



ANALOG HI-FI AND VINYL CULTURE





EPIC

I've probably never gained as much insight into the professional development of a loudspeaker as in this case. Please forgive me if I lose a bit of critical distance to the Epos ES14N here and there.



Of course, the ES14N comes with baffle covers. However, the manufacturer recommends removing them when listening to music

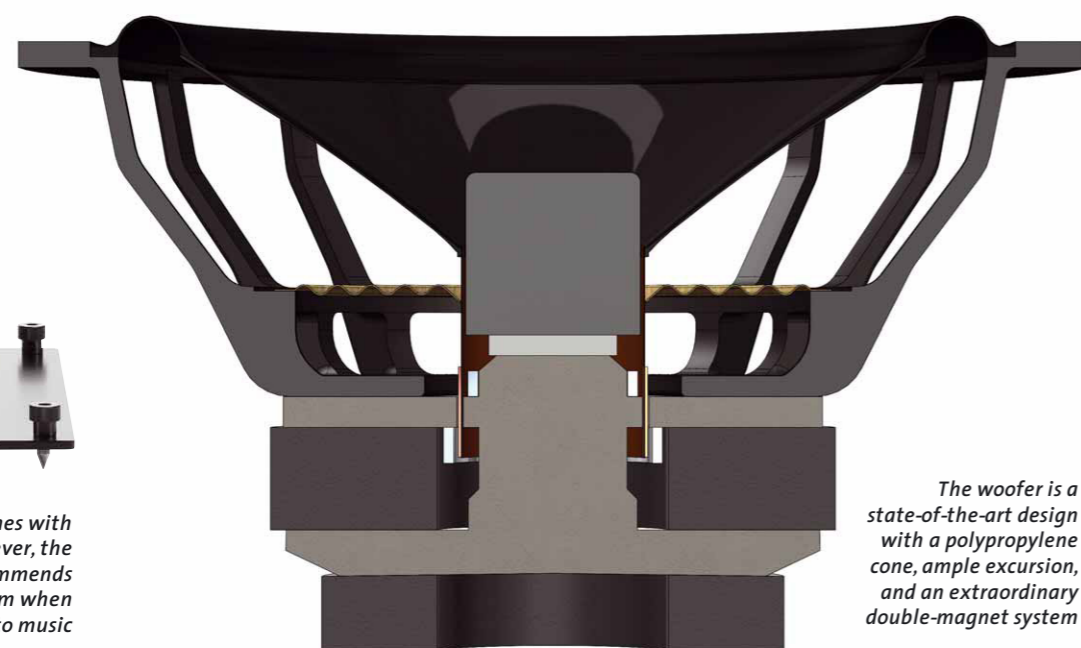
What I did not think: No matter with whom I talk about it – everyone has a story to tell on the subject of „Epos speakers.“ First and foremost, about the ES14 model, which certainly is the most famous design of the company’s owner Robin Marshall. In the 1980s, his approaches were groundbreaking. He tried to build loudspeakers mechanically so „right“ that he could get by with minimal filtering. The ES14 was a voluminous two-way „compact“ speaker with a metal dome tweeter and a seven-inch bass-midrange driver. Even though it was a decidedly British phenomenon, it also found many enthusiasts in our country, hence the multitude of memories of this speaker. Epos was bought out in the late eighties and disappeared from the scene. In 2020, the well-known Essen-based loudspeaker professional Karl-Heinz Fink acquired the rights to the name and decided to fill the brand with life again.

The first result of his efforts is sensibly called ES14N and is a reinterpretation of Robin Marshall’s ideas, which can now be purchased from EUR 4,000 per pair. Or for 4,600 if you add the highly recommended stands.

Since Epos – and thus Karl-Heinz Fink’s company headquarters – is only a stone’s throw away from Duisburg, I’m around frequently and get to see what’s cooking in Fink’s pots. I was there very early on the subject of the „ES14N“ and accordingly got to hear a lot about its development. At the Munich High End show last year, I even put on some music at the demo of a zero-series epic. So: I know how they sound. And how the sound has changed throughout the development history and infinite iterations were necessary until the speaker reached where it is now.

Appearance

The ES14N doesn’t deserve the term „compact speaker“ any more than its forebear. It is a two-way construction with – you guessed it – a metal dome and a seven-inch woofer blessed with a decent volume. So many references to the legendary original could be made without problems. In terms of design, the ES14N is an all-around coherent affair. The gently backward sloping – basically black – front with the accomplished „kink“ in the lower area makes the speaker appear modern and somewhat compact after all. The solid stand is screwed to the speaker, and I do not consider



The woofer is a state-of-the-art design with a polypropylene cone, ample excursion, and an extraordinary double-magnet system

it sensible to fall back on another make in this case, especially since the combination was tuned sound-wise during the development.

Housing

The housing of the 16-kilogram ES14N is made of double-layered MDF, with both layers glued together with a modern, highly dampening adhesive. In addition, various struts keep uncontrolled vibrations in check. The result is an extremely low-vibration cabinet with very little damping material. By the way, the continuous solid center column of the stand is constructed in the same way. The bass reflex system is coupled to the room via a rear reflex tube. Master Fink has much to say about the placement and design of reflex tubes, and there are unique features here as well: The tube, flared on both sides like a trumpet, has a series of circumferential holes in the center. Surprisingly, this does not affect the primary function at all but dampens the tube’s natural resonances very effectively. This is just one of the many little tricks Fink integrates into its speakers. Hardly anyone else does this because the facilities in Essen for simulating and metrological testing such things are only available in very few places worldwide.

By the way, the Epos is manufactured in China, which definitely doesn’t have to be detrimental to the quality, as is evident here: If you maintain a good relationship with your suppliers and give them room to breathe in terms of costing, then the result will also work out. In any case, the matte white surface of our sample pair is flawless, as is the black textured lacquer front. The drivers are neatly flush with a small gap, so there’s nothing to complain about here. Only the screw connection between the speaker and the stand does not inspire confidence – interestingly, this was also the case with Fink’s high-end two-way „Kim,“ which sails under the „Fink Team“ flag.

Drivers

The typical high-end loudspeaker designer usually scours the websites of the driver top dogs Scan Speak, Seas, SB-Acoustics, and Co. for the latest technology. At Fink, on the other hand, they think about what precisely the drivers need to be able to do for the project and start simulating voice coils and carriers, cones and surrounds, baskets and air gaps. For this, some people in Essen do nothing else all day, and they use highly specialized, ultra-powerful software tools for this purpose. If the results are deemed promising, prototypes are commissioned



In the disassembly drawing of the tweeter, the impedance control ring and the perforated voice coil former catch the eye

Teammates

Turntable:
TechDAS Air Force III / Reed 3p

Phono preamplifier:
DS Audio

Cartridge:
DS Audio DS-003

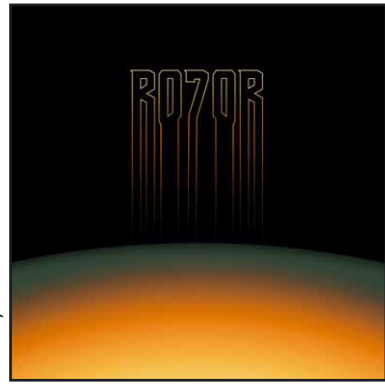
Preamplifier:
NEM PRA-5

Power amplifier:
Pure Dynamics Class-A Monos

Integrated amplifiers:
Accuphase E-5000
Thivan Labs 811 Anniversary

Competitors

Loudspeakers:
Klang + Ton Nada
DIY Focal / JBL



Rotor-7

What we played

Rotor
7

Nina Simone
My Baby Just Cares For Me

Chick Corea
Return To Forever

Causa Sui
Szabodelico

in the Far East and measured after completion. The effort is great, especially since the number of prototypes can sometimes be quite considerable. However, this is the only way to generate solutions that are precisely right for the application. In this case, it boils down to a bass-midrange driver with a polypropylene cone and a very specially shaped, particularly low-loss rubber surround, driven by a two-layer wound 36-millimeter voice coil. The magnet's geometry has been optimized, and there's even a compensating magnet, which – to put it simply – linearizes the motor. Everything is mounted in a fiberglass-reinforced plastic basket. For the tweeter, the process is the same. I don't remember exactly how many different aluminum domes we listened to in Essen before the 28-millimeter version now installed got the go-ahead. One thing is sure:

This incarnation no longer sounds like a metal dome. And I rarely say that because I'm sensitive about that.

Crossover

The crossover for the ES14N is not as simple as the filter of the original ES14. Simple first-order filters without extensive corrective measures can hardly be made without compromises, and Fink does not do that. The built-in crossover still passes for being flat, but it does afford a corrective element or two. For example, the tricky filter that excellently dampens the tweeter's resonance peak, which surprisingly only occurs at 30 kilohertz, without causing any damage in the listening area. And there are no cheap components here. The parts of the ES14N crossover come from the shelves with the tasty stuff of well-known suppliers at all critical points.

Sound

With an efficiency of about 87 decibels, a nominal impedance of about six ohms, and an uncritical impedance curve, the ES14N can handle a variety of power sources. A single-ended tube may not be the first choice, but a push-pull EL-34 should fit the bill. Or something small but good from the semiconductor camp. Like the excellent Pure Dynamics monos from the last issue, which I still haven't returned. What the Epos puts up with them regarding self-evidence and size is pretty sensational. In terms of fundamentals, this is the most impressive thing I've ever experienced from a „seven-inch+dome“ combination. I have known for some time that the Epos should not be handled with velvet gloves. And so the brand new album of the Berlin stoner rock heroes Rotor wandered onto the platter in joyful anticipation. The ES14N does

The black front is standard, and the cabinet comes in a few different colors and veneers



The cutaway model of the box reveals an extremely stable stiffened housing and a trickily ventilated reflex tube

On the back, the tiny but refined banana jacks for the connection catch the eye

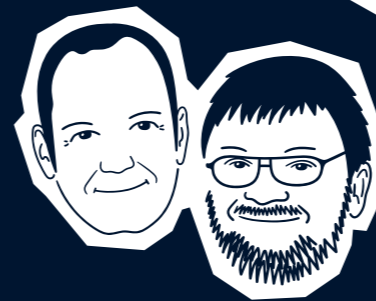


fink team

BORG
EPISODE 2

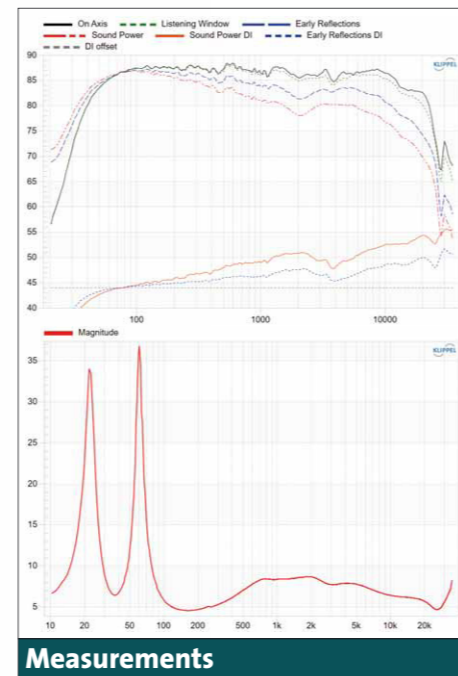
FINKTEAM.COM

Couldn't be better?
**WELL, WE
MASTERED IT.**





*It is not really small
but looks perfectly
proportioned on the
in-house stand*



Measurements

Lab commentary

The developer himself took the Epos measurements exceptionally, and I can guarantee their authenticity. The on-axis frequency response is linear, with a very slight downward trend - perfect. So is the omnidirectional response, which reveals a very even drop in off-axis sound pressure. Efficiency is around 87 decibels, and the impedance response shows the two non-linearized bass reflex "humps" and nicely even six-ohm behavior. The distortion level is decidedly low, and there is no noticeable reverberation.

that with ease. They convey the gnarly dirtiness of what is offered credibly, including the frequencies massaging the stomach area. It is already noticeable here that the ES14N is entirely free of resonances typical for reflections. The bass hits the notes precisely without anything getting out of hand. This applies to unreasonable SPLs as well as to midnight levels. The integration of the two drivers turned out flawless. Hardly anyone can demonstrate this as well as Nina Simone, whose voice and piano playing on „My Baby Just Cares For Me“ flow perfectly into each other.

The piano strokes have pressure, and the events have rhythm and timing; the early stereo recording sounds just as spectacular as it should. And again: no harshness of the tweeter at all. Flawless!

Holger Barske

Epos ES14N



• Price per pair	4,000 Euro
• Distribution	DC Klaassen, Lünen, Germany
• Phone	+49 231 9860285
• Internet	epos-loudspeakers.com
• Warranty	2 years
• Dimensions (W x H x D)	250 x 491 x 385 mm (with stand 515 mm higher)
• Weight	approx. 16 kg (without stands)



Epos ES14N

International 2/23

» The resurrection of the once British cult brand is a small speaker sensation: a highly competent all-round speaker who can impress emotionally and with its precision.