

# Cambridge Audio TV2 Speaker Base Reviewed

By: [Sean Killebrew](#), August 17, 2015

HTR Product Rating	
Performance	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★

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the  
TV2

Page 1 | Page 2

Cambridge-TV2-thumb.jpg Cambridge Audio employs a special place in my heart, as its DacMagic has been a bulletproof staple of my home theater for years. There are now more feature-filled DACs on the market, but the Cambridge product has been like a loyal friend, and it's not going anywhere soon. Cambridge Audio, a British company that's been in the audio game since 1968, reminds me a bit of Apple in that the company consistently designs products that not only function well but are also easy on the eyes.

The subject of this review is the new Cambridge TV2 speaker base, which retails for a palatable \$299. In case you're wondering, a speaker base (aka soundbase or pedestal speaker) is a rectangular-box speaker that doubles as a TV stand, versus a soundbar that is just that--a long bar that's meant to be wall- or shelf-mounted near the TV. The TV2 is the entry-level speaker base in Cambridge's "TV Sound" category of products, which also includes a larger TV5; more details on the product line can be found [here](#). The TV2 measures a svelte 21.65 inches wide by 3.93 inches high by 13.38 inches deep. According to Cambridge, the TV2 will support up to a 46-inch TV, and its cabinet is designed to minimize vibration. In terms of drivers, the TV2 features two 2.25-inch balanced mode radiators and one 6.5-inch subwoofer. The balanced mode radiators, or BMRs, combine treble, midrange, and a small amount of bass in one driver, whereas a more traditional speaker design uses separate drivers for each. The biggest benefit of this technology, at least in my case, comes with sound dispersion. BMR speakers are said to have much wider sound dispersion than typical speakers; read on to find out how this played out in my listening sessions. If you'd like a bit more detail on BMR technology, Cambridge has a well-written explanation on its site, complete with a cool animated rendering of a BMR driver in action.

As with many of the newer soundbars and speaker bases,

features Bluetooth, so connecting your audio device is a straightforward affair. Also, the TV2 has the added benefit of being able to remember as many as eight devices via Bluetooth (although it can only connect to one at a time). Inputs include stereo RCA, optical digital, and a 3.5mm headphone jack.

## The Hookup

Soundbar and speaker-base products are designed first and foremost to solve problems--anything from cramped quarters to inadequate television speakers to aesthetic concerns and beyond. Some people simply don't want multiple speakers or the assorted components and cabling they require, especially in a secondary location. My wife is one of these people--mainly for aesthetic reasons, but also because our house is small. Our bedroom TV has down-firing speakers that reflect sound off the dresser over which the TV hangs. This has the undesired effect of piping whatever adult fare we might be watching directly into our five-year-old son's bedroom.

Enter the Cambridge TV2, a simple, great-sounding, and affordably priced solution that just happened to fit, albeit snugly, between our dresser and the wall-mounted TV. So, for our family, a speaker base can actually kill three birds with one stone: it sounds infinitely better than the TV speakers, it doesn't take up as much space as a traditional speaker setup, and the sound is directed where it should be--into the room.

Another advantage of a speaker base over a soundbar is the fact that the engineers have the cabinet space to



include a quality subwoofer. While there are a handful of soundbars on the market that have decent bass, you're going to pay a hell of a lot more than \$299 for them. That means, if you want an affordable soundbar with decent bass, you're going to need a dedicated sub, and subs are notoriously difficult to hide--not only due to their irregular size and shape, but due to the fact that placing them in a cabinet will often produce unwanted noise and/or vibration. This is why I find the speaker-base product category much more compelling than the soundbar category.

Okay, after that lengthy preamble, I'll explain the actual hookup of the TV2. Cambridge has included the requisite cabling in the box. Connecting it to your television is as simple as choosing either an optical digital or RCA connection and plugging it in; you also might need to go into your TV's sound menu and switch from internal to external speakers, as well as dictate what type of audio signal to want to pass to the soundbase (PCM, Dolby Digital, etc.). The built-in Bluetooth makes it easy to wirelessly connect a variety of audio devices; I paired my iPhone along with my wife's, and we were streaming music to the TV2 in very short order. Since I didn't feel like re-programming my universal remote, I used the included remote and found it to be intuitively laid out and just the right size.

### Performance

The experience of watching any TV content with the Cambridge--be it TV shows, sports, or movies--was leaps and bounds over the down-firing, cringe-inducing "speakers" that are built into my JVC TV. The TV2 even made it possible to watch Jaws in the bedroom. The issue for me with Jaws is that, if I pass by it while flipping channels, I have to watch it...period. Through the Cambridge, the music was infinitely more immersive, and the creaks of the Orca were much more visceral. The bass, a critical element of the Jaws theme, was palpable and convincing.

While watching Gone Girl, I noted that the Cambridge provided a game-changing sense of immersion in the form of much more discernible vocals, markedly deeper and more palpable bass, and the occasional instance of a facsimile of surround sound. In other words, about the best 300 bucks you're ever going to spend in terms of an upgrade over your TV speakers.

Moving on to music, I played the title track from Sublime with Rome's latest release, Sirens (BMG). This is an upbeat, engaging track, and I found the vocals to be clear



and well fleshed out, while the deep bass was a touch boomy, especially with the volume pushed. It's worth noting that, in a critical listening scenario, the volume is typically being pushed beyond real-world levels simply to provide a thorough appraisal. Mid-bass was pretty exceptional, especially given the price point and the muddy mid and low bass I've heard from similar products on the market.

Another issue with these types of products, especially when playing music, is that fact that the height of the bar as it relates to ear level can have a dramatic impact on the quality of the sound. In this case, it definitely had an impact, but not nearly as pronounced as it can be with other soundbars and speaker bases I've heard. This is especially critical in my setup, as my TV, and thus the speaker base, sit well above ear height. Cambridge is on to something with their BMR technology and the flexibility it offers in terms of placement and ear height.

Next up was Alabama Shakes' "Don't Wanna Fight No More" from their latest release, Sound & Color (ATO Records). Again I noticed a bit of bloat in the deeper bass; other than that, I was generally pleased with the sonic signature of the TV2. Lead singer Brittany Howard's vocals were clear, and the TV2 did a nice job





of reproducing the shrill screams she belts out at the beginning of the song. A poorly engineered product would induce rapid ear fatigue on this track, but it was a pleasure to listen to through the Cambridge, and I came back to it a couple of times.

Moving on to Anderson and Roe's instrumental of Michael Jackson's Billy Jean from their album When Words Fade (Steinway & Sons), I was pleasantly surprised by the soundstage created by the TV2. The piano strikes were visceral and playfully bouncy, despite what I found to be a generally warm sonic signature from the TV2. If you're a fan of instrumental music, you'll likely to enjoy what the Cambridge has to offer.

In playing the Black Eyed Peas' "Where Is the Love," I noted that deep bass was a bit tighter and better defined; but, at the end of the day, you can't expect a speaker base to blow your doors off with bass. That's simply not what it's designed for. It's designed to enhance your listening experience, whether it's with television or standalone music, and that it does with aplomb.

The bottom line is that this isn't a speaker you're going to use while hosting 40 people. However, in a mid-sized bedroom or smaller living room, it will intensify your enjoyment of television viewing and, at the same time, will provide a seamless and sonically pleasing experience when listening to music.

### The Downside

Well designed, aesthetically agreeable, sounds great, and priced less than €299...what downside? If you pushed me, I'd say that the bass gets a bit chubby when the volume is pushed on bass-heavy tracks. Also, there's an energy-saving feature that powers the unit

down when no signal is sent from the TV for a few seconds. While this feature is an ideal power-saver, in our DVR-driven world where pauses are exceedingly common, it also introduces a bit of a delay when said pause is disengaged. It takes a second or two for the Cambridge to fire back up. In watching what is a depressingly awful second season of True Detective (HBO), this issue forced me to rewind several times in order to catch the dialogue I'd missed. Beyond those two minor issues, there's really nothing negative to say about the sound quality or the design of the TV2.

### Comparison and Competition

While I wouldn't call them ubiquitous, speaker bases are starting to proliferate the way soundbars did some years back. While I consider the Cambridge somewhat of a no-brainer given its sound quality and price, everyone's taste is different, and everyone's setup is different. So, if you need to look elsewhere based on setup demands or simply in the interest of being thorough, then you might want to look at the product offerings from Bose, Pioneer, and ZVOX--all of whom have respectable entrants in the speaker-base realm that are similar to the Cambridge in terms of price and feature set. More specifically, the Bose Solo 15 TV Sound System is the closest product in the Bose line to the TV2; it retails for \$449 and includes a universal remote. ZVOX is one of the first companies to manufacture a speaker base, and the Soundbase.450 includes a welcome front-panel display and virtual surround sound technology, and it is priced the same as the Cambridge at \$299. Pioneer has also been dabbling in this product category lately, and its most comparable entrant would be the Andrew Jones-designed SP-SB03 Speaker Base, which has garnered some solid reviews and can be found on Amazon for \$219.

### Conclusion

While the soundbar/speaker-base space is maddeningly crowded and difficult to navigate, I like what Cambridge has done in terms of performance, design, and pricing. As stated earlier, the task of this type of product is to move you away from the pathetic speakers included in most televisions and into a more immersive, enjoyable listening experience...with minimal hassle. In that regard, and after careful consideration, you'd be hard pressed to do better than the Cambridge TV2 for \$299. These types of products are here to stay. They're simply too cheap and too convenient to fall out of favor. Does



that mean you have to ditch your home theater rig? Dear Lord, no...but for a bedroom, a guest room, a small living room, etc., it's a solution that's difficult to argue with, especially given the price-to-performance ratio of a model like the TV2. This is another win for Cambridge, and I recommend it with great enthusiasm.

Additional Resources

