



Epos speaker designer Robin Marshall is held in awe by many a music lover. And the new Epos box has Malcolm Steward swooning.

I've always been particularly fond of the Epos ES14, but when I express this opinion many people find it hard to understand why, and reel off a list of objections to the speaker. Unwittingly these people are telling me not what is wrong with the ES14 but what is wrong with their systems. The Epos is a highly revealing design: often it's too revealing for comfort. It really does demand exemplary partnering equipment.

The new addition to the Epos family, the ES11, exhibits many of the ES14's characteristics, but it is agreeably less discriminating about the hi-fi with which it is teamed. That's not to say it can be tacked onto the end of a poor system: rather it can be used with more modest ancillaries than its forebear. However, it will reward those users who exercise most care choosing the equipment with which they drive it.

The £300 ES11 may seem small, but it has a degree of structural integrity and design sophistication rarely witnessed in its price band. Take its cabinet, for example, this is no ordinary chipboard box. The front baffle and rear panel are formed from injection moulded plastics, and are tensioned by steel rods to grip the 25mm MDF wrap which forms the side, top and bottom panels. The enclosure feels – and is – substantial and 'dead' (no resonances).

The speaker uses two custom drive units. The 165mm polymer-coned bass/midrange driver's chassis is an integral part of the speaker's baffle, and the 25mm aluminium alloy domed high frequency unit is a new design developed specifically for the ES11.

The new Epos speaker measures 375 x 200 x 250mm and is intended for use on its own dedicated open frame steel stands, placed reasonably close to a rear wall. The ES11 is reflex loaded and a small amount of space is required to allow the rear-facing port to 'breathe'. Talking of which, don't try and operate the ES11 with its grille cover in place: this item is solid plastic and is intended purely to protect the drive units when the speaker is not in use.

I partnered the speaker with a host of different, but always

high quality, components including a Thorens TD3001BC turntable fitted with Moth arm and Goldring 1012 cartridge into a Naim NAIT integrated amplifier, where it gave highly pleasing results. And it really sang when hooked on the end of a Pink Triangle-modified LP12 with ARO and Linn Trolka feeding a NAIM NAC52/NAP250 set-up. Compact disk was played throughout in an Arcam 170 CD transport and Black Box 2 DAC.

The ES11 offers an all-round performance that is musically cogent and informative, often captivating, and always well balanced. In fact, reviewing the ES11 was hard work: it wasn't easy to focus one's attention on segments of its presentation because the whole was so involving.

The ES11, like the ES14, has a remarkably transparent midrange. It achieves this without patently artificial highlighting of detail: instead it allows the listener to delve deep into the texture of a recording. When more than one instrument was playing on the

Beethoven disc, for example, it was an easy task to follow closely any individual player: not just his melodic line but also the way in which his part integrated harmonically and temporally with that of the others.

The crucial sense of human involvement in the music was clearly shown. Where some speakers tend to dilute this aspect, the ES11 brought it to the fore.

On rock and jazz music the Epos excelled. Reggae bass lines that I imagined would floor the speaker were articulated with power and dexterity, positive pitch definition and note-shape. Vocal lines had startling clarity, with the words and the techniques used to produce them being presented with the finest insight. Rhythmic complexities, such as the drumming featured on the Paul Simon LP, never flummoxed it. Instrumental timbre, like the variety of keyboard voices on Willy De Ville's album, was painstakingly differentiated.

This is surely one of the very best mid-price speakers I have encountered. Place it in good company and it will delight the most discriminating of listeners. It comes enthusiastically and unstintingly recommended.



• Value rating	★★★★★
• Sound rating	★★★★★
• Recordings used included:	
Art Pepper Meets the Rhythm Section (Contemp. COP004 LP)	
Paul Simon: The Rhythm of the Saints (Warner Brothers 7599-26098-1 LP)	
Quartetto Italiano Beethoven, Late String Quartets Op 127 Op 135 (Philips 422 840-2 CD)	
Willy De Ville Miracle (Polydor POLH39 LP)	