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Sept 27<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup>

# Epos ES-28N

It's number three of three as the reborn Epos brand is topped off with an innovative three-way floorstander  
 Review: **Jamie Biesemans** Lab: **Paul Miller**

With the arrival of the ES-28N, loudspeaker designer Karl-Heinz Fink has reached a key point in his career. Positioned above the previously launched – and lauded – ES-14N [*HFN* Jul '23] and ES-7N [*HFN* Nov '24], this three-way floorstander, priced £7500, marks the conclusion of Fink's campaign to revive stalwart British brand Epos. Perhaps other ranges will follow, but for the moment this speaker is touted as 'number three out of three'.

Fink has stated his intention not to cash in on the craze for 'nostalgia' products that resurrect past designs, however much they were appreciated back in the day. Instead, using engineering know-how honed by designing speakers for numerous companies over the past decades, his Epos creations are thoroughly modern – but also remain true to the spirit of the brand founded by Robin Marshall in 1983. So, while Fink's first Epos model was inspired by the ES-14, a 1980s hi-fi icon, the following ES-7N was an all-new design. This is also the case for the ES-28N.

'Gershwin's score veered between subtle and up-beat'

## PIPE DOWN

Although it stands only 1.05m tall, the Epos floorstander is reasonably wide (25cm) and deep (36cm). But at least it isn't your usual boring rectangle claiming floor space. Four adjustable radiused metal feet give the speaker the appearance of floating above the ground and, crucially, ensure the down-firing port in its base is not impeded by a thick carpet. It's a neat visual trick, which together with the slanted cabinet and faceted baffle (the former aiding time alignment, the latter helping to limit treble diffraction), makes for a novel, almost furniture-like look. Incidentally, that wide and long (8x30cm) down-firing port is pressure-compensated with internal vents to prevent pipe modes [see p118].

As well as being pleasing to the eye, the ES-28N is a well-crafted loudspeaker, solidly assembled with good workmanship

on show. The integration of the front baffle with the walnut side and top panels of our review pair, for example, is very nicely done, with no gaps to be seen. Some, however, might find the many visible screws around the drivers a bit of a throwback – many modern rivals hide this hardware away. The speakers arrive with their full-length grilles attached, but as with the ES-7N and ES-14N the guidance is to remove them when playing music [see PM's Lab Report, p55].

## BONDING EXERCISE

This floorstander weighs in at 35kg, which isn't much compared to some loudspeakers featured in *HFN* but is respectable enough for a model in this class.

The partitioned enclosure continues Fink's ambition to ensure the Epos cabinets are as inert as possible – the ES-28N is constructed from panels that sandwich a high-damping glue between two MDF boards. Two of these are bonded and topped by a further MDF panel to form the 'duo-layer' front baffle, its thickness reaching 50mm. The cabinet is also internally braced, with the tweeter and midrange drivers each benefitting from their own chamber. Unusually, the midrange chamber features an angled rear partition to prevent standing waves.

Alongside the walnut finish, Epos offers more modern-looking semi-matte white and black colourways for the ES-28N. Want something with a bit more flair? As with the ES-14N (petrol blue) and ES-7N (bright orange), there is a unique colour available, although this speaker's Jade Green option – pictured on this month's cover – is arguably a little more restrained. ➞

**RIGHT:** Epos's familiar 28mm ceramic-coated dome tweeter is joined here by a 130mm 'midrange' version of the ES-7N's mica-filled polypropylene woofer. This hands over at 330Hz to a pair of 180mm straight-coned bass drivers with low hysteresis rubber surrounds



'The wide and long (8x30cm) down-firing port is pressure-compensated to prevent pipe modes'



## THREE WAY SPLIT

The man behind the brand (and more than a few others, it must be said) is arguably best known for his two-way designs. These would include the partnering ES-14N [HFN Jul '23] and ES-7N [HFN Nov '24] as well as the FinkTeam KIM [HFN Feb '21] and Q Acoustics Concept 500 [HFN Jul '17], to name but a few. For this larger enclosure, designer Karl-Heinz Fink discounted a two-and-a-half-way configuration – here there would be two bass units, but with only the upper driver working in the midband, directivity is skewed downwards. A D'Appolito configuration was also considered, but with two sizeable bass/mid drivers sitting above and below the tweeter, and the latter raised up to a typical seating listening height, 'the speaker', says Karl-Heinz, 'would end up as a huge tower'. Better, he concluded, to trade the added complexity of a three-way crossover, and cost of three (four) different drive units, for the optimisation of each driver's passband and better control over directivity at crossover. For the ES-28N the two woofers operate in unison below 330Hz and are placed together, in a separate lower cabinet space, to optimise floor boundary reinforcement. PM

While designer Karl-Heinz Fink traditionally favours two-way loudspeakers, in this case he's opted for a three-way configuration, with both 180mm reflex-loaded bass drivers patrolling the same sub-330Hz frequency range [see PM's boxout, above]. These mica-loaded polypropylene units are adapted from the bass/mid driver of Epos's ES-14N, carrying over the basket and neodymium magnet, but the cone profile is now flattened for improved rigidity and pistonic behaviour, and the voice coil and surround upgraded. Similarly, the 130mm midrange unit is evolved from the ES-7N. It's only the 28mm ceramic-coated aluminium alloy tweeter, crossing over at 2.7kHz, that remains unchanged. This is a feature of all three Epos speakers, as is the ES-28N's single set of 4mm sockets that accept banana plugs but not spade or wire.

### DEEP IMPACT

I've enjoyed the voicing of Fink-designed loudspeakers, as they typically boast a relatively even tonal colour while allowing the music to escape and 'float free'. There's rarely a sense that the cabinet is joining in, which heightens this feeling of clarity and, especially, cohesion. With the ES-28N these qualities are present, as they are with the earlier Epos models, but with significant extra 'oomph' delivered here by the two dedicated low-frequency drivers.

But this is not bass extension that overpowers everything else. Paired with a Denon PMA-3000NE amplifier [HFN Mar '24] and Eversolo DMP-A8 streamer [HFN May '24], and playing George Gershwin's 'An American In Paris', performed by the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra/Louis Langrée on the *Transatlantic* set [Fanfare Cincinnati FC-016; 96kHz/24-bit], the

ES-28N delivered drums with a satisfying slam and depth. The tuba towards the end of this 18-minute piece also sounded brilliantly full-bodied. Yet these elements were just part of a well-balanced overall performance that tracked Gershwin's composition as it veered between subtle and up-beat.

Maybe some would prefer the brass to have a bit more definition or bite, but I felt the tuning of the ES-28N let me really savour the exuberant nature of the orchestral experience. Rich in dynamics, rhythmically secure and convincingly well integrated, Epos's flagship speaker consistently ticked the right boxes, including the one marked 'fun factor'. As the flutes and horns sprang from the soundstage, these floorstanders brought a smile to my face.

### VENI, VIDI, VICI

The ES-28N's slightly 'dense' portrayal meant they didn't necessarily create a huge sonic space with every track I auditioned. But that is not a deficiency *per se*; by not attempting to stimulate your brain with sounds pushed out to the fringes of the soundstage, the speakers create a more intense, direct relationship with the music while still producing a respectable sense of depth and width. With The National's tremendous *Rome* live album ➞





**LEFT:** Rear shot of the walnut-finished cabinet reveals cable connections are via a single set of 4mm sockets for bananas only. The crossover does not support bi-wire/bi-amping and is located high up within the sealed treble enclosure

Listening from a distance of around 2.3m, and with the ES-28Ns toed-in slightly, the joyful and occasionally in-tune singing convincingly surrounded me on all sides.

### BROOMING LOVELY

Time and again, the ES-28Ns showed and created a strong connection with the music – even with mediocre source material that might sound unremarkable on more ‘audiophile’-tuned speakers. Case in point, the *Dry – Demos* album from PJ Harvey [Island Records 00602508782473], spinning on a Technics SL-1200GR2 [HFN Sep ’24] with Audio-Technica VM750SH cartridge, presents early demo recordings which are extremely basic. Sometimes it’s no more than an acoustic guitar and Harvey’s voice, seemingly recorded in nothing more plush than a broom cupboard, but the performance of the ES-28Ns kept me engaged.

The intimacy of tracks such as ‘Oh My Lover’ and ‘Plants And Rags’ was deftly recreated, and the rich distorted guitar tones on ‘Joe’ and ‘O Stella’ were easily conveyed by the speakers’ strong midrange performance. The ease with which Epos’s flagship speakers portrayed Harvey’s sparse rock songs, while being just as adept at delivering the blast that is Gershwin’s ‘An American In Paris’, pays testament to their refined versatility. 🎧

[4AD 4AD0801; 96kHz/24-bit], the ES-28Ns placed me relatively close to the stage, letting me connect with the repetitive lyrics of ‘Eucalyptus’, a break-up song that starts off sanely but descends into desperation – a break from Matt Berninger’s usual monotone delivery.

Turning up the volume on the Denon amplifier was rewarding too, the speakers not losing their grip over dynamics as the sound levels increased. The very stirring rendition of ‘Bloodbuzz Ohio’ was a particular highlight as it demonstrated the sense of envelopment these new Epos floorstanders can deliver. This song is one of the Cincinnati band’s setlist regulars, which explains why the audience at the Parco Della Musica venue in Rome crooned along with so much enthusiasm.

### HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

If you liked what Karl-Heinz Fink did with his first Epos speaker, then you’ll love the range-topping ES-28N. These superbly crafted floorstanders showcase Fink’s talent for delivering detail and dynamics without straying from a balanced presentation, making for a thrilling performance that’s writ large by this three-way design with its dual bass drivers. These are an excellent choice for genre-hopping music lovers.

Sound Quality: 88%

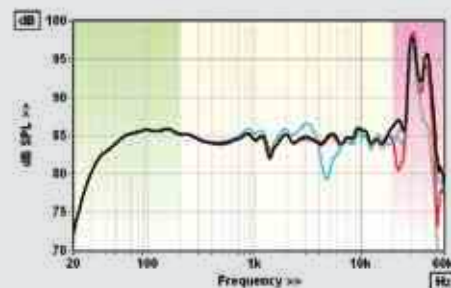


## LAB REPORT

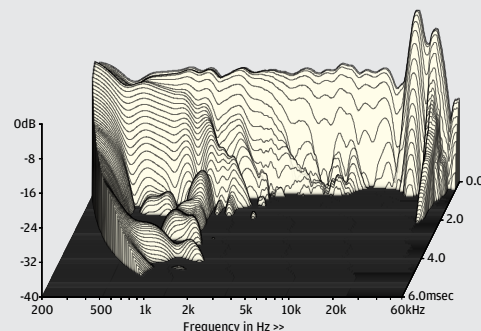
### EPOS ES-28N

Aside from a slight misterrmination at 1.2kHz, also visible on the CSD waterfall [Graph 2], the ES-28N’s forward response is flat and even with response errors of a mere  $\pm 2.2\text{dB}$  and  $\pm 2.1\text{dB}$ , respectively [re. 200Hz–20kHz, see Graph 1]. Pair matching is a supremely tight 0.2dB, albeit with a short-lived deviation to 0.9dB at that discontinuity and at 20kHz. Off-axis uniformity is also excellent, and arguably flatter still [grey trace, Graph 1], so subtle improvements may be realised by toeing the speakers in very slightly. The grille, meanwhile, disrupts the treble above crossover at 2.7kHz, causing a  $\sim 7\text{dB}$  dip between 3.6–5.7kHz [blue trace, Graph 1], so is best left detached. Above 20kHz the dual dome breakup modes of the 28mm ceramic-coated alloy dome tweeter are revealed at 30kHz and 42kHz [pink shaded area, Graph 1, and also CSD waterfall, Graph 2].

Distortion is very low indeed at  $<0.1\%$  from 100Hz–8kHz (re. 90dB SPL/1m), increasing to just 0.3% above 10kHz. Bass is also well judged with the two 180mm woofers maxing out at 100Hz and the down-firing port tuned (very cleanly) to 29Hz, bringing the diffraction-corrected extension down to a quite remarkable 30Hz ( $-6\text{dB}$  re. 200Hz). The ES-28N is an easy enough drive too, with its impedance modulus held to between 3.6–10ohm (20Hz–20kHz) while the maximum  $+33/-58^\circ$  swings in phase angle result in minimum low frequency EPDRs of 1.5ohm/25Hz and 2.0ohm/165Hz. All these features are gained at some expense in sensitivity, however, which is closer to 84.5dB/1kHz (and 84.6dB, 500Hz–8kHz) than the rated 86dB. The ES-28N will soar when partnered with a big amplifier! PM



ABOVE: Response inc. nearfield summed drivers/port [green], freefield corrected to 1m at 2.83V [yellow], ultrasonic [pink]. L, blk; R, red; grille, blue;  $\pm 15^\circ$ , grey



ABOVE: Cabinet and mid/treble resonances are well damped, but note mode at 1.2kHz and dome break-up

### HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Sensitivity (SPL/1m/2.83V – 1kHz/Mean/IEC)	84.5dB / 84.4dB / 82.6dB
Impedance modulus: minimum & maximum (20Hz–20kHz)	3.6ohm @ 106Hz 18.9ohm @ 16Hz
Impedance phase: minimum & maximum (20Hz–20kHz)	$-58^\circ$ @ 20Hz $+33^\circ$ @ 238Hz
Pair matching/Resp. error (200Hz–20kHz)	0.9dB / $\pm 2.2\text{dB}$ / $\pm 0.05\text{dB}$
LF/HF extension ( $-6\text{dB}$ ref 200Hz/10kHz)	30Hz / 59.6kHz/49.8kHz
THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz (for 90dB SPL/1m)	0.03% / 0.05% / 0.3%
Dimensions (HWD) / Weight	1050x250x360mm / 38kg