



THE MINI- PLAYBACK SHOW

It is especially in small speakers that a developer's skill truly becomes apparent. And the Epos ES-7N is the work of a true master. You can tell with every note!

Text: Matthias Böde

Many hi-fi enthusiasts consider them both an audio-ophile benchmark, a cult object, and a gateway into the world of hi-fi: compact, standmount speakers. This type of speaker often evokes very special emotions in its listeners. This may be due not only to their small size – which appeals to the “protective instinct” in some enthusi-

asts – but above all to the fact that, thanks to the concentrated expertise of their creators, they often distill musical expression to its very essence, while bulky floor-standing speakers tend to present a more general impression and therefore appear less focused.

These and other thoughts on the topic of compact speakers may cross the minds of hi-fi experts as they explore the Epos

ES-7N. Because this speaker – ta-da! – is the quintessential compact speaker. And that's no coincidence, since it was designed by Karl-Heinz Fink, one of the most distinguished experts on the international audio engineering scene. Under the name FinkTeam, he offers his own product line. Even more influential, however, may be his behind-the-scenes work as the head of the highly regarded Fink Audio Consulting, which makes its expertise available to manufacturers around the world – and not just in the field of speaker technology.

When it comes to Epos – a long-established brand founded in 1983 that Fink took over in 2020 – this means more than just a wealth of expertise in the field. For example, both of the Epos's drivers are entirely in-house designs. Furthermore, Karl-Heinz Fink has honed his understanding of the requirements for small speakers through his work on some of the popular all-in-one systems from Denon and Marantz, which ranked well above the average mass-market products in terms of sound quality. And guess who was responsible for Yamaha's renowned “NSG” speakers? Exactly!

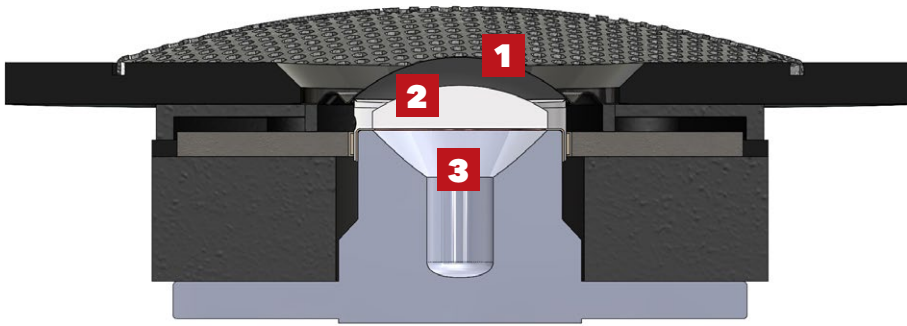
Sound tuning via switch

Now, the ES-7N – the smallest of the three Epos speakers – is certainly not dirt cheap at just under 2,000 euros for a pair. But look at it another way: If Karl-Heinz Fink can achieve respectable results even under price pressure, just imagine what's possible within the far more generous parameters of the compact Epos. After all, this model certainly doesn't come across as a cheap, stripped-down unit.

Behind the ES-7N's solid, dark baffle lies a sturdy, double-walled cabinet with selective internal bracing. Each pair is built in a mirror-symmetrical design. Fink recommends positioning the speakers so that their tweeters are on the inside, as this is said to enhance realistic spatial imaging.

To give the listener maximum flexibility in placement, the ES-7N can be adjusted for placement close to a wall or freestanding. This is done via a toggle switch on the rear panel, which adjusts the lower frequencies to suit the specific conditions. If the Epos is placed on a sideboard or shelf – its height of 29 centimeters was chosen in part so that it would fit in a vinyl record cabinet – these frequencies are slightly reduced in the “Wall” position, since the surrounding environment causes a boost in precisely this range.

If, on the other hand, the speakers are placed on stands – which, according to the



For best clarity and dynamics, the ceramic-coated tweeter diaphragm (1) is backed with a damping pad (2), while the rear volume (3) reduces back pressure.

manufacturer's recommendation, should be about 70 centimeters high – you can set them to the "Free" position and enjoy their full range of tonal richness and depth. We call this thoughtful design, because Fink naturally knows that not all quality-conscious listeners want to – or are able to – follow the strict doctrines of hi-fi, and has ultimately incorporated two crossovers onto the circuit board.

Nicely simple connections

Decisiveness – yes, even a reluctance to compromise – is also evident to the observer in other areas: For example, the bass reflex port, which is positioned at the front as a precaution and supports the 130-millimeter woofer equipped with a polypropylene cone and a powerful dual-magnet driver, is not designed to reproduce midrange frequencies due to its length, curvature, and specific damping characteristics.

To ensure at least some degree of low-resonance contact with the surface, the ES-7N stands on four small rubber feet. Unlike usual, these are not glued in place but are screwed into corresponding sockets via short M4 threads. This makes it easy

to replace them with spikes that can be locked just as securely in place, or with other suitable spacers.

The cable connections also show that Karl-Heinz Fink knows what he's doing and, moreover, doesn't let himself be driven by supposed marketing constraints. Instead of bulky pole terminals – which look great but often deliver mediocre sound – he opts for simple, low-mass sockets for banana plugs. Great!

What we like almost even more is the decision to not employ a standard bi-wiring terminal. In this price range, the vast majority of listeners likely have only one – hopefully high-quality – cable. If you leave the simple metal bridges between the contacts in place or make some other mistake – such as connecting your single cable to the upper inputs – you immediately lose a significant amount of sound quality. Based on this experience, one thing is clear: everything was done right here!

Substance without bass tricks

The attention to detail evident here is also reflected in the measurements: The Epos, which is surprisingly "loud" for a speaker

TEST DEVICES

Turntable: Technics SL-1200GR2 with MM cartridge Rega Nd9

Phono preamp: Pro-Ject DS3 B

CD player: Pro-Ject CD Box RS2 Tube

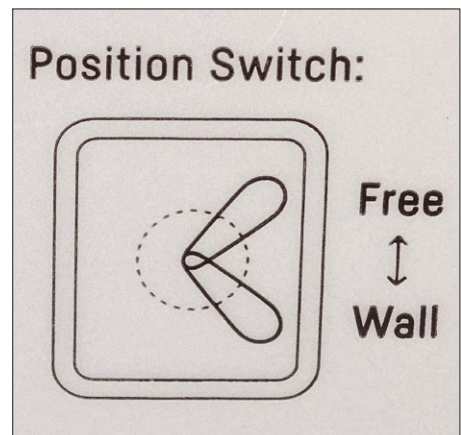
Integrated amplifier: Exposure 2510/3010 S2, Musical Fidelity M3si

Speakers: DALI Rubikore 2

Speaker cable: Silent Wire LS12

of this size – and thus requires very little power while also exhibiting an impedance response that is absolutely amplifier-friendly (Fink even took into account the use of his ES-7N with tube amps) – offers a balanced frequency response.

Unlike some other designers of small speakers, the German engineer avoids the trick of slightly boosting the upper bass



Photos: STEREO, manufacturer

Depending on whether the speakers are placed freely or near a wall, the switch must be set.

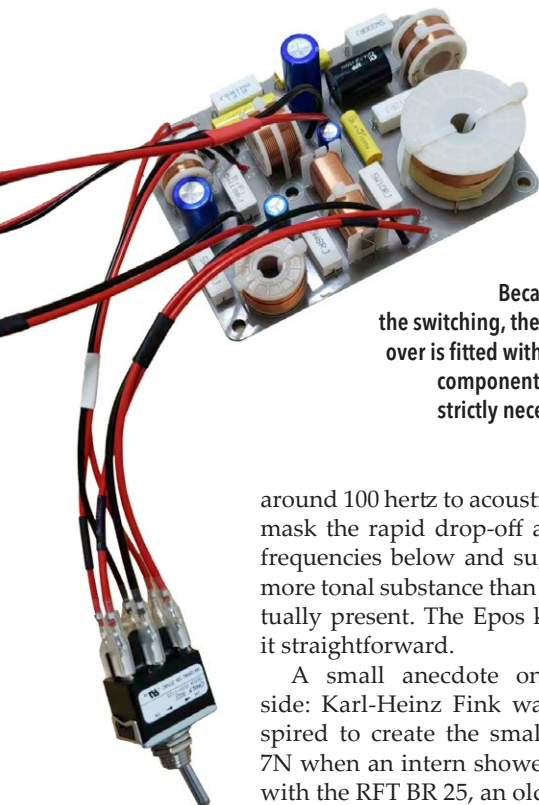


The ES-7N is also available in a satin-matte white, black and orange finish. The German Epos distributor IDC Klaassen offers a matching stand for around 500 euros per pair.



On both sides of the switch are the two connection sockets for banana plugs.

TEST COMPACT LOUDSPEAKERS (PASSIVE)



Because of the switching, the crossover is fitted with more components than strictly necessary.

around 100 hertz to acoustically mask the rapid drop-off at the frequencies below and suggest more tonal substance than is actually present. The Epos keeps it straightforward.

A small anecdote on the side: Karl-Heinz Fink was inspired to create the small ES-7N when an intern showed up with the RFT BR 25, an old cult speaker from eastern Germany, to put it through its paces with some technical testing. The aging gem performed quite well, but Fink felt

inspired to get more out of its fundamentally coherent sound design. For this reason, the Epos is ultimately the result of “preserving hi-fi culture.”

In the listening room, we placed the compact speakers on two stands – certainly their preferred setup – and set the switch to “Free” accordingly. From the very first notes, they radiated that inspired sonic aura that indicates a speaker crafted by a skilled hand. With this encouraging start, it was a pleasure to position the ES-7N correctly in its optimal spot, a process that took some time to bring all the sound parameters into the right balance with one another.

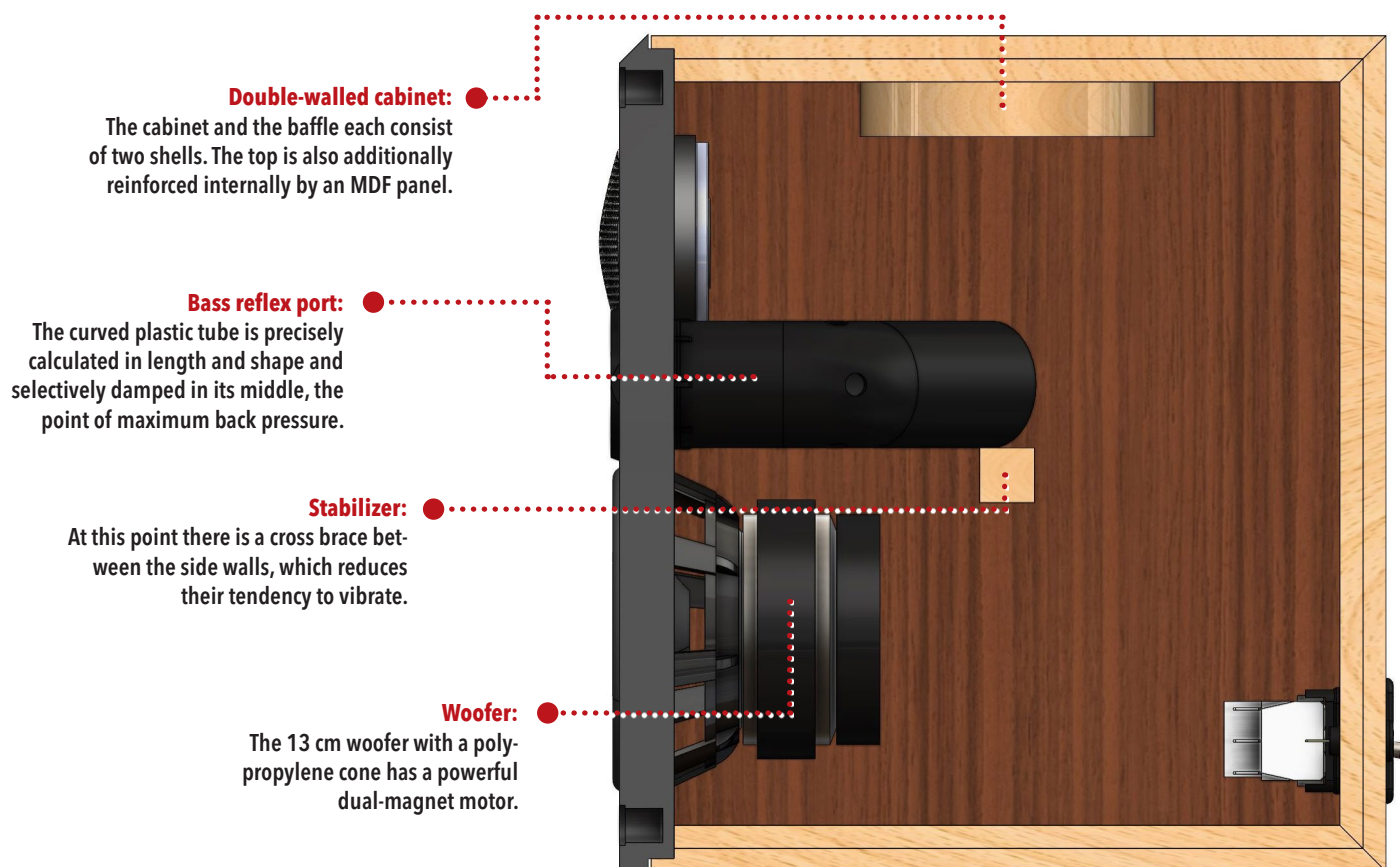
Striking naturalness

What the frequency response had suggested was confirmed in practice: This small speaker wasn’t designed to squeeze as much bass as possible out of a limited volume. Small speakers that do this may initially impress with their abundant low-frequency response, but they often sound sluggish and restrained. The Epos, on the other hand, captivates with its relaxed, free-flowing sound, which nonetheless doesn’t lack substance. Udo Schild’s “All The Lonely Girls,” for example, was able

to rest on a foundation that was clearly defined in the room. Almost more importantly: The singer’s distinctive voice built up seamlessly from the fundamental range and, at the same time, sounded natural in the upper registers – that is, not overly prominent. It is precisely in this range that a typical weakness of some compact speakers lies in the form of a “midrange dip.”

Not so with the ES-7N. Its credo is transparent naturalness. The performance comes across as balanced; it doesn’t sound “contrived” in the least, but rather has an effortless quality that suggests it simply couldn’t sound any other way. Furthermore, the music effortlessly detaches itself from the speakers, creating an open, colorful, and three-dimensionally layered soundstage.

This already worked at low volumes because the Epos kicks in early, but on the other hand it also tolerates higher levels calmly and without drawbacks. Surely contributing to this is the finely chiseled overtone range of its tweeter, which never seems sharp and is protected against touch by a grille, with a shallow ceramic-coated aluminum dome. That the Epos is nevertheless not intended as a shouty cube for party operation goes without saying.





The small rubber nubs on the underside are securely fastened with M4 screws.

The ES-7N, whose smooth unobtrusiveness, which counts among its greatest strengths, perhaps precisely for that reason encourages close listening, embodies rather a straightforward and honest audiophile concept. Because alongside the refined treble come finely fanned-out, richly shaded mids and an agile, pulsating, dry bass. Its supporting reflex port is evidently tuned effectively, since even small impulses create a noticeable draft outside.

This gives guitars body and a punchy grip, for example. The necessary speed without nervousness is one of the cen-

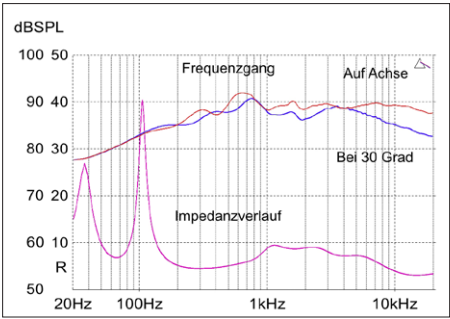


Karl-Heinz Fink
Epos Loudspeakers

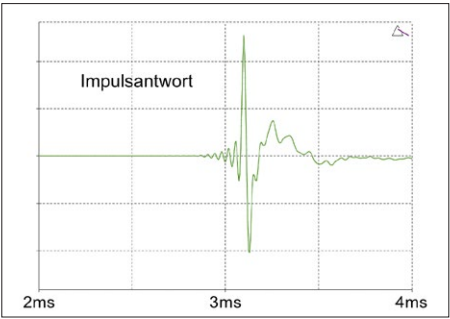
»A ‚SHOW‘ SPEAKER
WASN’T MY INTENTION,
AS HONESTY LASTS
LONGEST.«

tral characteristics of the light, strongly driven woofer cone, which works up to a good 2,500 hertz, where the drivers blend gently into one another. Fink explains that he keeps a coherent time behavior in mind, or rather ear, another important point in the development of not only small speakers.

This, along with other qualities, leads to the audiophile show effect that sophisticated compact speakers like Epos’ ES-7N unfold a complete sound cosmos in miniature format. ■



Basically very linear, gently rolling-off bass and an uncritical impedance curve.



The impulse shows the precise interplay of the two drivers and hardly any ringing.

STEREO TEST RESULT: PROFOUND. CRITICAL. TRANSPARENT.		
EPOS ES-7N		
Product type	Compact loudspeaker (passive)	
Website	www.epos-loudspeakers.com	
Price in euros	1,996 (pair)	
Dimensions (W x H x D) in cm	20 x 29 x 27	
Weight in kg	7.6	
German distributor	IDC Klaassen, www.idc-klaassen.com	
Phone	+49 231 22178822	
Principle	dynamic, two-way, bass reflex	
Terminal	Single-wire	
Info on recommended placement	near wall or relatively free depending on setting	
MEASUREMENTS	40 %	very good 1.4
Frequency response	very good	
Sensitivity (in decibels)	good (89)	
Impulse response	very good	
Minimum impedance	very good (4.4 ohms/240 Hz)	
Distortion at 63/3k/10k Hz (in percent)	good (0.88/0.09/0.1)	
Combination capability	very good	
FEATURES & HANDLING	60 %	good 1.8
Placement	very good	
Quality of the manual	Quick guide on paper, explainer video via QR code	
Initial setup	very good	
Tone control possible	yes	
Cabinet finishes	very good (four)	
Scope of delivery	Grille, rubber feet	
Haptics & workmanship	very good	
Warranty (in years)	good (5 after registration)	
PRACTICAL MARK	good 1.7	
Sound description	explicitly natural, relaxed and spatial reproduction with dry, clean bass	
SOUND SCORE	76/100	