

MOREL SUPREMO 6

REIGNING SUPREME

MSRP: \$2,199.95

TEXT & PHOTOS BY CASEY THORSON



IS THIS IT? THE ONE COMPONENT SPEAKER SET BY WHICH ALL OTHERS WILL BE JUDGED? THE ONE THAT WILL REIGN SUPREME AS ITS NAME IMPLIES? Or could Morel have bestowed the Supremo 6 its moniker in order to only to sell a pair of really expensive component speakers? Rather than boring you with an intro monologue about Morel and my past experiences, let's jump in with both feet and find out if the Supremo 6 lives up to its name.

IMPRESSIONS

The Supremo 6 arrived in an impressive looking, yet exceedingly large box that spans nearly 31" across. A semi-flat black sleeve uses cutouts to expose the main corrugated packing box within while also displaying the model number or logo on three sides. Underneath, a larger cutout displays a plaque containing the wealth of technologies incorporated into the system's components along with cut-away views of the speakers. The styling of the box is unique in a way that is fashionable and fitting of a component set costing a whopping \$2,199.95.

Remove the black sleeve and you'll find packed within the corrugated skin is yet another box. Grab one of its eyelets and upon lifting its lid you're greeted with the whole shebang: a pair of Supremo woofers, tweeters and sizable passive crossovers. The only items missing from view are the ones lacking visual importance, primarily hardware. A nice showroom arrangement, and yet the substandard cardboard inserts seem inadequate for its expensive contents.

Typically I initiate my product investigation by reaching for a woofer, but the two silver spacecraft casings that bear the -12dB crossover networks drew me in, so I

extracted one from the daft cardboard. My first thought was this must be made of lead, noting it had the heft of five to six typical crossovers. Protruding from behind one of the cross members of its cast aluminum chassis is the main culprit — a large, densely wound copper air coil. While sizing up this coil, I came across some other hi-fidelity components more commonly found in nice home audio sets: another good-sized coil, a very large poly capacitor and an expensive Mundorf M-Cap capacitor (part of the highpass). There's also a series of low-tolerance ceramic resistors, some of which are used for attenuation and others in an impedance equalization network.

While the crossover is exemplary, it's said that the success of any audio system starts with the drivers. Like any smart company, Morel drew from one of their finest past designs, the original Supremo tweeter. We reviewed this tweeter in the past and gave it our highest praise for its outstanding performance, but the Supremo's accomplishments were largely afforded by its tremendous size.

The new Supremo Piccolo is a direct derivative of that driver, yet arrives in a much smaller, installer-friendly package. Like its sibling, the Piccolo uses an Acuflex-coated, 28mm silk-dome that, according to Morel, results in "wider dispersion and softer sound characteristics." Also employed is the use of the company's proprietary aluminum Hexatech voice coil — a hexagonal-shaped wire used for the voice coil that interlocks when wound. This leaves virtually no room for air gaps, thereby providing a higher concentration of energy, better heat dissipation and increased power handling.

The under-hung Hexatech voice coil is submerged in another Morel exclusive — a pancake-style neodymium motor assembly. This assembly enables a linear excursion of the voice coil completely within a tightly focused magnetic field, virtually eliminating inter-modulation distortion.

But that's only part of the Piccolo story. The driver's casing is virtually all cast metal, including the cup that makes up the rear acoustic chamber. At the entrance of the acoustic chamber and beneath the 28mm dome is a C.A.R. (Controlled Acoustic Resistance) Filter. The combination of the rear chamber and the C.A.R. Filter all but eliminates unwanted back waves while improving the acoustical loading of the driver. This improves the speaker's dynamic range and transient response while allowing the Piccolo to be crossed over as low as 800Hz.

The last item of note is the input connections. Morel equipped the Piccolo with 12" of Van Den Hul silver-plated linear crystal cables. While it might seem like overkill, it shows a level of dedication that is certainly a byproduct of their hi-end home audio products.

For the low-frequency stuff, a pair of 165mm (6.5") Supremo SW6 woofers is provided. The driver's silver basket is cast aluminum and is said to be aerodynamically designed to minimize sound reflection. Like several other Morel woofers, this driver uses the company's Hybrid linear motor design, which combines both a neodymium and ferrite magnet centered within the voice coil. This allows for a large, 3" diameter under-hung voice coil using the Hexatech design submerged in a tall magnetic field.

Out front, the driver uses a speckled gray, one-piece Acuflex Duralay-coated paper cone. By using a single piece (cone and dust cap are one), weight is kept to a minimum and the coating helps eliminate cone breakup and distortion. Centered in the rear of the motor behind the cone is a C.A.R. Filter, much like the one in the Piccolo tweeter. This is told to allow the woofer better control in infinite baffle configurations by improving the acoustical loading.

All together, the Supremo 6 appears to have all the right stuff to put it in a league of its own.

SETUP

Supplying the amplified signal to this component system, I wired up an Alpine CDA-9857 head unit directly to a TRU Technology C-7 amplifier (conservatively rated at 125 watts x 4). The driving channels were level-matched within 0.05 volts of each other. At no time was any processing used during the listening test.

Alterations had to be made to my baffles to fit both the slightly oversized woofers and tweeters of the Supremo 6. This tells me they will most likely need custom mounts in a car. But, hey, if you can afford the price of admission, you can probably afford to have a custom installation done.

After retrofitting my baffles, I bolted them to my well-damped 2.25ft³ test enclosures and finalized my setup with some brief listening. I left the tweeter levels on the crossovers at the factory setting of 0dB for the best blend between the mids and tweets. I determined the best position for the speaker cabinets to be just slightly turned in from on-axis, although the Morels had such great off-axis response, it didn't really matter — a great benefit when installing them into a car.

LISTENING SOUL/BLUES

Toni Braxton "Shadowless"

Off of Toni Braxton's *Libra* album, "Shadowless" is a simple, serenade-style song that shows a lot of emotion without becoming a huge composition. It's very inti-

mate as Braxton commands the center of the soundstage, placing her mere feet in front of my listening position. Instrumentation consists only of acoustic guitars; a single guitarist accompanies her vocals closely while additional guitarists fill the more dynamic sections with resonating strings that encompass more of the soundstage.



I cued up the track on my Alpine deck and pressed the repeat function. Within the first minute of listening, it became apparent that I had been missing some details in this song when auditioning other component speakers — including the last big dollar set. What I thought was a single guitar through most of the song actually includes additional guitarists that strum in occasionally, adding to the ambiance of the composition. The Piccolo tweeters picked up the details in each and every string pluck, providing distinction to the ambient guitars. This is exactly what I was expecting at this price level — separation and accuracy second to none. So far, I was impressed!

Shifting from her deep, boxy lows to the open, breathiness of her upper range, the reproduction of Braxton's vocals was almost amazing. I say "almost" because a small lull in the midrange elicited a slightly unnatural transition as she scaled across her dynamic vocal range — a minor inconvenience that otherwise would have resulted in a perfect score. But honestly, it doesn't get much better than this.

Score: 9.5/10

ALTERNATIVE

New Radicals "Crying Like a Church on Monday"

"Crying Like a Church on Monday" by the New Radicals is a make it or break it track with a tendency to reveal any negative tonal characteristics of a system. Its dynamic level changes make it somewhat demanding, allowing me to track change in a system's response at different levels.

Ronan Keating's vocals drive this song, escalating in pitch and intensity as the composition progresses. But that didn't phase the Morels. They simply handled the vocals like Schumacher would handle a Ferrari — exacting with nary a mistake. Keating's voice just seemed to transpire naturally, with a serene airiness to his voice through the quieter passages and a raspy athleticism at full stride. His image equally good, narrowly focused just a tick to the left of center stage throughout his broad range.

The instruments played through with great poise. The electric guitar stood its ground to the far left with pristine composure, while the right side placed the piano and acoustic guitar, which were easily distinguished from each other. Each of these instruments sounded real, but it was the reproduction of the drums that captured my interest. At high volume they were seriously lifelike, particularly through the delicate taps of the toms in the quiet passages.

As I do with this track, I cranked up the volume level in small increments. The Morel Supremo 6 just sucked up the power and never gave into distortion until it was at an intolerable listening level. Another impressive performance.

Score: 9.5/10

JAZZ

Sara K. "If I Could Sing Your Blues"

The recording notes for "If I Could Sing Your Blues" by Sara K. state that the opening trumpet was recorded 10' from the microphone. This was done in order to provoke a "natural" depth to the soundstage without having to resort to DSP. While the trumpet is deep in the stage, Sara K. should be very close as the reverberation of her voice fills the studio, conveying the overall setting to the listener. The guitar should sound intimate and have a nice, warm tonality to it, while the subtle details of the plucks should be coherent.

Playback rendered the studio setting proper from the get-go, with the trumpet easy to locate to the far right. Its depth seemed genuine and consistent with the record label's notes for this song. The reverb of Sara K.'s voice controlled much of the room boundaries, which was executed wider and deeper than I noted in past speaker auditions. And, Sara K.'s guitar was dazzling, subtle and defined with the gentlest of plucks.



As the song develops to a short-lived full stride about halfway through, the jazz infusion of percussions, bass and piano takes hold. The piano and standup bass were well balanced, but one of the percussive instruments caught my ear. Although they should have been rendered on the same layer, the brushing of the left cymbal seemed to be a bit forward than the rest of the set. A trivial detail that I can only chock up to being, well, odd.

"THEY DIDN'T SEEM TO FALTER ANYWHERE WITH THIS RECORDING, EVEN AT HIGH-VOLUME LEVELS. I FOUND THEIR TRANSIENT RESPONSE SPECTACULAR AND THE PROJECTED SOUNDSTAGE TO EXHIBIT A DECENT AMOUNT OF TRANSPARENCY, LAYERING THE INSTRUMENTS NICELY ACROSS THE STAGE PLAIN."

Vocally, the Supremo 6 did a fine job. Sara K. imaged fairly focused with a relatively natural presence. I noticed a bit of roughness in her voice toward the song's end as she gets too close to the microphone in the recording. At lower levels playback is well controlled, but moderate to high volume resulted in mild midrange breakup.

Score: 8.5/10

JAZZ (INSTRUMENTAL)

Monte Alexander "Sweet Georgia Brown"

With an array of instruments, the soundstage, transient response and system dynamics can be easily compromised in this instrumental version of "Sweet Georgia Brown." But the Supremos strutted their stuff and reigned, err, supreme. They didn't seem to falter

anywhere with this recording, even at high-volume levels. I found their transient response spectacular and the projected soundstage to exhibit a decent amount of transparency, layering the instruments nicely across the stage plain.

The details of this track go like this: Two sets of percussionists duel it out in the intro and play intermittently throughout the song. Each set was distinct and very accurate in its reproduction, while every tom, snare and cymbal never transpired from a single origin. This attention to detail was also evident in the brass section, where the typically elusive mechanical noises of the keys of the far left horn were crystal clear. I also was blown away by the distinct "rasp" of the reeds that couldn't have been more tonally correct — a character that often sounds compressed in cheaper sets.

If there is anything negative to say about the Supremo 6 in relation to this track, it would have to be the low-frequency response. It certainly could have used a little more gusto to fill in the fundamental of the drums and the standup bass. That's pretty minor considering the demands of this track.

Score: 9/10

REGGAE

Ziggy Marley "Keep My Faith"

"Keep My Faith" comes off as a simple song with not a lot of instrumentation. But in fact, that isn't entirely true. While it's no symphony, it's compiled using several instruments that are spread over the entire song, most of them being different styles of drums. It's no secret that the drums are a primary focus

for me with this track, yet I still have a keen ear for the less obvious instruments and Ziggy Marley's vocals.

This track starts off with a harmonica to the left and a guitar on the opposite side, followed by a shaker. Each of these instruments had good tone and a stable position, but it was the detail in the shaker that blew me away. I could actually discern the individual beads as they settled before the next shake. Brilliant! Never have I experienced this level of clarity in this song, not even from the last set of

Dynaudios I reviewed and praised for their level of detail.

This detail also was evident in the vocals. Marley imaged rock steady and focused. His voice was perfectly rendered with a very life-like presence. The mixed backup vocals extend widely but never became overbearing.

And then there are the drums. The beat of the bongos to the left and right of the stage weren't as distinct as I'd prefer, missing about an octave in their fundamental response. About all that was really present were the skin tones of the hand meeting the hide, yet that was enough to provide adequate division between the left and right — important since the fundamental can be filled in by a mono-driven subwoofer. When the big drum bangs in halfway through the track, the extension was again noted as lacking fundamental, but the kick drum and drum set were perfect and easily distinguished among all the other percussive instruments. Another impressive performance, and a good way to end my listening.

Score: 9/10

CONCLUSION

As I mentioned toward the beginning, the success of any great audio system starts with its drivers. Being no stranger to their product, this review was just more evidence to me that Morel is determined to

SUBJECTIVE SCORE CHART

	POINTS POSSIBLE	MOREL SUPREMO 6
Overall sound quality	20	19
Tonal balance (above 80Hz)	10	09
Low-frequency extension	10	07
Clarity at low volume	10	9.5
Clarity at high volume	10	9.5
Image stability	10	09
Listening fatigue (moderate volume)	10	10
Flexibility/ease of installation	20	13
Total subjective score	100	86

Ratings: Average performance is equal to 1/3 total points possible.





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