

<b>manufacturer:</b>	<b>MartinLogan</b>
<b>model:</b>	<b>Montage</b>
<b>category:</b>	<b>Speakers</b>
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## MartinLogan Montage Loudspeaker

### Introduction

As you decide to make the transition into the higher-end realm of speakers, MartinLogan is a company that needs to be strongly considered. Widely heralded for their lust-worthy line of hybrid electrostatic speakers, MartinLogan has a well deserved reputation for excellence. The price of excellence has traditionally been steep. This has all changed with the new MartinLogan Montage. Based on a speaker technology targeted to the price-conscious customer, the Montage is considerably more affordable.

The Montage is beautifully styled and, like all MartinLogans, is an attention-grabber in any room. Each Montage measures 38 inches tall, nine-and-one-half inches wide, 11-and-one-half inches deep and weighs a svelte 30 pounds. The cabinetry features an attractive half-elliptical shaped wood cabinet. Most traditional speakers in this class are still the boxy rectangle cabinets, yet the Montage has a style that is engaging. The nicely polished smooth wood finish can be had in native cherry or black. The front of the speaker has a black plastic face, which houses the drivers. The top of the curved face extends above the cabinet several inches to allow the high-frequency transducer the ability to emit sound from both the front and the back of the speaker. This speaker features dipole radiators.



Removing the front screen of the Montage reveals some of the impressive technology engineered into this small floor-standing speaker. Two six-and-one-half-inch high-resolution aluminum cones act as the midrange and woofers for this speaker. These high rigidity cones with extended throw drive assembly have some great bass output. The port for the speaker is near the binding posts toward the back base of the speaker. Lifting the speaker is tricky, since you need to grab the port with one hand and lift near the top of the cabinet on the opposite side. Although the speaker is light, I found it a little too easy to accidentally grab the fragile top part of the transducer and risk damaging it. For this reason, be very careful when lifting this speaker. Also, watch out for the included carpet

spikes, as they are very sharp. The multi-way binding posts are nestled in a small area, so you may have to try several kinds of speaker wire or terminations to negotiate them into the posts. Included are a set of metal rigid floor feet and carpet spikes to make sure the speaker sits above the floor and is insulated from floor vibrations.

The most impressive element of this speaker is the inch-and-a-half by two-and-a-quarter-inch advanced thin film (ATF™) transducer. This high technology design sandwiches a low-mass Dupont Kaladex polyethelene naphthalate (PEN) film between two arrays of Neodymium super magnets. The PEN diaphragm is similar to the one used in the Generation 2 electrostatic transducers featured in MartinLogan's higher-end speakers. Extremely powerful Neodymium iron boron magnets used in this system allow for superb control over the aforementioned diaphragm. Translated to more human terms, this transducer's design allows for a more accurate sound reproduction with increased ability to resolve detail over traditional dome tweeters.

## **Setup**

MartinLogan really set itself apart from the rest of the speakers I have reviewed by making set-up easy. The user's manual is by far the most useful and educational tool I have seen included with a speaker. MartinLogan actually took principles that took me hours to read through in engineering textbooks and distilled them into a couple of concise pages in their manual. Kudos to MartinLogan for going out of their way to educate the consumer on how to get the absolute best from these speakers. The manual even goes into setting up the center and subwoofer in the room, although you can't really use the Montage in either of those roles. Also covered in this manual are advanced room treatment tips (like eliminating near-field reflections and resonant room cavities) and algorithms to exactly place your speakers in the room. More importantly, it entertains the concept that nothing is absolute in speaker placement. It teaches you how to experiment with different placements to find the audio nirvana that all audiophiles search for but never really find. For some, it is all about the journey and not the destination.

I followed the manual and placed the speaker about two-and-a-half feet from the back wall and one-and-a-half feet from the side walls. I also have ASC room treatments set up in my room, so I could follow the additional advice covered by the manual. I used my Anthem AVM30 and the A5 amplifier to supply the juice to these speakers and allow them to open up. After connecting some bare speaker wire from Monster Cable, I ran the Montages for about 120 hours of break-in at 90dB as the manual instructs.

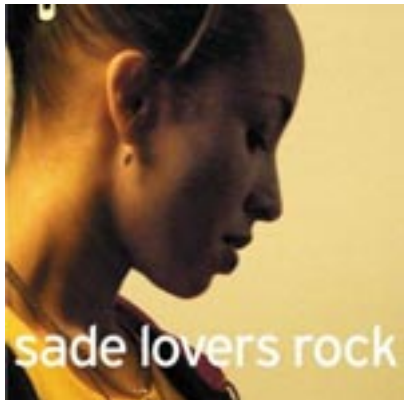
This period allows for the speaker's crossovers and woofer to break in and for the speaker to be ready for critical listening.

## **The Music and Movies**

I began the music listening with Keb' Mo' and his album Just Like You Super Audio CD (Okeh/Epic). Singer and guitarist Kevin "Keb' Mo'" Moore has definitely got a talent for generating soothing blues-inspired folk music. Mo's "More Than One Way Home" is a positive and upbeat song about growing up in Los Angeles and appreciating public transportation available to those with no bling-bling. The guitar solo halfway through this track was detailed and tonally appealing. The midrange driver nicely communicated

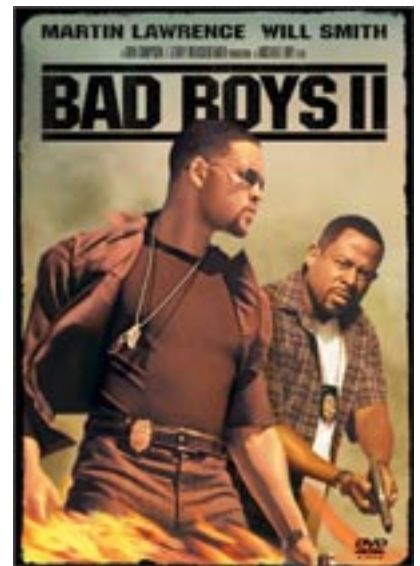


Mo's talent while the bass driver had no problem pushing the low range snaps of the drumbeats. The sweetness of the high-frequency transducer became evident during the beginning of the song, when the small bells and chimes were used. There is a section where the chimes shift across the soundstage from left to right, giving me a lovely taste of the space and imaging made possible by the Montages. "Just Like You" really puts the dynamic range of the Montage to the test by utilizing a variety of instruments and singers. A female singer and another male singer are matched up with the deeper voice of Mo. There is a faint cymbal or tambourine-like instrument that is brought to life by the Montage that was difficult to hear on lesser speaker systems of mine. Perhaps what struck me most was the Montage's sheer sense of ease and its overall liquid midrange. These speakers were performing above and beyond their price class. In the past, MartinLogan offered one of the lowest-priced avenues into high-performance sound and the Montages have extended this trait. Again, the Montages are doing this at a price that competes directly with speakers that sound good but are incapable of serious soundstages and other high-end characteristics.



Sade's Lovers Rock album (Epic) has to be in my CD changer at all times when a date is over. Her music is smooth and sultry. I have met few people who disagree with me on that. The track "Lovers Rock" displays a variety of percussion, from aluminum drums to the scratch-like noises of the Latin super guiro. No noticeable graininess or harshness was found in the reproduction of these unique instruments. The dynamic vocal range of Sade was outstanding and lush, thanks to the Montage's versatile midrange driver. Some chest-thumping bass guitar was prominent in this track as well. The Montage does not have as large a woofer as the Polk LSi-15, yet the Montage was still able to put some vibrations in my chest while I sat in my couch. I have heard more powerful bass on different and higher-priced speakers, yet to the Montage's credit, it had no poor-sounding characteristics. It may not drop to earthquake lows but the bass that it does supply is very high quality and void of negative artifacts. On "Every Word," Sade seduced me with her smooth and gentle cries. The sliding sounds of the guitar player's hands moving up and down the neck of guitar were very detailed and musical.

For movies, I decided to go against my better judgment and select a Will Smith film. Even though I am not a big Smith fan, I was impressed by the gross amounts of unnecessary violence in “Bad Boys 2” (Columbia/TriStar Studios). Guns, bikini-clad bodies, foul language and Martin Lawrence one-liners are all the right ingredients for a good action flick and product evaluation. This time around, the Bad Boys stumble into a big smuggling case and eventually save the day. The opening car chase features the roaring noises of Smith’s Ferrari, the crashing of countless cars and trucks, and a boat taking out a bunch of cop cars. Add a heaping tablespoon of machine gun fire to a dash of car crashes and you get two dozen servings of explosions. The complexity of the sound in this chaotic scene was handled beautifully by the Montages and never became congested or harsh. Details in the sounds like the cracking and shattering of glass were amazing with these speakers. I never seem to get sick from repeatedly hearing the sound of metal crunching and safety glass crackling, except of course if it is my car that is getting smashed.



“Dune” (Universal) is one of my favorite films of all time. It is also one of the most underrated sci-fi films. It is sad that crappy films like “Independence Day” get more commercial success than “Dune.” The best part is that Sting plays one of the bad guys – right on. The scene where Paul Atreides is practicing to fight a machine simulator using a weirding module was awesome. The weirding module is a weapon that uses amplified sound to destroy things. The mechanical and whirring noises made from the simulator were so real that it felt like it really was actually in my living room. I heard the hum of the weirding module charging up and the “eeeechhaaa” noise that resulted in the exploding of one of the simulator’s arms. The massive assault on the Harkonnen base rocked my whole living room. Any possible issues you may have with the Montages not having the power that bigger speakers may possess in the bass department will be cast aside with this scene. I found that the atomic explosions, lasers firing and mountains crumbling all sounded great with Montages in my system.

“Ronin” (MGM/UA) is a great demonstration DVD for showing off the power capabilities of your system. When I first got my Anthem A5 amplifier, this DVD went in before any others. Amazing car chases and gun fights in the middle of Nice make this film a premier action flick. The ambush scene in Nice had a wide spectrum of sound that ranged from the really high frequencies to the low explosions sounds at the other end of the scale. The high-frequency beeps of the computer noises as the computer specialist banged away at the keyboard reminded me of old school Atari games. My walls shook as a result of the thump of the grenade launcher firing and the resultant massive explosion of the bodyguard’s car. Again, the Montages produced plenty of energy and the sound was delineated nicely. Never did the Montages sound compressed or over-pushed at any time

and the amount of detail that they presented was amazing.

### **The Downside**

My biggest gripe about these speakers is the fragility of the transducer section of the front plastic face. Although this is a non-issue for those with secluded rooms, they are far from childproof and will not withstand much of a bump. This is not uncommon in other speakers, yet it requires careful attention.

MartinLogan Montages require careful and detailed placement in the room to hear showcase their full capabilities. This means that you may lack some flexibility in location and orientation. In many homes, this will not be an issue, because good sound is of course a high priority. However, in some homes, this could require you to sleep on the couch until you come to an agreement with your spouse. This is a strange downside: it is a bonus that the Montages are good enough to benefit from extreme tweaking, yet this is a very real consideration to purchasers who are restricted in their speaker placement options.

I felt that the binding posts seemed a bit cheaply made. The binding posts do not have holes in them, so it is much harder to securely screw down bare wire without it falling out. Instead, you have to use a banana plug or curl the bare speaker wire around the post. This also requires a third hand to hold the cable while the other person carefully tilts the speaker over.

### **Conclusion**

For or against electrostatic technology, few deny that MartinLogan has been at the forefront of the high-end loudspeaker technology curve for decades. They have a longstanding reputation for providing

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tremendous sound quality for a price that is in many cases fractional compared to competitive products. The Montage is a new chapter for MartinLogan – a chapter that is about affordability and value. Nearly every member of the Audio Video Revolution staff have owned or currently own MartinLogan speakers. For some, they were the very spark that lit the fire of interest in high-end sound reproduction. Moving the technology aside, the Montage is a great-sounding speaker; I think that they are more enjoyable than anything I have heard in the price class. They are detailed and sweet and have an incredibly liquid sound. I was a tad skeptical about a dynamic speaker from MartinLogan, yet the Montage quickly erased this doubt and made me a believer. This is a speaker that I feel strongly enough to recommend to my closest friends – a true winner.