

The Skiing Ninja Crossover Upgrade For The Onix x-ls Speakers

— Jeff Dorgay



At the end of last year, we reviewed the x-ls speakers from AV-123 that cost a mere \$219 a pair! We gave them one of our eight exceptional value awards and proclaimed them one of the best values in hifi, period. While I still stand behind this statement, the Skiing Ninja folks have taken this to a whole new level of performance.

Skiing Ninja consists of Sean Parque, (the support manager at AV123) and his wife Sarah. Danny Ritchie of GR Designs helped with the design of the upgrade, which is fortuitous because he was a partner on the design of the original x-ls.



There are two components to the upgrade, the No-Res kit which adds more damping to the inside of the cabinet and the crossover upgrade. Go to the SN website to see the different combinations available (www.skiingninja.com/xseries.html) as there are six variations on the theme. You can see that the capacitors are upgraded to Sonicap models along with better resistors, wire and Alpha Core 16ga copper foil inductors, as well as a few other Ninja tricks.

For the hard core DIY person, the best value is to buy these in complete kit form and use your existing crossover board. The Ninja Master Crossover and NoRes kit is the most expensive upgrade and will set you back \$292. This includes the Master Crossovers completely assembled and the NoRes kit, all with complete instructions. Taking your time, the assembly should take about 1 hour per speaker. Sean was kind enough to send me a pair of upgraded speakers so that I could directly compare them to the stock pair of x-ls speakers that are in my garage system.

You might think that I've really lost my mind telling you to spend 300 bucks to upgrade a pair of 219 dollar speakers, but you would be missing the point. The cabinetry in the x-ls is as good as any pair of 1200 dollar speakers I've seen from either side of the world, so that part of the equation is covered. Secondly, the drivers in the x-ls are quite good, so upgrading the crossovers and giving these excellent cabinets a bit more damping is not such a bad idea.

Matter of fact, I suggest that if you are taking these speakers apart to upgrade the crossovers, you are crazy not to spring for the extra 60 bucks and get the No Res kit. Like George, my mechanic says, 'While we've got the hood up, we might as well...'

While I'm spending your money, if you don't have a pair of beefy stands, I suggest getting a pair; I used these speakers with a pair of filled Sound Anchor stands and they really improve the bass response. So, total with speakers, stands and upgrades you are still under 1000 dollars.

The Proof is in The Pudding, I Mean Listening

I gave the upgraded speakers about 100 hours of play before I began to listen critically, but right away I knew the ninjas were on to something ver good. Because I am obsessed and didn't want to have the system be responsible for any part of the sound, I compared both speakers on my main reference system. I had them about four feet out from the wall and used a pair of Zu Libtec speaker cables. This gave me a great read on the ultimate performance of both speakers.

The Ninja upgrades are significantly better in EVERY way. \$300 gets you a speaker that is definitely twice as good as what you started with. Just being handy with a screwdriver and a soldering iron saves you the equivalent of another 3-500 bucks at retail and if you are an audiophile on a tight budget, this is a great thing.

It's all in the details. The original x-ls speakers are quite good, but the upgraded ones are really serious speakers. I am never one to embrace the giant killer philosophy, but this is as close as it gets. I think that you would be hard pressed to find much to compare with these speakers in their upgraded form, even at the \$1000 price point. (maybe even a little more)

The biggest thing you will notice once you have a few hours on the upgraded speakers is how much more open and transparent they are. Thanks to these upgrades, you can hear a lot further into a recording, it's as if you had blankets over the speakers before! I got nostalgic and spent a lot of time listening to some of my favorite audiophile classics here. Dire Straits, Supertramp, Pink Floyd, Steely Dan, it was a blast. I listened to a lot of oldies that I've heard a million times; perfect for a close evaluation.

I also noticed a big performance jump at both ends of the frequency spectrum. Bass went down a bit deeper and was more solid and well defined. The highs were more extended and quite a bit smoother. These really are fantastic little speakers!

Back to Earth

I know what you are thinking, that this is all great but how much of these upgrades will I be capable of hearing in a modest system? Quite a bit actually. After forming my opinions, I moved both sets of speakers back into a more real world system with a Prima Luna Prologue One integrated and an ONIX CD player. I tried a few other combinations, with the Valve Audio Predator and the new McIntosh MA6300 integrated so that I could see how these speakers worked with tube, solid-state and hybrid amplification.

Flying colors everytime! I even hooked them up to my daughter's system that consists of a Pioneer SX-737 and a Pioneer 563 universal disc player. Even at this level, there was more than enough difference to justify buying this upgrade!

Conclusion

If you are looking for a great pair of inexpensive speakers that offer high performance and dashing good looks, look no further. If you already have a pair of x-ls speakers and have been thinking about an upgrade, the Skiing Ninja Master Crossovers and No Res treatment is as good as it gets. I strongly feel that if you make this upgrade to your speakers, you can upgrade your components quite a way before you feel that you have outgrown these speakers. I only have one suggestion for the SN team: Offer a better pair of binding posts for another 25-50 bucks! This is the only weak link of these speakers.

The Skiing Ninja upgrades for the x-ls speakers get my highest recommendation; this is truly great value in hifi! Don't forget to add on one of these cool Skiing Ninja pint glasses to enjoy your favorite brew with.

MANUFACTURER

Skiing Ninja

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