

Steve May ponders the value of Dolby Atmos, when faced with Klipsch's Cinema 600 soundbar



Belting bar goes back to basics

THE KLIPSCH CINEMA 600 puts forward a compelling argument for old-school sonic theatrics. With its distinctive horn drivers (a brand speciality), gutsy subwoofer and dynamic power plant, this mid-ranger compensates for a lack of Dolby Atmos and Wi-Fi smarts with its well-constructed wall of sound.

It's not that the American audio outfit has anything against Dolby Atmos, it just expects you to pay more for the privilege. The Cinema 600 sits above the brand's entry-level Cinema 400 model, but below its two Dolby Atmos 'bars', the Cinema 800 and Cinema 1200. Typically selling for £599, the Cinema 600 therefore appears expensive, given the way Atmos (sometimes in virtual guise) has found a home on soundbars at half the price. So let's investigate.

Substantial build

This soundbar is a big beast. At 1.15m wide, it'll be a good match for 65in screens. The partnering wireless subwoofer is similarly large, and not something you'll easily hide amongst your decor.

Yet what strikes you about the Cinema 600 in addition to its size is its substantial build and breath-of-fresh-air styling. It looks classically smart with its nearly all-

consuming cloth wrap, but the left/right horn tweeters escape the fabric shield, instead sporting a premium brushed metal effect. And while some rivals are going all in on curved synthetic cabinets, Klipsch's wood enclosure isn't afraid to rock a right angle or two.

To the right, above the tweeter housing, are physical buttons for power, input and volume. The Cinema 600 has no onscreen display, and communicates to the world with a single red LED, which borders on the antisocial. There is a remote, of course: a simple, ergonomically styled zapper which lights up when picked up. Sitting comfortably in the hand, it offers volume and subwoofer level controls as well as Dialogue, Surround and Night sonic presets.

Serious intent

The Cinema 600's driver array comprises three of Klipsch's Tractrix tweeters, a technology that's trickled down all the way from its top-of-the-range Reference Series loudspeakers. There are then four 3in fibre-composite bass/mid units, one each left and right, and two either side of the central tweeter. This LCR array faces forward with serious intent.

The wireless subwoofer is also beefy, housing a 10in down-firing driver within its wooden, ported cabinet.



This 3.1 package has a Bluetooth wireless connection, but beyond that is fairly limited feature-wise. In addition to a single HDMI ARC connection and digital optical audio input, there's a 3.5mm analogue jack. But there are no separate HDMI inputs, nor Wi-Fi/Ethernet, USB or Chromecast/Apple AirPlay talents.

While the 600 isn't Dolby Atmos enabled, it does know a Dolby Digital 5.1 soundtrack when it hears one. Consequently, the ensemble can be upgraded with optional Surround 3 rears (which sell for around £255), creating a full horizontal 5.1 sound spread; unfortunately these weren't supplied for review.

A rush of energy

Having lived with the Cinema 600 for a while, I'd say it's at its best with high-octane blockbusters. This system delights when driven hard.

The Klipsch roars into life with the Blu-ray of the Ron Howard-directed Formula 1 drama *Rush*, its LCR drivers finding all the detail and weight of the duelling racing cars of James Hunt (Chris Hemsworth) and Niki Lauda (Daniel Brühl). The soundbar presents squealing tires with relish, while the acceleration of engines is gutty and fierce, the sub delivering appropriate thunder.

Indeed, integration between the 10in subwoofer and the main array is excellent, the two crossing over seamlessly. There's no sense of disconnect between the units, which isn't always the case with soundbar/subwoofer combis. And those horn tweeters left and right, fluted for wide dispersion, really help deliver impressive width. The soundstage is big and wide, and you'll certainly feel like you're travelling at speed.

This may not be the most technically advanced of soundbars, but it has genuine cinematic chutzpah.

As for the Cinema 600's audio post-processing, it's light of touch. The Surround mode option doesn't offer any additional ambience, beyond what appears to be a little reverb; perhaps it's only intended for layouts using Klipsch's optional Surround 3 speakers?

The Dialogue mode may prove of worth if you struggle to discern speech in drama, although I never felt the need to engage it. Klipsch's Night preset flattens the dynamics, and so would only be used when trying not to disturb others in the house.

A few movies in, and I'm left with the impression of a soundbar that's unapologetically bold, with clean-cut channel definition. Dialogue is focused, full-bodied and

SPECIFICATIONS

DRIVERS: 3 x Tractrix horn-loaded 1in tweeters; 4 x 3in fibre composite woofers
ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED): 600W total **CONNECTIONS:** 1 x HDMI input; 1 x optical digital audio input; 3.5mm analogue audio input **DOLBY ATMOS/DTS:X:** No/No
SEPARATE SUBWOOFER: Yes, 10in driver **REMOTE CONTROL:** Yes **DIMENSIONS:** 1,443(w) x 73(h) x 86(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 14kg (including subwoofer)

FEATURES: Bluetooth; Dolby Digital compatibility; HDMI CEC control; Dialogue, Surround and Night audio presets; 28Hz-20kHz claimed frequency response; wireless subwoofer connection; motion sensitive backlit remote; optional Surround 3 speakers for 5.1 setup

TESTED WITH



RUSH: A perennial demo fave since its 2014 Blu-ray release, Ron Howard's F1 drama has a 5.1 DTS-HD MA soundtrack that leaves many others trailing in its wake – the sense of danger, speed and power it brings to the race sequences is superb. No 4K release yet, but the film's varied mix of digital cameras/resolutions might explain why.

smooth, avoiding sibilance. There's also warmth to the Cinema 600's presentation overall; it sounds not unlike a pair of quality standmount speakers, albeit with the bonus of a dedicated centre channel. And despite its lack of Atmos upfirsers or steering DSP, when Teddy's spacecraft takes off in episode 2 of *Cowboy Bebop* (Netflix), there's still's a dimensionality to the sound which makes the levitating metal seem all the more real.

As the soundbar is Bluetooth-enabled, it would seem churlish not to send a few tunes in its direction. This transpires to be time well spent. *Temple of Ekur*, from Danish rockers Volbeat, confirms Klipsch's kick-ass reputation, as the Cinema 600 does a sterling job with the track's relentless riffing, and delivers a great guitar tone without sacrificing that smooth midrange. I'd have no qualms about using this Klipsch as a surrogate Bluetooth music speaker.

Timely reminder

Dolby Atmos compatibility might seem like a red line when shortlisting soundbars, but Klipsch reminds us there are other fundamentals that can make or break a listening experience. This system is light on contemporary technology, but does a blistering job with the basics.

It's a no-nonsense, big and powerful soundbar that's eminently listenable. Bass drops deep but integration is top-notch, and dialogue remains crisp and well defined. The Klipsch Cinema 600 isn't leading-edge, but it's more accomplished than its spec suggests ■

HCC VERDICT



Klipsch Cinema 600
 → £600 → www.klipsch.com

WE SAY: A no-nonsense soundbar system that's an exhilarating listen; dynamic and clean with seamless bass integration. It's expensive though, given the lack of Dolby Atmos.

1. There's a third Tractrix horn tweeter (for the centre channel) behind the bar's fabric grille

2. Klipsch's subwoofer is elevated by four inset feet to give the down-firing driver room to breathe

AV INFO

PRODUCT: 3.1-channel soundbar system

POSITION: Below the Atmos-capable Cinema 800 and Cinema 1200 models

PEERS: Samsung HW-Q600A; Sony HT-ZF9