



MOREL DOTECH OVATION 6

**WHEN PERFORMANCE
SURPASSES PRICE**

MSRP: \$499.95

TEXT & PHOTOS
CASEY THORSON

MOREL IS NO STRANGER TO THE PAGES OF CA&E. Moreover, the company is no stranger to praise. Since the brand reinvented itself stateside just a few years back, we've had the opportunity to run several of the company's products through our daunting tests only to report back to with enthusiasm. Heck, we liked one set so much that it landed Morel a spot in our coveted "Best Of" for 2005. In retrospect, though, all that praise by our evaluators was for products in the upper echelon of Morel's lineup, such as the \$500 Supremo tweeters and component sets retailing for a wallet-cleansing \$900 and \$1,150. So I guess the question needs to be asked: "Can Morel build an affordable system that performs?"

I was recently sent the Morel Dotech Ovation 6 component set; a set I hope will answer my question. With a price tag considerably lower than those aforementioned Morel components at a mere (by comparison) \$499.95, there's no doubt I'm interested to hear them. So let's get to it.

IMPRESSIONS

Morel really knows how to make an appearance. The box for the Dotech Ovation 6 is simple, artsy, and sophisticated with its natural, light brown exposed corrugate packing. A 1" x 1" Morel logo adorns its topside while the front, rear, left and right panels get a 1/2" x 4" (approximately) imprinted paper badge with the system's model number. There is nothing cheap about the looks and, at this point, I would hope that's an indication of the product inside.

After running my hand over the corrugated box a couple of times, I lifted the lid and started pulling out the components. The Dotech Ovation 6 is your typical 2-way system using a pair of 6 1/2" woofers, a couple of 28mm (1.1") tweeters, and a crossover duo. Also found was a pair of modern, highly unique woofer grilles stamped out of a nice thick-gauge steel with half-oval cutouts adorning one large circle in the center and a goody bag of mounting hardware and accessories that even includes gaskets for the woofers.

Morel took a giant leap in the crossover design for their products, at least in terms of cosmetics. I've been told that they look like little spacecraft, but personally I think they have a more alien-being appearance, resembling giant eyes with the two clear acrylic oval windows snapped into the top-side of each crossover. The case itself is nearly a half oval made of black injection-molded ABS plastic and furthers the

impression of an alien. But that's where the sci-fi ends. Protruding from the straight edge of the case is a red masked pcb holding the crossover components and barrier terminal strip. The woofer gets a good size air core inductor making up the -6dB filter, and the tweeter side uses a smaller iron core inductor and Mylar capacitor for -12dB filtering along with two resistors for tweeter attenuation. The tweeter level can be selected between +3, 0, and -3dB by removing the left window to access to the jumper.

In their own right, the 6 1/2" woofers in this set are just as unique as the crossovers, but not as foreign in look. Somehow the engineers at Morel figured out how to stamp a basket out of steel to some serious depth. Honestly, I can't recall ever seeing metal stretched in a manner such as this — the frame fully encompasses the motor! Sure, you can cast a basket like this, but this was once a flat piece of metal, and a thick gauge at that! Morel calls it a unified one-piece chassis and claims it was "aerodynamically designed to reduce sound reflection distortion and mounting depth." Behind the cone are nine semi-circular holes punched through the metal and perforations on the bottom to vent the motor.

Under the hood, so to speak, horsepower comes from a double-magnet drive motor. This creates the force to move the large, yet lightweight 2 1/8" diameter Hexatech aluminum voice coil that's

wrapped around an aluminum former. Using such a large coil format means that the ferrite magnets actually reside on the interior to save space. Morel also uses their unique C.A.R filter (Controlled Acoustic Resistance), which is an acoustic material located to the inside of the magnetic rings (and behind the dust cap) and is said to improve acoustical accuracy and provide greater cone control in infinite baffle environments (i.e., the doors of your car).

The woofer cone is made of a composite cellulose fiber that is paper based. It has a nice metallic look to it and a matching dome dust cap of a different material. Morel uses an NBR rubber for the surround with additional compliance handled by a poly/cotton spider.

High frequencies for this set are handled by Morel's MT-12 Acuflex-coated soft dome tweeter. This compact driver uses a neodymium magnet and a large 28mm (1.1") voice coil that is said to allow for a wide frequency response and lower resonance point. The driver is situated in a plastic housing that incorporates a permanent phase alignment plug sitting above the dome, the latter also acts handily as a grille. The tweeter's plastic housing press-fits into different mounting options, two of which are surface mount and one, flush

mount. If additional protection is desired, a mesh grille is also provided that simply press-fits into a small gap around the driver in any of the three mounting options. Overall, it's an impressive design with thoughtful engineering behind it.

MANUAL

The manual is a 4-page affair that uses a single sheet of paper folded in half. Words are few, but the pictures are detailed and plentiful. Just about every application scenario is covered for mounting the woofers and tweeters, connecting the system with or without an amplifier, and tweeter attenuation instructions for the crossover, complete with graph. The back page includes an entire list of parameters for each individual Dotech Ovation speaker model and even crossover specifications. Unfortunately no warranty information included, but a call to Morel's U.S. headquarters informed me that it is three years, dealer installed, and one year, consumer installed.

SETUP

As I mentioned earlier, the Dotech Ovation 6 is a typical 2-way set. In order to properly fit the components, I made new baffles for my well-damped, 2.25ft³ test enclosures. The manual thoughtfully pro-

vides cutout dimensions for both the woofer and the tweeter (flush mount), so the new baffles were a snap. I mounted each pair of drivers within an inch of each other, with the tweeter above the woofer.

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). Channel A was used for the left components and channel C for the right, providing ample headroom while limiting crosstalk. The channels were level-matched within 0.05 volts. No addition crossovers or processing were used.

I finished up my setup with some basic listening to determine the best position for the test cabinets, verify phase and to adjust the passive crossovers accordingly. Yielding the best results, I ended up with the enclosures nearly on-axis in a close proximity of my seating position and the tweeter attenuation circuit of the crossovers set to -3dB. You read that correctly, -3dB. One would naturally think that the 0dB setting would be the proper match, but the midranges were a little tame by comparison to the tweeters at that level. The lower setting proved to be an excellent compromise to get that desired linear response.



LISTENING

FOLK

REBECCA PIDGEON
 "SPANISH HARLEM"

Simply put, this Chesky Records recording of Rebecca Pidgeon singing "Spanish Harlem" is a model audiophile soundtrack. Pidgeon's vocals are lust-worthy, real and extremely revealing. When listening to this track there should be a fine sense of transparency, good depth and instruments should be simple to localize. Rather than ending this paragraph with a conclusion, I'll give it to you here: the Dotech Ovation 6 fared rather well. Pidgeon's vocals were well focused side-to-side, but had a tendency to elevate ever so slightly with higher pitches. Her airy tone was consistent and smooth in all but her lowest octaves where a small amount of resonance could be heard. The offensive tones were also perceived during certain notes of the piano. The symphonic violins, one left, one right, were in perfect tone and easy to differentiate, even when they overlapped. The shaker to the starboard side of the stage was just as admirable, easy to locate, and each shake was distinguished from the next. However, a couple items were less than ideal. Character and resonant details of the stand-up bass did not engage me, and there was a certain amount of depth and transparency missing from the soundstage. Even though those aspects were weak, this track played back easily on the ears. **Score: 7.5/10**

JAZZ INSTRUMENTAL

MONTE ALEXANDER
 "SWEET GEORGIA BROWN"

With Monte Alexander on the piano, a full horn section, and two sets of drummers and two basses, this rendition of "Sweet Georgia Brown" is filled with energy and excitement. In this audition, the image boundaries of each instrument were clearly defined, yet I still perceived the layers of the instruments as a bit shallow.

However, the tonal balance and overall purity in this performance impressed me. The horn section portrayed itself through the Dotechs with spectacular rasp, and the near perfect placement of the individual horns that started hard left to just right of center stage. Each drum set clearly defined itself right down to the location of every snare, tom and cymbal, but the garbled hum of Alexander during certain low spots was played without any real presence. The Dotechs also had a difficult time distinguishing the low notes of both basses when competing with the drum set, getting lost at times. However, the 4-second acoustic bass solo toward the end was commendable.

Score: 8.5/10

CONTEMPORARY

STING "FRAGIL"

Even though I'm not fluent in the language, I find myself constantly drawn to this track. The Portuguese version of "Fragile" by Sting has a gentle, harmonious nature about it. It's been said that when you listen to music recorded in a language foreign to you, you tend to pay closer attention to the finer elements that make up the composition of the song, not the words. In that respect, "Fragil" certainly works.

This recording has a fabulous ambiance about it and renders the feeling of a large, vacant room that should be evident in the reverb of the acoustic guitar and the airiness in Sting's vocals. Resolution of space by the Ovation 6 was superb, especially with the acoustic guitar, providing good detail of the room's width and depth. Sting's vocals were not as impressive — yes, they imparted a perception of space to the immediate environment, but there was excessive sibilance in Sting's upper vocal range. This exaggeration was also accompanied by an image that was less than stable, moving up and down with the elevated tone of his voice. I noticed a similar occurrence with instruments — those

playing within range of the tweeter were perceived with greater height in the soundstage. I can't help but think that this could be a phase error complicated by the -12dB highpass tweeter crossover and -6dB lowpass for the woofer. Whatever the case, it was more of a minor annoyance than a large concern.

Other instruments were clearly defined and sharply focused, such as the cowbell and shaker. The transparency in this recording was better than in the previous tracks, and thus the metal drums toward the rear of the soundstage were well noted but a little dry in the response. **Score: 7/10**

ALTERNATIVE

NEW RADICALS
 "CRYING LIKE A CHURCH ON MONDAY"

The dynamics of "Crying Like a Church on Monday" make it a very demanding track and one I like to use to reveal the changes in a system's response at different levels. As well, artist Ronan Keating's broad vocal range and somewhat off-pitch style can be trying when not played back with authenticity. This is one of those songs you don't have to listen to several times to know that the system is reproducing it properly, or improperly.

I started the audition at a subdued listening level to get a feel of the system. Tonal balance was very nice and the distinct image of each instrument and Keating were well defined. There was an ever-so-slight harshness to the upper range of Ronan's vocals, but the piano, percussions and guitar were rock solid.

Raising the volume to a moderate level, there were some changes to note. Keating's vocals became less concentrated and elevated above the soundstage as his range peaked. The slight harshness heard in his vocals at the lower level revealed itself even more. To this I also noted several strikes to a cymbal or hi-hat by the percussionist that jumped out, causing slight disarray in the perception of the drum set. To me it

sounded as if there might be a minor quibble in the response of the tweeter an octave or so above the crossover point.

Aside from my nitpicking the tonal balance of the system, the rest of the composition was very likable with good articulation amongst the remaining instruments. It's also worth noting that the Dotechs performed admirably with a good dose of power, better than some systems costing twice as much.

Score: 7.5/10

REGGAE

ZIGGY MARLEY AND THE MELODY MAKERS
 "KEEP MY FAITH"

I absolutely love this track! Its composition is simple and yet it is very ubiquitous. The track starts with a harmonica, left, and an electric guitar followed by a shaker to the opposite side. Seventeen seconds in, the trio is joined by the first of a complex set of drums whose arrangement is left and right of the soundstage. This is one of the few tracks I've found with a low bass array that is truly stereo — and a difficult proposition for speakers to play with absolute definition. As the track moves forward, the bass gets complicated with the introduction of a closely mic'd kick drum and rather large wood drum with a prominent composure; all the while Ziggy and the Melody Makers keep verse.

Capturing the exact location of the various drums was a bit of a struggle with the Dotechs. Most of the lowest frequency information was centralized, although some of the skin tones were present and accurate in their setting. Much of this could be attributed to the dry and meager low-end response of the woofers. To be fair, the 6 1/2-inchers are not subwoofers and they do an excellent job in their primary function. As a matter of fact, the resolution of the harmonica and shaker, and detail in Ziggy's vocals were pretty spectacular. With the right sub, this system would be fabulous.

Score: 7/10



CONCLUSION

The Morel Dotech Ovation 6 is an absolute must for anyone looking to explore the finer element of sound reproduction. This system does just about everything right with only minor issues to speak of. And though the retail of \$499.95 is not pocket change, it's worth every penny and more. Kudos to Morel for bringing a mix of art with design to a product that is priced right! 🍀

SUBJECTIVE SCORE CHART

	POINTS POSSIBLE	MOREL DOTECH OVATION 6
Overall sound quality	20	16
Tonal balance (above 80Hz)	10	07
Low frequency extension	10	06
Clarity at low volume	10	09
Clarity at high volume	10	07
Image stability	10	07
Listening fatigue (moderate volume)	10	09
Flexibility/Ease of installation	20	16
Total subjective score	100	77

Ratings: Average performance is equal to 1/2 total points possible.



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