

epos es14

The ES14 loudspeaker system was conceived with one aim in mind: the reproduction of music in the home. It seeks to guide the listener away from the mechanics of music reproduction and towards the music itself. It makes a virtue of basic simplicity and elegant engineering. It is a masterpiece of clear thinking and purposeful engineering, its task unhindered by peripheral trivia and worthless gimmicks. The ES14 is a loudspeaker for the music enthusiast rather than the technoholic. If music is the ES14's purpose, science is its means. Few loudspeakers have undergone as much painstaking development, and fewer still incorporate so much advanced thinking and precision engineering. The intelligent application of technology is the ES14's hallmark. Engineering with a purpose, not engineering as an end. Epos differs from many loudspeaker manufacturers in its total commitment to designing and building its

own unique state-of-the-art drive units. Epos loudspeakers are not restrained

by the indifferent design and poor performance of bought-in drive units. Epos drive units are designed and built to exacting standards. Such is their precision, and so capable their performance, that Epos loudspeakers can dispense with the complicated electrical crossover and equalisation networks which bedevil most manufacturers' products.

Epos drive units need no corrective signal manipulation and remain in complete control no matter how complex the music. The absence of complex electrical circuitry pays handsome dividends in bringing the loudspeaker into tighter contact with the driving amplifier and significantly reduces the complexity of the amplifier's role. Both amplifier and loudspeaker function to better effect and bring a greatly

increased sense of transparency and focus into play.



DIMENSIONS

488mm(H) × 226mm(W) × 290mm(D)

WEIGHT

11 kg

FINISH

Walnut wood veneer or black cabinetwork with black textured drive unit frames.

DRIVE UNITS

The 200mm bass driver and 26mm treble driver are of Epos Acoustic's own design and manufacture. Both units incorporate the most advanced design thinking and stand head and shoulders above the common run of drive units. The bass driver employs a highly stable plastic cone and synthetic rubber surround, while the tweeter employs an aluminium-alloy dome. The units are engineered so as to integrate properly with one another without need of extensive electrical correction circuitry.

POWER REQUIREMENTS

The ES14 presents an extremely easy load to the driving amplifier, even under the most demanding dynamic conditions. It requires, nevertheless, a competently designed amplifier to achieve its full performance. An amplifier rated at between 25 watts and 100 watts into 8 ohms will generally be found suitable.

IMPEDENCE

8 ohms nominal. The impedance does not fall below 7 ohms and contains insignificant reactive components.

PLACEMENT

The ES14 will give its best performance in most rooms when placed about 250mm – 500mm (10" – 20") from the back wall and at least 500mm (20") from the side wall. Rigid floor stands of about 350mm – 500mm (14" – 20") height should be used. The stands must be placed firmly on the floor and the loudspeakers placed firmly on the stands. Any movement of the loudspeaker cabinet will be reflected in reduced clarity and definition.

Excessive movement will also reduce the impact and solidity of bass reproduction.

Open frame stands of light and rigid construction are generally found to work best with the ES14. Further benefit can be gained by arranging for minimum contact between the stands and the loudspeakers. Spikes or small cones are ideal for this purpose.

CONNECTION

Input to the ES14 is via high-quality sockets which accept 4mm 'banana' plugs. Connection to the amplifier can be made with any good-quality cable, the precise choice being a matter for personal preference.

AUDITIONING

The ES14 is available from a small number of enthusiastic and competent retailers who are at pains to demonstrate and sell complimentary and sympathetic equipment. It is most important to realise that combinations of the 'best' or the most highly-rated equipment do not necessarily make good systems. The advice of a good retailer is invaluable if money is not to be wasted on unwise combinations of equipment.

The ES14, like any other piece of precision equipment, needs to be used correctly to achieve its intended performance. A judgement made of the loudspeaker with unwisely chosen partnering equipment, or in a poorly set-up system, is no judgement at all.

When listening, judge the loudspeaker on its ability to provide you with enjoyment from the music. Do not try to analyse individual aspects of the loudspeaker's technical performance such as its tonal balance or its frequency extension. Judge the loudspeaker's performance as a whole. Judge its ability to let you follow individual instrumental parts within a piece of music. Judge its ability to integrate the various instruments into a pleasing and harmonic ensemble. Ask yourself the question 'Do I enjoy listening to this loudspeaker?' at frequent intervals. Whether you enjoy listening or not is infinitely more important than any question of frequency response, tonal balance or colouration.

epos acoustics

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RUNNING-IN

The ES14 needs a little gentle use to allow its working components to settle into their proper working routine. Do not be concerned if your new loudspeakers sound aggressive and lacking in low-frequency authority when you first begin using them. Things will quickly improve. Allow about eight hours of use before you expect your new loudspeakers to perform to their full capability.

STORAGE & TRANSPORT

If you store or transport your loudspeakers at low temperatures you should allow them an hour or two to reach normal domestic temperature before you begin using them.

STANDS

Rigid open-frame stands are essential if your ES14 loudspeakers are to perform correctly. Sound Factory SF3 stands work well, and a purpose-designed Epos stand will be available in November 1987. Pedestal stands and stands filled with sand are not, in our opinion, suitable.

Spikes or small cones (available from your hi-fi retailer if they are not already fitted to your stands) are the best way to couple the stands to the loudspeakers. Avoid direct contact between the top of the stand and the base of the loudspeaker if you possibly can. The loudspeaker will otherwise tend to transfer too much energy into the stand. Beware of using too compliant a coupling between loudspeakers and stands, however. Blue-Tak or rubber pads will almost certainly impair the performance.

It is essential to locate the stands in such a way that they are stable and unable to wobble. Any movement of the loudspeaker cabinets, particularly in the front-to-back plane, will impair the performance. Most good loudspeaker ~~stands are fitted with spikes to aid good location.~~ Be sure to adjust these so that the stand is absolutely level (use a spirit level) and ~~and secure.~~ Tighten the locknuts on the spikes once you have completed their adjustment.

CABLES

Connect your ES14 loudspeakers to their partnering amplifier with good-quality cable and properly soldered plugs. We believe that stranded cable of reasonable cross-section gives the best overall performance. NAIM NACA4 is particularly suitable. Ask your retailer to fit RS or NAIM 4mm plugs to the cable to help ensure good performance.

POSITIONING

The ES14 loudspeaker will generally perform well when it is positioned with its back fairly close to a solid wall. Avoid placing the loudspeaker on a flimsy partition wall or a window wall if you possibly can. Avoid, also, placing the loudspeakers in corners or very close to side walls. Ideally, each loudspeaker should be at least 50cm (20") from the nearest side wall.

Some experiment is needed to find the best position in the room for your loudspeakers. A little time spent trying different positions will pay handsome dividends in the final results.

Generally speaking, the ES14's bass extension and solidity will improve as the loudspeaker is brought closer to the rear wall. A point will often be reached, however, when bringing the loudspeaker any closer to the rear wall merely loses bass control and causes muddled performance. A little experiment is needed to find the best compromise. The loudspeakers' sound stage - the sense of space and three-dimensionality - will also be impaired as the loudspeakers are brought closer to the rear wall. Once again, a little experiment is needed to find the best compromise.

IN BRIEF

The Epos ES14 loudspeaker has always posed one major problem for those who have fallen under the spell of its exceptional sound quality: which stands to support it with? Such a revealing design, needs proper, rigid, open frame stands to give fully the outstanding performance of which it is capable. On unsuitable stands its capabilities simply fall far short of those that can be realised.

Phone calls to several of the speaker's stockists elicited that to date the favourite choice of available stands that they sold with ES14s had been either the Heybrook HBS1 or Linn Sara. Neither of these are really an acceptable aesthetic match for the speaker (which is deeper in the front to back dimension than it is side to side) and, more seriously, neither are correctly proportioned to secure it as firmly as is desirable. With both designs the speaker overhangs the stand's base. No criticism of these stands is implied here: both are eminently suitable for the speakers for which they are intended but they can only be regarded at best as compromises for the Epos.

One solution to this problem I have seen implemented is the use of the Sara stand turned through 90 degrees: whilst this may be a way round the instability problem (in one direction) it has one major drawback - even to me, someone firmly entrenched in the school of thought that says "hang the looks if it sounds better" - it looks ridiculously like the Heath Robinson solution that it is.

What was required was a purpose built stand that fulfilled both the sonic and visual criteria but until recently there was no dedicated stand for the ES14. The company did not manufacture one themselves. Another manufacturer - Origin Live, well known for their Skyline turntable supports - recently brought to our attention a tripod stand that they had produced for the speaker which costs over £100 and which was well received by Chris Frankland in a previous *In Brief*. However, not everybody will wish to spend this amount on a stand - there's still a psychological hurdle with many buyers that acts as a barrier to them parting with over £100 for stands to go with a £350 loudspeaker. Also some might prefer the more conventional four legged arrangement to the Skyline's three: arguments still rage within

the hi-fi fraternity about the relative merits/superiority of three/four point support.

It will come as the answer to many people's prayers to discover that Epos Acoustics are now manufacturing their own stand - costing about £85 - which is a four-legged design similar to the Linn Sara stand but correctly proportioned for their speaker. It also differs from the Linn stand by not having a solid top-plate: instead the upright pillars are strapped together front and back with flat metal strips leaving the area within the framework completely open. Experience has shown that these speakers benefit from such an arrangement and prefer not to have a flat panel beneath their cabinets. Completing the picture, upward facing spikes in each corner of the top frame engage in the speaker cabinet.

I recently tried out the new stands - kindly supplied to me by distributors The Sound Factory, Loughborough - and found them to be an ideal partner for the ES14s, both sonically and visually. When CF was listening to the Origin Live alternative I managed to get a quick listen to them and felt that they were significantly better than any stand I'd tried previously with the speaker. Although on this occasion I was unable to compare the two different designs I have to say that I felt more than satisfied with the performance of the home-brewed Epos stand which I have now been using for several weeks. They impart a surefootedness and security to the sound of the ES14 which stands like the HBS1 and Sara can't match. This is particularly noticeable at high listening levels where the speakers now retain their full complement of precision, 'speed', and articulateness.

So Epos owners who have been looking for stands specifically designed for their speakers now have the choice of two models - the four-footed Epos stand and the three-toed version from Origin Live. Both offer worthwhile improvements over other stands commonly used with this speaker. The only considerations to concern yourself with now seem to be which is best - four legs or three, which stand looks best in your living room, and finally, how much do you want to spend?



Malcolm Steward tries the 'official' stands for the Epos ES14 loudspeaker while Adam Meredith finds uses for a time switch from Tempo



BETTER BY DESIGN

With the ES 14, Epos Acoustics have come up with a speaker that's hard to fault, not least in terms of its superb value for money

In terms of the components employed, the care which goes into its construction, and the sheer depth of research behind its design, the Epos ES 14, at £295, is one of the biggest bargains in the world of loudspeakers. Of course, that lot wouldn't add up to a hill of beans if it didn't sound any good, but we don't want to jump the gun. . .

Epos Acoustics are an exceptional company. In spite of being one of the country's smallest and most recently established operations, they design and build every drive unit used in their ES 14 speakers. Although this is an

expensive and time-consuming business, it's the only way of guaranteeing consistency; it also means that a number of designer Robin Marshall's innovative ideas can be built into the drivers from the word go.

The ES 14 is an innovative speaker design in a number of important respects. The materials used in the bass/mid driver and surround were carefully chosen for their unsusceptibility to temperature and humidity fluctuations. The driver, meanwhile, employs a double opposed rear suspension (rather than the more common single suspension) to promote linear cone movement.

The tweeter is a 26mm aluminium dome design, loaded with a separate chamber to absorb rear radiation, and with a very small surround, developed using adv-

anced laser holography techniques. Crossover between the two drivers is handled by a simple series capacitor to the tweeter.

Robin Marshall also paid a great deal of attention to the cabinet when he was designing the ES 14, eventually settling on chipboard for the carcass itself — the cabinet being braced with a steel rod which is tightened via external bolts, over which the veneer is then set.

To the layman, of course, this fastidious design is of little immediate importance. On audition at a dealer, what you'd run into is a slightly unusual looking two-way reflex speaker, rated for 100watts programme input with a nominal impedance of eight ohms. In fact, in use the impedance should never drop below seven ohms, making the ES 14 a very friendly load for most amps.

When listening to the speaker, I found positioning and set-up to be every bit as critical as the instruction leaflet suggested they might be. Although the ES 14s sounded okay on 15in Foundation pillar stands, they worked much more convincingly with top-spiked Heybrook HBS1s. Given the financial saving this involves, I shouldn't have thought too many people will grumble overly.

Given the speakers' rear-firing reflex port, a position at least 20in from the rear wall seems advisable. Epos supply foam plugs for the ports should you be forced to use the speakers closer to the rear wall than this. However, the results I achieved with these in place were not all that persuasive.

Used sensibly and carefully, the ES 14s were capable of producing extremely enjoyable results. Almost irrespective of programme, they gave such an even-tempered, clear and balanced sort of sound, it was impossible not to be impressed.

The aluminium tweeter is an exceptionally smooth performer. Suzanne Vega's *Solitude Standing* is a recording which tends towards the spiky, but via the Epos it sounded as smooth and silky as one could ever wish. Bass extension and weight were also unusually good for a speaker this small, the power and solidity of the bass guitars on Joe Jackson's *Body And Soul* bearing this out absolutely.

Reproduction of piano (Alicia de Larrocha playing Granados) showed integration between the two drivers to be near flawless. And the capacity of the speakers to set up soundstages with genuine depth, yet with extremely precise spatial location of individual instruments, showed that there was nothing seriously wrong with the midrange.

Perhaps more appealing than any of these cerebral strengths was the Epos ES 14s ability to involve the listener. These are powerful and gutsy speakers; throughout my listening there was a bounce and verve to the bass that only a corpse could have resisted for any length of time. Only their ability to display real transient pace was in any way questionable.

They are far and away the best £300 speakers I have listened to lately. Audition them against the Monitor Audio R852/MDs if you're thinking of spending this amount of money. Either way you'll end up with something special.

George Entwistle

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Epos ES 14

typically £295