



Jamo Torsten soundbar & wireless subwoofer

Price: \$1499



TØRSTEN TIME

Our first soundbar comes with an impressive size of wireless sub, perhaps to justify its naming after the Norse god of thunder...

Torsten is a common enough name in Jamo's home turf of Denmark. As we understand it, it comes from the Old Norse 'Þórsteinn' — meaning "Thor's Stone". Given the impressive 10-inch driver in the subwoofer here, we prepared ourselves for sonic impact worthy of the hammer of the gods. Or something like that...

EQUIPMENT

Despite the enormous box in which the Torsten arrives, the soundbar itself is not conspicuously oversized (compared with, say, the Sony in this group). It is moderately graceful, indeed, in the sweep of its front grille between the two 19mm tweeters at the ends of its 109cm width, which flank four 76mm midrange drivers. The bar is also usefully thin in its depth at 72mm, making it more suited than many bars to wallmounting, and Jamo supplies a full-size drilling template for those

wishing to do so. Otherwise a pair of rubber feet slot onto the bottom so it can sit in front of your TV. (A hilarious second option — balancing the bar on top of your TV — is shown in the manual, but this is crazy talk.)

Thin it may be, but once on its feet the Torsten sits 11.5cm high, which will cover the infrared receiver on most TVs. With the Sony W670 we were using, it covered a good chunk of the screen as well. There's no IR passthrough or blaster options here, so unless you have an exceptionally high stand for your TV (e.g. the giant chrome spider legs of some Samsung models), you should not consider this as a bar which can be placed on the same surface as your TV. If not wallmounting it, then you will need some kind of separate lower shelving to accommodate it.

That achieved, set-up is among the simplest of all soundbar and subwoofer solutions. The optical connection to the TV is preferred;

second best is analogue from the headphone socket; last comes a pair of RCA phono connections from a TV's audio out.

As mentioned, the subwoofer is a large one for such systems, boasting a 10-inch driver firing from the left side of a cabinet measuring 33.5cm high, 23cm wide and a long 46cm deep with room required behind for its rear port (and to reach the controls). The sub connects wirelessly so requires only its power cord; it immediately connects to the soundbar, requiring no further attention than adjusting its level using the knob on the back.

PERFORMANCE

Jamo's supplied manual, which is mainly pictures and lacks plain English instructions on anything much, offers no help for owners of TVs which don't allow you to switch off their internal speakers. It was similarly unhelpful on how you should decide where

to set the subwoofer volume, and there is not the slightest mention of what the “360° sound” button on the slimline remote might be aiming to achieve (or when to use it). We also reckon the average user may not understand what its description of “TV remote programming” means without any accompanying explanation. The required text might run something along the lines of: “You can use your existing TV remote to control the Torsten soundbar. Follow these instructions to teach the soundbar ‘volume up’, ‘volume down’ and ‘mute’ commands.” This worked fine.

We were also struggling at first to get any sound from the Jamo at all, messing with our TV settings and outputs for some time until we realised we had to change the input selector on the soundbar (even though only the preferred optical input was connected). The rather too-bright LED on the soundbar changes colour to show the input — green for optical, apparently. Again, there was absolutely nothing in the manual to tell you this.

This IKEA-level of communication is a shame, since this is a well-pitched subwoofer and soundbar in performance terms. We initially thought the sound from the bar to be very bright — you’ll never have trouble understanding dialogue from the Torsten, as those frequencies are projected with emphasis and cut-through. The trick, however, is not to sit too far to one side of the soundbar, where the treble is emphasised and the overall balance can be too peaky. Directly in front, the clarity of the treble merges well with the midrange, and the handover to the subwoofer was effective and hole-free.

The size of Jamo’s subwoofer here reaps its rewards, as the combined sound from sub and bar is impressive. We’d suggest positioning the subwoofer as centrally as possible; we achieved best results with it directly in front of the TV, its left-side driver facing forwards, even though this gave its rear port no wall support. To set its level we’d recommend playing some music LOUD (this system consistently achieves its

best integration and balance when running at higher than average levels). Our preference was with the knob set above halfway, yielding deep bass just short of the final octave.

To play this test music we had made the connection via Bluetooth to our iPod touch, which was easy and fuss-free (and we correctly guessed we needed the LED to be blue for Bluetooth!). The Jamo also has NFC pairing should your smart device support this simple tap-to-pair system.

We were exceedingly impressed with the Torsten’s musical performance — it’s genuinely musical, producing an enjoyable and punchy sound across a range of material. Sheryl Crow bounced forth looking for fun, her vocal strong and rounded over the band; early Beatles remasters were rich and dynamic; Ke\$ha’s lively ‘TiK ToK’ pumped forth with a solid kick drum and rich bass, showing how tight (as well as deep) the subwoofer here could play. Only very occasionally with busy dense music (the highs of Radiohead’s ‘Fake Plastic Trees’ for example) did we push it so very far as to hear it begin to muddy through sheer exertion, but it was tough to fluster.

The Torsten’s period of residence coincided with the arrival of three discs from audiophile label Katzenberger, so we tried the Pure Audio Blu-ray of Heinrich von Kalnein’s playful twin-saxophoned quartet. Heaven knows how much of the 24-bit/192kHz made it through the TV to the soundbar, but it sounded great, delivering much of the percussion’s scintillating high-end and portraying the spacious acoustic around the two saxophone players. While switching this signal to a full hi-fi certainly showed there was more of everything available (the relatively quietly recorded double bass in particular), this was still an impressively musical delivery for a soundbar system.

When a system does music this well, you can rest easy as to its movie performance. Ignore that ‘360°’ button (which thins central dialogue while pushing effects sideways); soundtracks enjoy plenty of power and clarity

without it. There was oodles of gusto for action sequences of *Battlestar Galactica*, while dialogue was always clear thanks to quite a forwardness in vocal frequencies, a slight ‘presence’ which could make general TV audio insistent in demanding attention, though without ever going too far into edginess. The combination of clarity, musicality and volume made *Rockwiz* episodes particularly enjoyable through the Torsten.

One warning — don’t leave it idle after stopping Bluetooth music; it will eventually switch back to the TV input, in our case deafeningly loudly, while we were out for several hours. Apologies to our neighbours....

CONCLUSION

Poor manual aside, the Jamo bar/sub combo has much to recommend it, from pleasant aesthetics to the rare feat of making great music as well as powerful movie soundtracks, especially when playing loud. Indeed loud is a merit of the Torsten; for regular TV viewing it performed admirably enough, but as we turned it up, its grace under pressure revealed its quality. If you like bigscreen entertainment but can’t fit or stretch to a receiver and surround sound system, you’ll appreciate the advantages of Jamo’s subwoofer size in delivering real impact to movies, and enjoyable Bluetooth music as a big bonus. *Jez Ford* ←

VERDICT

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- Great subwoofer for good levels of tight and deep bass
- Good with music; can go loud without stress
- Attractive bar design



- The manual needs more words!
- No remote control of bass level
- Too high for many TVs, and has no IR passthrough or blaster

INPUTS: 1 x optical digital, 1 x RCA stereo analogue, Bluetooth

QUOTED POWER: 250W (unspecified)

SOUNDBAR DRIVERS: 2 x 19mm soft-dome tweeters, 4 x 76mm midrange

SOUNDBAR DIMENSIONS (hwd): 114 x 1092 x 76mm

SOUNDBAR WEIGHT: Total carton 20kg

SUBWOOFER DRIVERS:

10-inch (254mm) woofer

SUBWOOFER DIMENSIONS (hwd):

330 x 228 x 406mm

WARRANTY: Soundbar four years, six years

with registration; Subwoofer is two years

warranty, three years with registration

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