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Focal Chorus 700 5.1 Speaker System

A Secrets Speaker System Review

Written by L. Richard Stevens

Monday, 08 December 2008

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Introduction

While not sold in big box retail stores nor shipping Internet-direct to consumers, Focal has built and maintained a solid reputation in the audiophile community by offering top tier sound quality. Being very familiar with the brand, it was with great anticipation that I agreed to review the Chorus 700 speaker system. The Chorus 700 series is at the lower end of Focal's speaker lineup, and the review system consisted of a pair of 726V three-way tower speakers, a CC700V center channel speaker, a pair of 706V bookshelf speakers for the rear, and a SW700V subwoofer. At roughly \$3,600 for the package, I was eager to see how the Chorus system compared to its mass-market competitors.

Furthermore, can the 700 series live up to the reputation of its higher priced siblings?

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Design and Setup

Out of the box, the Chorus 700s sport an attractive design, bearing a close resemblance to the 800 series. While the system is MDF constructed, the "Amati" finish is visually appealing, giving it the look of a much more expensive speaker. If you're not a fan of the light wood Amati finish, Focal also offers this system in black ash. The front and rear speakers have a curved grille, which exposes the tweeter (more on the tweeter later).

While the 700 series may look like its older brother, I was surprised to see the 726V towers did not have the same floor base that comes standard with the 800 series towers. The 726Vs stand 39 inches tall and a mere 8 inches wide, so I would've liked to have seen better support beyond the standard carpet spikes. I would certainly advise keeping your children away from these slender beauties.

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The CC700V center channel and 706V bookshelf speakers are both two-way designs, each sporting 6.5" midranges, perfectly matching those in the 726 towers. Much like the towers, the center and rear speakers are very easy to drive at 91 and 90 dB sensitivity respectively, with the 726Vs coming in at 91.5 dB. This means you don't need a large amplifier to make these speakers sing.

All the speakers in this system come with typical five-way binding posts; there is no option for bi-amping. While I would have liked this option for the three-way towers, which come equipped with dual 6.5" woofers, the efficiency of these speakers almost make up for this oversight. I'm sure this was done to help keep costs down, an omission I can live with.



The SW700V is quite small in today's world of gargantuan subwoofers. This one features a very capable 300 watt RMS BASH amplifier and a front firing 11" polyglass woofer. BASH amplifiers are a popular choice among subwoofer manufacturers, mostly because they provide a nearly perfect blend of sound quality, low distortion, high bandwidth, and high efficiency. If implemented correctly this is usually a recipe for success. At 33.6 pounds, finding the perfect placement for this sub is a breeze.



Underneath the subwoofer you'll find a down firing port. Focal rates the SW700V at 29 HZ (-6 dB), I was able to get reasonable output in my listening area down to about 26 Hz before its limits became apparent. While it doesn't match the extension and raw output of my reference sub, which is much larger, the SW700V is is much more attractive according to my wife.

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In Use

After putting away the trusty SPL meter, it was time for some serious listening. When the review period was over, there is one thing I knew I would certainly miss about these speakers: the tweeter. The 700s have the sweetest top end of any speaker I've heard in this price range. I'm not sure if the curved speaker grille was designed to be a cosmetic or performance enhancement, but I'm happy the decision was made, the aluminum/magnesium inverted dome tweeter is a jewel. Another honorable mention takes me back to the SW700V subwoofer. When I put this sub in one particular spot, I was totally prepared not to like it. I immediately thought it was too small to fill my 23 x 14 listening space with the type of deep bass I was accustomed to, I was wrong, sort of. As I mentioned earlier, if you're looking for benchmark low frequency extension, you need to consider something larger, but if you want tight punchy bass in a compact and attractive frame, you'll LOVE this subwoofer.

Music



Norah Jones' *Come Away with Me* continues to be one of my favorite multi-channel SACDs. It's a disc that I know well and one that I often turn to when evaluating new speakers. Track 3 "Cold Cold Heart" showcased the wonderful midrange and tweeter combination of the 726V towers. The center channel blended seamlessly with the towers, creating a wide and life-like soundstage. Norah's voice can prove to be a challenge for lesser center channel speakers; the CC700V was up to the task. The CC700V actually sounds like a larger speaker; it has its limitations with frequencies below 80 Hz, but properly crossed over in a multi-channel system, the CC700V is a competent performer. Switching over to two-channel listening, the boundaries of the 726V towers became obvious. With the subwoofer disabled I wanted to see how the towers stood on their own. Bass is clearly the Achilles heel of 726Vs, as frequencies south of 60 Hz lack weight and are not well defined. But, just about every speaker benefits from a subwoofer, and the 726Vs are designed to be mated with a sub like the SW700V.

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Movies



Before the review period came to an end, I was able to get a copy of Dreamworks *Kung Fu Panda* on Blu-ray. This disc is loaded with a first rate Dolby True-HD track, a great workout for the Chorus system. Wow, this is a reference quality disc and the Focals did exactly what speakers should do, disappear. For 90 minutes I was not evaluating a speaker system, I was engulfed in the soundtrack. The 706Vs are more than capable surround speakers, rear effects and pans were spot on, creating a totally enveloping experience. The SW700V continued to shine, and *Kung Fu Panda* is loaded with tons of deep bass. The SW700V remained composed, providing tight and punchy sound. While I'm sure a bigger subwoofer would have sounded, well "bigger", the SW700V survived the *Kung Fu Panda* LFE torture test.

As a whole, the speakers remained composed at high volumes. My ear drums gave out before the Focals did. They weren't as dynamic as my Klipsch reference speakers, but I've yet to encounter a non-horn-loaded speaker that could match my reference system. The Focals were definitely on the warmer sound of the block but didn't shy away from head banger volumes.

Voices were full and natural, even at high volumes, I never felt the center channel couldn't keep pace with the other towers.

There was a definite synergy to the system, pans were fluid, not once could I detect any speaker shift in the soundfield across the front three speakers.

I was really quite impressed with the focals, outside their performance below 60 Hz without the subwoofer. There was no boominess in the speakers, but there was a definite lack of articulation and definition at the low end, and everything came back into focus when I put the SW700V back in the mix.

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Conclusions

When shopping for a 5.1 speaker system, there are a lot of options in the \$3600 price range. While this system has its limitations, its positives greatly outweigh the negatives by a long shot. The Chorus 700V is an incredible speaker system, with a midrange and tweeter combination that is sure to be a crowd pleaser. This is a system that I would recommend in a heartbeat, a system that sounds as beautiful as it looks. The next time you stop by your favorite hi-fi dealer, take a listen to the Chorus 700 system, and you just might be leaving the store as a proud Focal owner.

Tags: [5.1](#), [Speakers](#),



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