

START ME UP



Epos K1 Loudspeaker

More Than Meets The Eye

Neil Gader

The \$799 Epos K1 is a stylish two-way compact with a nifty little secret up its sleeve (for which, see the sidebar.)

The smallest of the British brand's newly minted, three-model K Series, the K1 joins the 34.5"-tall K2, a medium-sized floorstander also equipped with dual mid/bass drivers, and the recently introduced kingpin, the K3. All are bass-reflex designs, featuring drivers mounted from the rear of the front baffle and, uncommon to speakers in this range, a forward-firing slotted port.

At just under a foot in height, the K1's stout MDF cabinet is uncommonly rigid—thanks in part to a newly developed bracing pattern augmented with internal damping that reduces cabinet colorations to new lows for Epos. The front baffle encircles the transducers to the edges of their surrounds and there are no visible mounting bolts or screws to sully the smooth design. (Epos also offers an optional protective magnetic grille that automatically snaps into place against the baffle.) The satin finished K Series is available in black or the bright arctic white of the review sample I received. The driver array includes a 25mm soft dome with high-temperature voice coil. It's ferrofluid-cooled and driven by a neodymium magnet system. The mid/bass transducer is a six-inch polypropylene cone with a 25mm high-temperature voice coil and shielded magnet system. Internal wiring is 18-gauge oxygen-free copper throughout. Twin sets of terminals are provided for users who find bi-wiring too alluring to dismiss.

Two-way compacts, stand-mount or floorstanding, have steadily chipped away at an old laundry list of small-speaker limitations—from output deficits to attenuated bass extension and overly compressed dynamics. The K1 reflects constructive developments in all these areas with a character that's open, dynamically engaging, and mainly neutral in tonality. Its spectral balance is lighter overall as befits its pint-size profile, but it's not a lightweight sonically. The midrange has a slightly forward lean and descends smoothly into a nicely proportioned mid-to-upper bass region. The K1's output in the upper bass is very good for the speaker's modest size, which lends it a welcome warmth that secures music's foundation and pulse, and generates a sense of gravity—a quality often lacking in sub-12"-tall compacts. While the addition of a good subwoofer reveals the *full* range of ambience and acoustic air in a recording, the K1, in a good setup, is quite convincing on its own.

The K1 reproduces vocals of all stripes with point-source-like solidity, as it demonstrated on Audra McDonald's "Lay Down Your Head," a vocal and string quartet track that underscored the attractively full-throated midrange of the K1. On a 24-bit/96kHz high-resolution track like Ana Caram's bossa nova cover of "Fly Me To The Moon" the reproduction of Caram's soothing vocal, the gentle energy of the classical guitar, and the softly brushed snare and metallic crackle of the hi-hat were detailed, beautiful, and lifelike. Similarly Eva Cassidy's soaring version of "Fields of Gold" highlighted the ability of the K1 to reproduce the

The Secret Revealed

Each K Series can be ordered or upgraded to fully active status using the optional Active-K module. The module replaces the easily removable rear panel/passive crossover assembly, converting the speaker from a passive monitor to a fully active one. Thus modified, the K1 becomes in essence a completely different animal. Here are the details: Built-in to the Active-K module is a Creek-designed power amplifier. The original lossy passive crossover is replaced with an active version, allowing superior driver integration and even wider dynamic range, thanks to the use of EQ (equalization) below the port resonance. A selection of digital inputs is provided that includes a high-quality multi-input DAC, asynchronous USB, and a Bluetooth receiver. Also included is a set of analog inputs. A handheld remote control provides input selection and volume adjustment. Essentially the Active-K1 is transformed into a fully integrated system that only requires a source to rock 'n' roll. The transition is designed to be an easy one, capable of being done in the field by the user or dealer. I'm hoping to receive the Active-K for evaluation when it becomes available, and I'll let you know my impressions in a forthcoming Further Thoughts. Stay tuned.

expansive and immersive reverberant field around the singer. Treble response was quite smooth, pleasantly open, and well integrated into the greater tonal spectrum. The sibilance range was kept nicely in check. There were minor hints of darkness on the very top, with less than the full load of speed, brilliance, and detail found in the finest tweeters; nonetheless, the K's tweet is a top competitor in the under-\$1k class.

The K1 offers superior balance and poise on small-to-medium-scale music, but can also rise to the challenge of full-range symphonic pieces like Copland's *Fanfare for the Common Man*—which has dynamics that can give fits to even the largest loudspeakers. Certainly the smallish mid/bass driver can be pushed beyond reason, or asked unfairly to fill cavernous volumes of cubic footage. But in these instances, the K-1s compress evenly and undramatically, adjoining images shrink slightly, and tonal decay is somewhat attenuated. Basically the K-1 is an amazingly potent little speaker that pretty much doesn't know the meaning of the word "uncle."

Along those same lines the K1 is really in its element establishing a beat and keeping a listener's toe tapping. And for that I have to credit the fortuitous arrival of *The Beatles in Mono* 14-LP box set (reviewed in this issue's music section). The K1 and these marvelous reissues—cut from the original analog mastertapes, no digital finagling—seemed to have a natural affinity for one another. Perhaps it's the K1's British monitor roots, but there were moments during songs like "Blackbird" or "Mother Nature's Son" that I felt like a fly on the wall of the control room at Abbey Road.

Although the K1 doesn't always pull a full-Houdini and vanish into the soundstage such as, say, a classic like the ProAc Tablette,

its image focus is still very good. On Fleetwood Mac's "Gold Dust Woman" from the 24-bit/96kHz file, the K1 preserves the distinct quality of the lower-level harmonies of Lindsey Buckingham and Christie McVie as they backup Stevie Nicks' lead. There is just minor smearing of complex groupings of images, things that top-notch ribbons and beryllium tweeters can resolve all day. Still, back in the real world, the K1's imaging is unashamedly solid.

Bass response is very good, actually excellent for a speaker whose height doesn't even break the one-foot mark. It's decidedly tuneful and well controlled, with a pleasing roundness and resonance. Extending into the fifty-cycle range isn't peanuts for a speaker this size, and the K1 will give listeners more than a mere impression of soundstage information and timbral detail. There's a little thickness in the 80–120Hz range, but it doesn't cloud over the responsiveness and clarity of the mids; rather, it helps to anchor the stage, preserve dimensional cues, and make up in midbass authority for what the K1 lacks in the lowest octaves.

Epos is proud, and in my opinion justifiably so, about its implementation of its slotted port. It not only saves baffle space, but also allows high volumes of air to pass without overhang or the "chuffing" effects commonly found in conventional tube ports. The result, says Epos, is significantly improved low-frequency response and power-handling with minimal coloration from a relatively small driver and modest cabinet volume. Also to its credit the K1 mates smoothly with a good fast subwoofer like the REL S5 (review to come). If you want to really get down to *fundamentals*—the sort that a pair of big tom-toms deliver—a sub on the order of the REL is a must. More than adding extension, which it most assuredly does, the REL defines initial bass transients and timbre with greater clarity and color than the K1 or any small monitor can manage on its own.

The Epos K1 is one seriously classy little speaker with genuine sonic integrity. It sports many of the virtues that endear us to the finer, pricier two-way compacts, while minimizing the common shortcomings in its "blue plate special" price category. A hugely satisfying effort from Epos to say the least, and as you'll read in the sidebar the story doesn't end here. To be continued.... **tas**

SPECS & PRICING

Type: Two-way bass-reflex, compact loudspeaker

Drivers: 25mm tweeter, 6" mid/bass

Frequency response: 51Hz-30kHz

Impedance: 4 ohms

Sensitivity: 88dB

Dimensions: 11.8" x 7.3" x 8.9"

Weight: 12 lbs.

Price: \$799

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