

THE ULTIMATE 6X9 SHOOTOUT

I'm the first to admit that 6x9 speakers may not be the best option for users seeking ultimate sound quality from their audio gear. They do however, present some undeniably strong design points that have seen them become perhaps the most widely used audio upgrade component on the market. The weightiest of these being that their size and shape allow a pair to fit perfectly into a car's rear parcel shelf.

They also allow two things to happen; their 6x9 inch size endows them with the cone area of an eight-inch woofer, providing some worthwhile bass to be produced; plus they have enough area in the centre to mount one, two or three mids and tweeters to cover the rest of the frequency spectrum.

For this test, we set out to find as many 6x9s under \$300 on the market and pit them against each other in a few different ways. First of all, each speaker was installed as a direct factory replacement in our Honda Accord Euro. It has a pair of OEM Pioneer 6x9s in the rear parcel shelf and as far as factory stereo systems go, the in-dash 6-disc stacker, and front splits with tweeters on the dash make it more than acceptable. We would run the new 6x9s in place as rear fill from the head unit.

The next test would involve a little woodwork. We set out to create a level playing field for as many speakers as we could, so we constructed two large speaker boxes, each fitting eight speakers, so we could test eight pairs, one after the other. Each speaker was in a large, one cubic foot enclosure so a good level bass output could be tested.

Wiring up the 16 speakers at a time was a little messy, but was necessary as it enabled fast changes to the amplifier. Firing up some of our favourite sound quality test tracks and a few frequency sweep tones, we set out to measure the speakers' characteristics. Each speaker was scored in each environment and the two figures averaged. Read on for the results.

AS FAR AS BANG FOR YOUR BUCK CAR AUDIO GOES, YOU WOULD BE HARD PUSHED TO FIND A BETTER BASIC UPGRADE THAN FITTING A DECENT SET OF 6X9S. .

PHOTOS: MARK PAKULA

TEXT: MARK PAKULA

SHOOTOUT

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AXIS CX-694

Axis provided the cheapest speakers on the test, a good \$20 cheaper than the next cheapest; the Megavox's and the Jaycar's. Their sound however, was very average. Muffled and choked treble, weak bass, and poor mid range, they had nothing that impressed. Their appearance wasn't too bad, with the main cone gleaming with a metallic shine, but there is better buying for not many more dollars.

SCORE

PRICE: \$119 VALUE: 42%
SQ: 39% LOOKS: 72%

OVERALL:

48%

For: Appearance is decent, nice looking metallic cone.
Against: Very poor sound, not much cheaper.



SONY XS-GT6947X

Sony's Xplod range are all good looking speakers. Testing their four-way 6x9s, we were not expecting the best sound from them, as it's quite rare for multi-way speakers to perform at the top of the charts. Firing up our test CD, the sound from the Sony's was quite disappointing. The four-ways lacked bass and what treble there was, was rough and inaccurate. They sounded like they were tuned to sound best for FM radio and other poor quality recordings, so it may suit some buyers.

SCORE

PRICE: \$299 VALUE: 58%
SQ: 52.8% LOOKS: 73%

OVERALL:

59%

For: Good looking, sound optimised for FM and pop.
Against: Sound optimised for FM and pop, poor value.



KICKER KS 693

Another US company more known for their subs and amps than their speakers is Kicker. Their three-way KS693's looked to be an interesting speaker. Firing them up we were a little disappointed with the sound. The treble was rough and muffled, it lacked detail and had a poor image. Bass was adequate, but not overly exciting. At this price, we were expecting a little more.

SCORE

PRICE: \$259 VALUE: 68%
SQ: 53.8% LOOKS: 69%

OVERALL:

68%

For: Spec-wise they look fine, and not an ugly 6x9.
Against: Performance was only average.



EARTHQUAKE VTEK693

A big bold speaker, featuring a metallic cone, massive magnet and huge mid/tweeter assembly, we expected a big sound from these monsters. What resulted was not exactly big. Comparing them to the other models, the bass was noticeably weak, the mid was flat and the treble too casual. At the top end of the price scale, but nearer to the bottom for sound.

SCORE

PRICE: \$299 VALUE: 76%
SQ: 60.5% LOOKS: 77%

OVERALL:

76%

For: Heavy duty look and construction.
Against: Flat and unmusical sound.



CADENCE ZX691

The bright orange Cadence speakers have a noticeably dazzling look, with their chrome mid and tweeter and metallic orange cone. The grilles are equally striking and remain functional. The sound from the ZX691's was mid-field, good bass helped the score a little, but the mids and treble were only just on average. A very high sensitivity rating means they will perform well with the power of a standard head unit.

SCORE

PRICE: \$225 VALUE: 80%
SQ: 65% LOOKS: 81%

OVERALL:

77%

For: Look good, will perform well from head unit.
Against: Relaxed mid and treble lets them down.



ECLIPSE SE8495

The Eclipse speaker was one of the best sounding four-ways in the group. With nice mid and accurate treble, it was only the bass performance which let this speaker down a little. It was definitely lacking, but not as bad as the Axis model. They were also the lightest speaker on test, so if you care about weight in your car, these are a good option.

SCORE

PRICE: \$199 VALUE: 78%
SQ: 63% LOOKS: 79%

OVERALL:

78%

For: Good value, nice and light, decent sound.
Against: Bass was lacking a little.



JAYCAR RESPONSE CS-2328

Jaycar's range of two-ways have been popular for a long time, offering good value for money. In testing the current range we were expecting them to perform well and they certainly did that. However, many other speakers near their price point did even better. The titanium tweeters release significant detail, but never sound smooth. The Kevlar cone has a neat appearance but the supplied grilles are typical of the Response brand and make the speaker look cheaper than it is.

SCORE

PRICE: \$139 VALUE: 82%
SQ: 67% LOOKS: 76%

OVERALL:

78%

For: Good detailed sound, external crossovers.
Against: Lacked a little mid bass, cheap grilles.



KENWOOD KFC-M694.01E

Kenwood's four-ways are a very similar design to Pioneer's. Both are good looking, modern speakers. We were expecting most of the four-way designs to sound pretty average, however the Kenwood's sound was quite acceptable. A highlight was the bass output, easily matching the better American speakers. Elsewhere the Kenwood's didn't disappoint, but didn't exactly get the feet tapping.

SCORE

PRICE: \$199 VALUE: 81%
SQ: 67.5% LOOKS: 76%

OVERALL:

80%

For: Good looking, good value, great bass.
Against: Tranquil midrange and treble.



LIGHTNING AUDIO S2.69.2

US brand Lightning Audio put out some awesome products and their cool blue 6x9s are a fine speaker at a good price. With some of the best bass output on test, they were only let down by a slightly weak mid range. Almost as good looking as the Rockford's, the Lightning's are a good alternative to many more popular brands.

SCORE

PRICE: \$249 VALUE: 80%
SQ: 64.5% LOOKS: 66%

OVERALL:

81%

For: Good looks, good sound and good price.
Against: Mid range was a little lacking.



CROSSFIRE SX69M

Crossfire's 6x9s are marine speakers, meaning they can be used on boats and in wet environments. This is actually good for many cars where the sealing is not as good as it could be. Having a sexy, stainless steel basket and all white components, their appearance is attractive, if a little different. If you have a white themed interior, these 6x9s will suit your car perfectly. They performed quite well, with good bass and mids, but the treble was lacking a little refinement. Still, they're a good speaker at a good price.

SCORE

PRICE: \$199 VALUE: 82%
SQ: 68% LOOKS: 78%

OVERALL:

81%

For: Water resistant, stainless steel baskets.
Against: Treble wasn't perfect.



MTX THUNDER 6903

MTX's 6x9s sound like their subs: big, loud, and typically American. In this case it's not a bad thing as 6x9s are quite often meant to sit on the back shelf and pump out tunes as hard as they can. MTX's 6903 do sound decent with massive bass and good mid range and treble. At \$239 they are good value for a good looking and sounding speaker. Their design is a little different with the small mid and tweeter mounted centrally and on an angle to direct their sound into the car's cabin.

SCORE

PRICE: \$239 VALUE: 79%
SQ: 65.2% LOOKS: 78%

OVERALL:

82%

For: Big bass, interesting design.
Against: Treble lets them down slightly.



PIONEER TS-A69815

Another good-looking four-way, Pioneer's 6x9s had a quality look and feel to them. Grilles were attractive and the bright blue cone looked the part. Sound-wise there were OK, not offensive in any way. They lacked a little bass compared to some of the others and the mid range was also a little weak, but overall the sound was quite balanced. They also played quite loud thanks to their high sensitivity rating.

SCORE

PRICE: \$259 VALUE: 72%
SQ: 61% LOOKS: 82%

OVERALL:

82%

For: Good looking, play nice and loud with little power.
Against: Bass and mid was a little soft.



JL AUDIO TR690-TXI

JL Audio make some of the world's best subs and their W7 range has been raved about since its release, so we were expecting good performance from the 6x9s. In testing they performed well, with a nice balanced sound not overly strong in any one area, but not poor in any area either. They look like an average speaker with little flash and bling, but perform better than the average. A nice safe sound that will be good with all types of music, the JLs are good buying.

SCORE

PRICE: \$239 VALUE: 74%
SQ: 64.8% LOOKS: 75%

OVERALL:

82%

For: Balanced sound, clean and simple appearance.
Against: Power handling lower than most.



ALPINE SPR-69LP

Alpine have one of the best names in car audio. They have a huge legion of fans, and some of the best gear you can buy. Their speakers in the past have been a little hot and cold, some great products and some average ones. Their new Type R 6x9s are definitely in the hot category. They have an amazingly detailed top end from their coax tweeter. The bass is a little mild compared to some models, but good enough for most. A very good looking speaker, the Alpine scores highly in the appearance stakes.

SCORE

PRICE: \$299 VALUE: 78%
SQ: 67.5% LOOKS: 86%

OVERALL:

83%

For: Strong, detailed treble very good looking.
Against: Bass was weak, top of the price range.



CLARION SRR6985

Japanese audio company Clarion have recently stepped up their range of speakers. They have some great products in their folio and their new Pro-Audio 6x9s are amongst them. The appealing design suits modern interiors with lots of silver and chrome. The sound was impressive across the frequency spectrum with terrific mid range and very good treble. Well priced, good looking and a good performer, the Clarions are deserving of their top ten finish.

SCORE

PRICE: \$239 VALUE: 83%
SQ: 72.1% LOOKS: 85%

OVERALL:

83%

For: Modern design, great overall sound.
Against: A few cheaper speakers scored higher.



JBL GT0936E

One of the world's biggest and best-known speaker companies, JBL, rarely make a bad product. Their latest GTD range of speakers perform quite well and are very good value compared to the rest of the American brands. Their 6x9s are a good looking speaker, though the mid/tweeter assembly looks a little cheap with its matte silver finish - but the rest of the speaker is very attractive. They had a good sound to them, a little more laid back than the other US speakers, but with nearly the best bass out of all models tested.

SCORE

PRICE: \$179 VALUE: 89%
SQ: 67.2% LOOKS: 81%

OVERALL:

83%

For: Great value, cheapest US brand, awesome bass.
Against: Mid and treble a little laid back.



ROCKFORD FOSGATE P1692C

Rockford's 6x9's win the prize for the most attractive speaker. Blingy, yet classy, they scream quality from every angle. The grilles are also a very nice design and will look great installed in any car. The sound from the Rockford's was very decent, they scored very highly in treble and bass and did well in the midrange too. A very forward and bright sound which never seemed to get tiring which is a good thing. Second best behind the Soundstream from the US brands, the RFs are a very good speaker.

SCORE

PRICE: \$289 VALUE: 78%
SQ: 71.7% LOOKS: 88%

OVERALL:

84%

For: Best looking in test, great forward sound.
Against: Mid range not as smooth as others.



BLAUPUNKT VELOCITY VXC690

Blaupunkt's Velocity 6x9s are a nice speaker. They come with some thick wiring, which comprised the external crossover. Well priced, well built and good-looking, the Blaupunkts are safe buying. Their sound is typical Blaupunkt (a little laid back with the treble not as pronounced as many others), and though it's not overbearing, it is smooth while remaining detailed. This may suit you and your system perfectly, especially if you have any other Blaupunkt speakers in your car as the speakers will sound uniform.

SCORE

PRICE: \$169 VALUE: 88%
SQ: 66% LOOKS: 82%

OVERALL:

83%

For: Neat looking, dual connectors.
Against: Smooth treble is a little weak.



JVC CS-FX6902

A very good-looking speaker: JVC's Kevlar hybrid carbon cone is visually appealing. The titanium central dome tweeter is protected by a crossover, which is built into the wiring and features connectors for both drivers. The simple grilles complete a neat and clean package suitable for most car interiors. The sound from the JVCs was of a high standard; very good treble, if a little bright, but not objectionable. Bass was also very good; it remained tight through the entire range, easily matching most other speakers.

SCORE

PRICE: \$249 VALUE: 86%
SQ: 74.4% LOOKS: 83%

OVERALL:

85%

For: Good looking, great sound and well priced.

Against: Treble not silky smooth, but still very good.



FUSION FES-692

The Fusion offering is excellent value for money. They come in a nice box with their trademark green and black coloured wires (and a sticker), and are a two-way design with a movable central tweeter. The green monsters from NZ are very nice sounding units and they had our review panel tapping their feet to the sweet musical sounds they were producing. With nice balanced sound, even and detailed treble, great bass and good volume, the Fusions did very little wrong.

SCORE

PRICE: \$159 VALUE: 90%
SQ: 76% LOOKS: 82%

OVERALL:

88%

For: Excellent value for money and great sound.

Against: Green colours may not suit everyone.



DLS 960

Well known (in the SQ ranks) Swedish speaker brand DLS have a few models of 6x9s, right up to a \$499 two-way. We tested their \$299 three-way 960. They look very business like but have all the right design features; a silk dome mid range, clear tweeter, foam seal and a 12dB/octave crossover. The sound from the DLS would please many a listener. They have an amazingly smooth-yet-detailed mid-range and very good bass performance. Their treble was accurate, but a little recessed compared to some other models.

SCORE

PRICE: \$299 VALUE: 82%
SQ: 77.2% LOOKS: 78%

OVERALL:

88%

For: Best mid range on test, excellent overall sound.

Against: Treble was a little recessed



MEGAVOX MGX-990 TURBO

The biggest surprise of the test came from little known company Megavox. Reading the box: Power handling 350W RMS. That is about four times the average of the other speakers in the shootout. Listening showed they had a very good sound indeed. The bass was definitely a highlight; tight, detailed, and loud. Feeding each speaker 260 Watts, we were just amazed. They remained clean and clear all the way to 10. They just cranked with no strain. Unbeatable at the price, the Megavox's are the best bang for buck.

SCORE

PRICE: \$139 VALUE: 92%
SQ: 77% LOOKS: 73%

OVERALL:

89%

For: Power handling and amazing SQ for the money.

Against: Look a little cheap, but purposeful.



SOUNDSTREAM SST6.9

Soundstream's speakers amazed us from the first note they played. In terms of raw sound quality they were head and shoulders above anything else. Silky smooth treble, detailed and even mid range, accurate, tight, deep and loud bass, they did everything right when it came to pumping out tunes. The gloss black cone and swivel tweeter looks simple and classy, while their grilles are definitely noticeable - if you don't mind spiders. When it comes to playing music, the SST6.9's were unbeatable in this test.

SCORE

PRICE: \$299 VALUE: 86%
SQ: 83.5% LOOKS: 85%

OVERALL:

90%

For: Amazing sound, better than the rest.

Against: Grilles are a little offensive.

“THE SOUNDSTREAM'S DID EVERYTHING RIGHT WHEN IT CAME TO PUMPING OUT TUNES.”



“PRICE WAS NOT THE BIGGEST DETERMINING FACTOR ON HOW WELL THEY PERFORMED.”

ASSESSMENT

What surprised us most about this mega test, was how good some of these speakers actually performed. All of them were significantly better than the OEM pair found in the Accord, so it is definitely worthwhile dropping the odd \$200 on your favourite brand as an upgrade.

Listening to them all in the closed testing room, using quality audio components, highlighted the fact that speaker technology is progressing. Some of these speakers, mounted in a good solid box, would rival similarly priced home hi-fi speakers.

The next biggest surprise, was that their price wasn't the biggest single determining factor on how well they performed. Some mid range and low priced speakers, did sound better to our ears, in our environment, than some of the highest priced models.

Also interesting was that most of the top ten, but not all, were simple, two way designs. While 3 and 4 way designs look more appealing to some, and their power handling is generally higher than most 2 ways, a 3 or 4 way 6x9 speakers audio performance is generally worse than a 2 way.

Of course there are always exceptions to the rules, as the DLS and Megavox (both 3 way designs) show. But what was clear, is that none of the 4 way designs, finished higher than 11th.

It's also worth noting that each brand sent just one model. They may have other versions or different designs still within our set budget, that perform better than the model they sent us for testing. And this test is in no way a reflection of any other equipment in their range.

The Soundstreams really did have the best sound - they were just a sweet speaker that sounded heavenly playing anything at all. Two other brands really stood out; the Fusions, with their well priced and neat looking speakers, sounded very musical and had the listening panel taping their feet, not worrying about how they looked or measured, just that the sound was good; and finally, the Megavox's. It was a shock to see an affordable, average looking speaker, crank out such clean sound at the highest levels in the test, with so much poise and clarity. If it wasn't for the amazing Soundstream's they would have finished first in this test. ■ *ESM*

SPECIFICATIONS

Rank	Brand	Model	Price	RMS Power	Peak Power	Sensitivity	Freq	Distributor
1	Soundstream	SST6.9	\$299.00	150 W	NA	90dB	45Hz-22kHz	Soundstream
2	Megavox	MGX-990 turbo	\$139.00	350 W	700 W	93dB	45Hz-23kHz	Audio Extra
3	DLS	960	\$299.00	80 W	120 W	93dB	50Hz-20kHz	Cartoys
4	Fusion	FES-692	\$159.00	NA	260 W	94dB	55Hz-22kHz	Fusion
5	JVC	CS-FX6902	\$249.00	NA	300 W	NA	NA	JVC Australia
6	Blaupunkt	VXC690	\$169.00	80 W	240 W	92dB	35Hz-22kHz	Bosch
6	Rockford	PI692C	\$289.00	100 W	200 W	90dB	50Hz-22kHz	A-Z Trading
8	JBL	GT0936e	\$179.00	100 W	300 W	91dB	50Hz-21kHz	Convoy
8	Clarion	SRR6985	\$239.00	60 W	280 W	NA	NA	Clarion Australia
8	Alpine	SPR-69LP	\$299.00	55 W	275 W	89dB	30Hz-30kHz	Alpine
11	JL Audio	TR690-Txi	\$239.00	60 W	NA	90.5dB	53Hz-22kHz	Custom Car Sound
11	Pioneer	TS-A69815	\$259.00	80 W	420 W	93dB	25Hz-33kHz	Pioneer Australia
11	MTX	Thunder 6903	\$239.00	100 W	200 W	92dB	42Hz-20kHz	Custom Car Sound
13	Crossfire	SX69M	\$199.00	NA	150 W	NA	55Hz-22kHz	Audio Extra
13	Lightning	SE.69.2	\$249.00	75 W	225 W	NA	NA	A-Z Trading
16	Kenwood	KFC-M6940ie	\$199.00	80 W	400W	93dB	25Hz-30kHz	Kenwood Australia
17	Jaycar	Response CS-2328	\$139.95	80 W	NA	93.5dB	NA	Jaycar
17	Eclipse	SEB495	\$199.00	75W	220 W	93dB	50Hz-40kHz	Eclipse
19	Cadence	ZX691	\$225.00	75 W	150 W	95dB	35Hz-22kHz	Zylyx
20	Earthquake	VTEK693	\$299.00	NA	700 W	NA	50Hz-22kHz	AMG Audio
21	Kicker	KS 693	\$259.00	90 W	180 W	92dB	30Hz-21kHz	Custom Car Sound
22	Sony	XS-GT6947X	\$299.00	100 W	400 W	93dB	25Hz-32kHz	Sony Australia
23	Axis	CX-694	\$119.00	NA	200 W	NA	40Hz-22kHz	Audio Extra