proud to have a pair in my home. A simply sensational audio bargain. Thank you, Paul Barton.



PSB Alpha B1 loudspeaker

RUNNERS-UP (in alphabetical order)

Aperion Audio Intimus 533-T loudspeaker (\$750/pair; reviewed by Robert J. Reina, Vol.30 No.4, April 2007 WWW)

Benz-Micro MC20E2-L phono cartridge (\$199; reviewed by Art Dudley, Vol.30 No.9, September 2007 WWW)

Harbeth HL-P3ES2 loudspeaker
HeadRoom Desktop D/A head-phone amplifier (\$1895; reviewed by Wes Phillips, Vol.29 Nos.4 & 11, April & November 2006 WWW)
K&K Electronics MC step-up transformer (\$275; reviewed by Art Dudley, Vol.30 Nos.9 & 10, September & October 2007 WWW)

NHT Classic Three loudspeaker
Oppo DV-970HD universal player (\$149; reviewed by Wes Phillips & John Marks, Vol.30 Nos.5 & 6, May & June 2007 WWW)

Prima Luna ProLogue Seven power amplifier (\$3149; reviewed by Robert Deutsch, Vol.29 No.12, December 2006 WWW)
Rega Apollo CD player

2007 **PRODUCT OF THE YEAR****Ayre Acoustics MX-R monoblock power amplifier****RUNNERS-UP**

(in alphabetical order)

Chord Choral Blu CD transport**& Choral DAC64 D/A processor****Focal Electra 1037 Be loudspeaker****JL Audio Fathom f113 subwoofer****Krell Evolution 600 monoblock****amplifier****Logitech Slim Devices****Transporter WiFi D/A processor****Pioneer S-1EX loudspeaker****Shindo Masseto preamplifier****Simaudio Moon Evolution P-8 preamplifier****Simaudio Moon Evolution****SuperNova CD player****Sonus Faber Guarneri memento loudspeaker****Wilson Audio Specialties****WATT/Puppy 8 loudspeaker**

Ayre Acoustics MX-R monoblock power amplifier

This year's "Product of the Year" category found an extraordinary *nine* products winning first-place votes, spanning nearly the entire spectrum of prices and component categories, from the JL Audio Fathom f113 powered subwoofer (\$3400) to the Krell Evolution 600 monoblock power amplifier (\$30,000/pair). One very special piece of kit, the Shindo Masseto preamplifier, actually received three-*and-a-half* votes. I'm not sure if that's even possible, but there you have it. It all goes to show that what

makes a product "high-end" is its devotion to meeting the needs of audiophiles and music lovers, an undeniably diverse bunch. Indeed, there is a hi-fi component out there to be had for each and every one of us.

This year's prestigious winner might even be the amp that *all* audiophiles can love. Eight of our 15 reviewers placed their bets on the sexy, powerful Ayre MX-R monoblock. Perhaps what makes the Ayre most extraordinary is the way it obliterates the usual audiophile distinctions separating solid-state from tube designs. Said Wes, "it was fast as the dickens" while also being "unusually clean in its retrieval of detail." It was "free from added color," but was also "capable of delivering convincing stereo solidity." It appeals to the inner audio geek, it has that certain lust factor, and it makes beautiful music. It's our 2007 Product of the Year. Congratulations to Charlie Hansen and everyone at Ayre Acoustics, and thank you.