



*You're a talented speaker designer who suddenly finds a wealth of resources to hand. Do you blow out on a deep-end design of superfi silliness, or buckle down on a competitive lower-end product? Epos plumped for the latter, and Malcolm Steward approves.*

Epos was virtually a one-man operation when it launched the ES14 loudspeakers. Five years on, Epos Acoustics is now incorporated into the TGI empire, having been acquired by one of the conglomerate's mainstays, the large and successful loudspeaker manufacturer, Mordaunt-Short. It was a canny move for all concerned. The group acquired an innovative and respected designer, Robin Marshall, and Epos has benefited from a level of resources of which it could previously only have dreamt.

The way was paved for Epos to develop a new speaker to complement the ES14. Most pundits would probably have guessed that Epos would take the opportunity to unleash some sort of 'statement' design – to put it firmly into the super league of speaker manufacturers. Not Epos. Here's how Marshall puts it: "I think good products at low prices that everyone can afford are much more exciting. I'm more intrigued by making hi-fi products that will please a lot of people than producing exotic stuff which only a handful of customers in the world will think are wonderful."

Although the new £300 speaker is an Epos speaker through and through, there are significant differences between the ES14 and ES11. For example, the ES14 has a conventional Medite cabinet, its side panels stiffened by means of a tensioned steel rod.

The junior speaker relies on far more sophisticated technology to reduce unwanted enclosure resonance. The front baffle has an integral bass driver chassis of injection-moulded plastic, with four steel rods connecting front baffle to a similarly-formed rear panel. Medite top and side walls are sandwiched between, the resulting structure proving very stiff and inert.

Like its predecessor, the ES11 has customer built drivers, and a minimal crossover network. The bass unit is directly connected to the input, a series capacitor rolls off the signal to the tweeter. The mid-bass range is handled by a 150mm polymer cone with a high-power voice coil, and treble by a 25mm aluminium dome tweeter with rear cavity loading and ferrofluid cooling. The cabinet is reflex ported.

The opaque plastic grilles are anything but acoustically transparent. They *must* be removed to listen, an idea that will please those with inquisitive pets or children.

The complete ES11 measures 375mm high, 200mm wide and 250mm deep, and is intended for use on its own open-frame steel stands (£80), placed reasonably close to a rear wall for best results.

I used the ES11 with a variety of front end components, including a Linn LP12 Pink-Linnk with ARO tonearm, and Linn Troika, Kiseki Blackheart and Ortofon MC5000 cartridges for LP, with an Arcam Delta 170 CD transport and Black Box 2 DAC for Compact Disc. Amplification came from Naim – a 52 preamp and 250 power amp, and an original Nait integrated. Speaker cable was Naim NAC A5 as recommended by Epos.



The ES11 can be bi-wired, but Robin Marshall candidly admits that this facility was provided to satisfy public and dealer demand. He feels that the speaker does not benefit significantly by being bi-wired. He points out with wry humour that the first ES14 had such a facility, but it was removed when dealers complained that no one would want to suffer the expense of messing about with extra speaker cables.

It didn't take long for me to discover that the ES11 is really quite special. Although less transparent than its more expensive antecedent, it nonetheless provides a crystal clear view of recordings. On tracks like *Babe I'm Gonna Leave You* from the new Led Zeppelin CD *Remasters* I was particularly impressed by the way the ES11 revealed so much musical information. It lent a remarkable insight to Robert Plant's voice which came through with delightful detail. The sound of his breathing, even his lips parting before he started to sing, was conveyed to the listener with great clarity. Such resolution and the ability to convey the convincing attack of acoustic guitar transients are rare qualities in a speaker of such modest proportions. They helped the speaker to display even minor dynamic contrasts with a natural sense of scale.

The ES11's remarkably commanding and authoritative presentation of low frequency information was

## DESIGN PERFORMANCE

- Reflex-ported two-way bookshelf speakers
- Moulded front baffle with integral bass driver chassis
- Minimalist crossover design
- Dedicated stands
- £300
- Musically fast and coherent with high transparency and detail
- Extended bass from small cabinet
- Easily driven, eight ohm nominal impedance
- 87dB sensitivity

also impressive. Bass guitar suffered none of the usual small speaker anaemia. It had good weight and impact with particularly strong pitch definition. Notes started and stopped decisively and had pleasing timbre and character. This sterling performance is perhaps surprising for a speaker whose response specification shows a 'tailing off' below 60Hz, well above the lowest frequency of a bass guitar.

Above all, the ES11 presented music cogently and with considerable lucidity. Rhythmic figures were compelling. The syncopated West Indian timing accents of toaster Tippa Irie's *Original Ragamuffin LP* were accorded a characteristically staccato yet fluid feel. The low, plodding bass guitar was surprisingly solid and tuneful, and exceedingly agile. The speaker's treble was articulate with precise portrayal of rapid percussion figures. And that charming midband rendered Irie's quick-fire creole diction extraordinarily intelligible. Even those who find reggae-speak as incomprehensible as Russian would have no problem making sense of most of the words issuing at machine gun speed from Irie's lips.

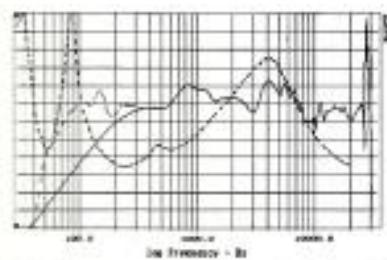
Most impressive, however, was the manner in which the speakers offered up the lyricism and harmonic progression inherent in the music. On Quartetto Italiano's recording for Philips of Beethoven's *String Quartet No. 12 in E Flat, Opus 127*, a musical line played by successive instruments always seemed logical and purposeful. Counterpoint seemed explicit,

effective and natural. One could summarise these effects by saying that the music's architecture was convincingly drawn. The icing on the cake was the ES11's measured tonality, which gave the listener the full quota of instrumental timbre, bringing life and colour to the quartet's sound.

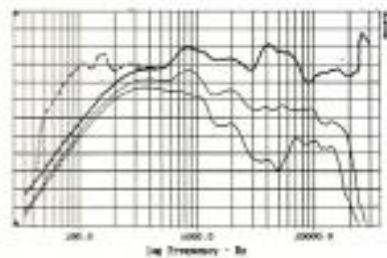
Having done most of my listening with top-of-the-range amplification, I tried out a few tracks using the little integrated Nait. Although this proved that the ES11 reflects the quality of the signal with which it is supplied, the speaker still sounded more than acceptable with such a relatively modest amp. There wasn't the same degree of extension or control at the frequency extremes – PIL's *Rise* played at a respectable volume level proved that. Bass guitar, for example, sounded lighter in weight and lost some precision. The vibrancy of midband instruments and voices veered towards slight over-enthusiasm but never became ragged. In short, the speaker made the most of the signal with which it was presented; its performance remained palatable and highly enjoyable even using the Nait. The same could not be said of the ES14, which with the same partnering amp would voice its disapproval in no uncertain terms.

The moral of this story is simple. The ES11 is more forgiving than its older stablemate, but responds well when used with a top quality system. Just don't expect it to sound good with a midi system.

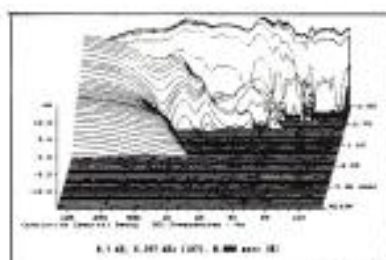
## FOR THE TECHNICALLY MINDED



Epos ES11: on-axis 1m response plus dashed LF correction, with modulus of impedance plotted separately. Response scale 2dB per division, impedance scale 0-24ohms in 2-ohm steps.



Epos ES11: lateral response family with 3rd-octave weighting, axial 30°/45°, 2dB per division.

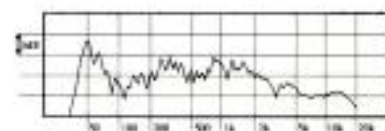


Epos ES11: MLSSA decay waterfall, 30dB with 0.1ms rise-time.

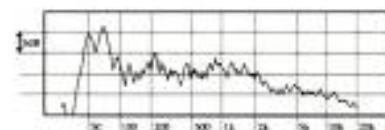


Epos ES11: room-averaged response (RAR).

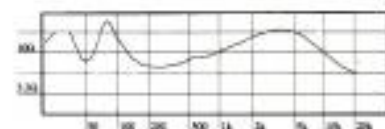
Hi-Fi News May 1991



Room averaged response (large room, free space)



Room averaged response (large room, wall mount)



Modulus of impedance

Hi-Fi Choice May 1991