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Polk Audio db6501 Review

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Category: Other

Some weeks ago, a friend (with the name of Manoj) dropped by the house and said, "hey Myke, how ya doing? I got a brand spanking new pair of seps you may want to try out. It's for my brother's car, actually and I thought maybe you might want to have a crack at it before I install it. So whaddya say?"

Without hesitation, I said with a devilish grin, "yeah, sure!" and copped the box from Manoj's hand and we went straight inside the house and discussed the details of the install. So after he left, I showered, shaved and shipped out to my girlfriend's house so I can install the loaned db6501 series of separates from Polk Audio in her car.

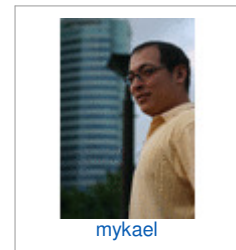
The db6501 is a generation after Polk's db6500 component system. In the case of Polk's product lines, the db series is now the entry-level of goodies. Similar to the db104 which we reviewed some months back, this came in a gray package probably the same box dimensions of pair of size 12 rubber shoes. Open the treasure trove and a pair of stylish speaker grills peak out (albeit part of the contract between Polk Audio and MOMO, where MOMO designs the aesthetics of PA's products) and under it are the tweeters with mounting hardware and crossover networks with necessary wiring (though it wouldn't be enough in a full install). Then underneath it are the woofers and their mounting adaptors. All of them are individually wrapped in sealed plastics with corrugated cardboard to stiffen the whole package. Also included are manuals, driver cutouts and a Polk Audio sticker.

On the technical side of life, the tweeter is a 1" silk/polymer composite dome with a black mesh grill covering the silver dome which is housed in a black plastic tub. A Polk Audio logo is embedded on the outer side of the grill to show your friends what brand of speakers you're using. These come in pre-wired with about a few feet of 16ga wires with those micro spades that come with tweeters in this category.

At 2-5/16 of an inch tall, this is one shallow mid-woofer. The mounting hole is a fairly standard 5" with several mounting holes options. Despite the fact that it's bigger (cone area wise compared to a lot of mid-woofers in this market category), the mounting basket and magnet are shallow. Yep, it's a thin mount so if you have doors (ex. EK Civic 96-2000 model, AE101 Corolla, etc.) that can't accommodate a deep woofer, this is maybe your best bet. This speaker is a looker too, with a Polymer/Mica Composite cone finished in silver and the db logo screened in the middle. Wire mounting is done using spades.

On un-covering the crossover module, it features 18db/oct hi-pass and 12db/oct low pass filtering laid out in single sided PCB, with all of the connections done in one end. You'd notice on either side of the PCB there are slots where you can use plastic tie-straps to hold the crossover in odd places if you don't want to use the provided screw points or if you want to hide them under the dash where it's hard to screw them. The cover has some holes that run along side the cover to properly vent the coils, caps and resistors during play time.

On comparison between the 6500 and 6501, there are subtle differences mainly in the tweeter; the 6501's tweeter has foam on the backside, perhaps to tame it a bit, but



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structurally, they're both the same. The crossover network now has a tweeter-level adjustment network in which you can use to tailor the output of the tweeter to your liking. It should be noted though that the crossover topology of both component systems are the same, though different as mentioned in the adjustment network and in appearance. The 6500's crossovers have covered endplates to hide speaker wires with and the new one doesn't. On the woofer's end of the business, as a package, it only comes now as one size. They used to have two models where you can choose between a 6.5" or 6.75" Now they only offer the woofer in one size. Well, it's basically somewhere in the middle of 6.5" - 6.75" and you can fit it in most 6.5" cutouts, plus with the included mounting adaptor, installation in different cars is pretty much a breeze. Both are shallow mounts with the same mounting depth.

While installing the 6501 in my girlfriend's '05 Honda Jazz (Fit in other parts of the world outside Asia), though as I mentioned this is a shallow mount woofer, we still needed a spacer for the front doors. She was actually reluctant when I pulled the jigsaw and was about to cut up her door opening and realized that all we needed was a spacer to clear the not so round factory speaker hole that it had. (Whew!) After a few minutes of mounting the woofers on the doors (which aren't deadened at the moment, because the deadening that we used earlier, didn't like heat that well and just oozed all the way to the bottom, but we'll be putting in new ones soon) and putting the panels back on, we hooked up the tweeters on the dash just a few inches above the corner a/c vents towards where the doors meet the a-pillars, this is about 2ft away from the mid-woofers. We ran two sets of wires to the front so the crossover was mounted at the boot of the car (actually, this was done in the event that we'd go full-active in the future) hooked it up to a JBL GTO 75.4 power amplifier and an old 10" sub in a sealed enclosure. We're running everything off an Alpine CDA 9833 a pair of old Rockford Fosgate RCA's to connect signals to the amp, 14ga speaker wires and 8ga power wire from the stock battery.

Before doing any critical listening, we let the speakers' break-in for a couple of weeks (around 20 hours of total play time) using my girlfriend's iPod as the main content source and ran the 6501 at full range. After the burn-in, we didn't tune the system in any way except for setting the crossover frequencies at 80Hz HP and 50Hz HP both at 18db/octave slope.

During listening sessions, I use CD's that I'm very familiar with to establish a baseline of what to expect with different speaker systems. First one queue was Hiroshima's Between Black and White album. With cut number 3 "The Door is Open", Dan Kuramoto's smooth vocals were clear and audible, no nasal characteristics that are usually associated with over damped systems can be heard. I usually queue cut number 11 "Omotai" if I want to checkout the system's response to mid-bass and its characteristics. This track has an assortment of oriental (Koto drums) and the regular percussion instruments (cymbals, triangles, etc.) and is pretty much taxing to both tweeter and mids especially when you get to 0:49 upwards where the two sets of percussion instruments try to out do one another. Going back, the mid-bass came a bit on the thin side. You can hear part of the mallet hitting the drum skin and the tap of the toms, it was lacking impact. I'll bet what ever is left with my hair that when I deaden the doors, these are just going to pop out. Cymbal crashes, to an extent are piercing, though in a good way. As a friend of mine listened to it, he commented, that's how cymbals are supposed to sound like. Triangle extension was exquisite, it doesn't trail-off like a metal dome tweeter but it doesn't punt on it either. High level detail gets somewhat confused at higher power levels but it won't leave your ears ringing when the song fades. For female vocals, I cued "Here's to Ben" by Jacintha, and the track "Georgia". This CD will bring out some harshness to a lesser capable speaker system. The 6501 produced Jacintha's voice heavenly, though a bit on the edgy side (due to tweeter mounting location) and a bit lacking in body (again, the deadening). The scraping of the bristle sticks to the snares come out as, well, scrapes. Detail in the middle high frequencies are a bit colored (this I have to see if it's the location or if I need to cut the EQ somewhere in that region) but nothing that you'd notice if you're playing R&B and house music.

Speaking of house, I played Hed Kandi's summer '06 album and enjoyed it. It seemed like I was in a club tapping my feet to the beat, probably more so because I raised the crossover from 50Hz 18db LP to 80Hz and bumped the sub-level a couple of notches.

Overall, I like how this speaker system plays; it has a lot of potential to be very good. It doesn't come without flaws, it needs tweaking (deadening and EQ on some frequencies) but so does a lot of component systems in the market. If you want to be different, you

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may want to audition the Polk Audio db6500 or 6501 out. Some of my friends, in which I trust their ears, didn't get disappointed, and I'll bet my last peso, so won't you.

Now if I could only tell Manoj I won't be returning his brother's speaker back, I'll keep this one for my girlfriend's car.

Cheers!!!

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