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TECHNOLOGY

Sound Lounger Adds To Gamers' Excitement

January 21, 2005

Kevin hunt - takes bug

Like Mountain Dew, snowboards and Hilary Duff, the Pyramat PM 550 Sound Lounger speaks to a specific generation.

Dude!

The PM 550 looks like a DayGlo orange-and-gray exercise mat co-opted from the local Curves with a funky, accordion-like headrest that has a speaker sticking out of each side. A third speaker inside the headrest kicks out the pounding thud-thud-thud bass of a subwoofer, vibrating the headrest and, ultimately, the head. Attach the PM 550, equal parts boombox and lounger, to anything from an Xbox to an iPod for some ultra-sensory down time.

Pyramat - no, it's not a prescription medication for acid reflux but a maker of "sound furniture" - envisions the PM 550 as an all-purpose entertainment system for people who spend idle hours sprawled on their butt.

Dude!

Disclaimer to teenage readers: That the PM 550 also managed to entertain, even amuse, this predominantly upright, still-young-at-heart evaluator should not in any way diminish the coolness factor of this product.

It's not quite surround sound, but the combination of speakers inches from the ears and the tactile effects of the subwoofer gives the gamer, in particular, a jolt of excitement. At \$150, the PM 550 is a lavish video-game accessory costing somewhere between a GameCube and Xbox video-game console. But you know how video-gamers are with accessories.

The PM 550 conceals its connections almost too well. A cluster at the foot of the lounger includes a set of audio inputs - for, say, a video-game console - a set of audio outputs intended for another PM 550 user and a connection for the power adapter. Closer to the headrest, hidden so well that it took me and a 13-year-old technical adviser almost 15 minutes to find it, is a wired hand remote that controls volume, bass and power on/off.

We set up the PM 550 on a wood floor with an Xbox, a TV and "Tony Hawk's Underground 2" and off we went. Pyramat (www.pyramat.com) provides a 10-foot pair of audio jacks and adapters for additional wiring. You should have no trouble setting up the PM 550 wherever you want. Remember, though, that the yellow video cord from a game-console like the Xbox connects to your TV and the red and white audio cords connect to the PM 550. (You'll need an additional, extra long video cord and adapter, provided by Pyramat, to hook up the game-console's video connection to your TV.)

Unless you're actually supine on it, the PM 550 sounds like a cheap boombox. But get down and dirty with the PM 550 and it's another story. Not only do you feel in the middle of the video-game action, but you can also feel it in the

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My technical adviser volunteered to give "Underground 2" a spin on the video skateboard maze and could ... not ... stop. "This is awesome," he said. "I can get a lot more into the game."

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OK, junior, now it's my turn. Soon, boom-chukka, I knew what he was talking about. Compared to listening to an video-game through a TV speakers or even a sound system, the immediacy reaches another level. Thankfully, the bass and the volume are controlled separately, so you can dial into the desired effect. The PM 550 will please gamers most. For music, TV and DVDs, it doesn't generate quite as much excitement.

The PM 550 isn't long enough to fit the entire body of most users, including teens, and the dangling remote might get crushed if left on the floor. Also, because your ears are so close to the speakers, be careful with the volume.

Fortunately, parents, there's an escape if things get too loud. Tell your little video gamer to use the headphone jack.

Loading Dock

If a TiVo mated with an iPod, you'd get something like DockTrax, a docking station due in the spring from Time Trax Technologies that will download Sirius Satellite Radio's digital programming directly to the iPod.

The DockTrax will use the TimeTrax Connect digital audio recording software now available for storing both Sirius and XM Satellite Radio programming on a computer's hard drive.

The DockTrax, introduced earlier this month at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, is expected to cost \$199 when it arrives this spring.

Kevin Hunt can be reached at hunt@courant.com.

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