



Spot check

Elac has a vast range of fine speakers, but **David Vivian** wonders if this high-end baby might have hit the sweetest spot of all

I reckon German speaker maker Elac has a bit of an image problem in the UK. Universally respected for its high-tech drive units – especially the celebrated and distinctive JET ribbon tweeter, now in fifth-gen spec – the Kiel-based company perhaps comes across as having a little too much *vorsprung durch technik* and not enough, er, funk.

A response of sorts has come with a new range of optional custom lacquer finishes (yep, any colour you can

think of), but I'm inclined to think its BS 263 two-way standmount, the baby of the 'affordable high-end' 260 series (there's also a 267 floorstander), has more raw desirability than the majority of models in the German company's extensive range. And, like many a compact component with a premium price tag, the good feelings start with first contact.

The BS 263 is a really chunky little fellow, almost dinky in height but unusually deep, the enclosures' gently

DETAILS

- PRODUCT**
Elac BS 263
- ORIGIN**
Germany
- TYPE**
2-way standmount loudspeaker
- WEIGHT**
6.6kg
- DIMENSIONS (WxHxD)**
192 x 285 x 285mm
- FEATURES**
 - 1x JET 5 ribbon tweeter
 - 1x 150mm AS-XR mid-bass driver
 - Quoted sensitivity: 87.5dB/1W/1m
- DISTRIBUTOR**
Hi-Fi Network Ltd
- TELEPHONE**
01285 643088
- WEBSITE**
elac.com; hifi-network.com

curved sidewalls tapering to back panels that give the upper third to the generous circumference of flared reflex ports, beneath which are single pairs of high-quality binding posts. Very neat. It feels surprisingly weighty at 6.6kg and, whichever side you rap with your knuckles feels impressively inert. Reassurance that you've spent your money wisely gets a final thumbs up when you whip off the magnetically secured grilles to reveal the jewel-like drive units. I suspect exposed is how they'll stay.

Elac has been in the speaker business for around three decades and, as well as the enduring JET tweeter, has given the audio world the omni-directional 4Pi tweeter and, most recently, its AS-XR mid and bass drivers with their unique crystal-like cone surface geometry, a 150mm version of which appears here. The AS cones are constructed from a sandwich of aluminium and paper while the distinctive crystal pattern, as well as looking very pretty, is

intended to add stiffness and so help the cone stay in shape under duress. All Elac drivers are designed and built inhouse; only the van den Hul internal wiring and a crossover network that boasts large air-core coils and foil capacitors coming from outside suppliers.

The fourth refinement of the JET tweeter adheres to the meticulously folded membrane structure originally inspired by Dr Oskar Heil. Essentially a ribbon folded through a series of neodymium bar magnets, its construction requires incredibly fine tolerances. The upshot is a tweeter that combines efficiency with high power handling while shifting break up to a place well out of harm's way (around 50kHz). It's high end in every sense.

Sound quality

As ever, my super-heavy and stable Slate Audio stands get an outing. Despite creating a pretty glaring aesthetic mismatch (Elac can furnish a more elegant solution), they effectively clamp the compact BS 263 in space. And it needs some of that to give its best – at least a metre away from the back wall, with a little toe-in, proximity to side walls is less critical. Amplification duties fall to Monitor Audio's A100 (HFC 390) claiming 50W per channel and Musical Fidelity's kW250S claiming 250W each side, with digital sources of varying resolution routed through Chord's Hugo DAC (HFC 386).

Elac has an enviable reputation for making small speakers with a big, room-filling sound. This isn't simply a case of being able to play loud and

having a disproportionately deep bass, though in the broad scheme of things, the BS 263 confidently ticks both these boxes, even with the modestly muscular MA amp doing its bidding. More than this, though, is the sense of space the speaker is capable of generating, not just exceeding the boundaries of its bijou cabinet but also the walls of my modestly sized listening room. And it isn't just a width thing. Soundscapes are truly three-dimensional and the speaker magically dissolves into them.

All right, so much for the expansive sonic arena, what about the music? With the proviso that some allowance has to be made for scale and dynamics – a tiddler, however talented, is never going to match my

Not to sample the delights of a speaker as special as this would be crazy

reference ATC SMC20 in this respect – it is exceedingly clear, precise, well balanced and coherent. In one respect, it leaves the ATC for dead. The SMC20 is no slouch for a big, three-way floorstander, but the Elac is fast. Fast like an Ariel Atom is fast. Its temporal surety isn't manifested as leading-edge emphasis, but a rare sense of fluidity – a great complement to the similarly gifted Hugo in this respect – that lets the music breathe and move along in a completely natural and unforced manner. This transparency and insight, especially the finely resolved texture and shape



Standard gloss finish is available in a choice of black or white

of treble energy, hits all the right hi-fi notes, but the seemingly effortless lucidity is what draws you in and keeps fatigue at bay, however long you keep listening. If you want to know just how much love and care has gone into the production of James Taylor's latest album, *Before This World* (HFC 399) the BS 263 will provide the answer. More importantly, you'll hear why JT cares in his voice.

Conclusion

It wouldn't be unreasonable for anyone with £1,250 to spend to expect something that at least comes up to their waist, and there are plenty of fine floorstanders at this price to choose from. Not to sample the delights of a standmount as special as the BS 263, however, would be crazy. It's an essential audition ●

IN SIGHT

- 1 JET 5 ribbon tweeter
- 2 Rear bass port
- 3 4mm binding posts
- 4 150mm AS-XR mid-bass driver

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY**
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Fast, transparent yet beguilingly natural sound; fine build; high-quality finish
- VALUE FOR MONEY**
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Lacks the dynamic reach of a good £1k floorstander
- BUILD QUALITY**
★★★★★ **WE SAY:** One of the best standmounts we've heard at this price point
- EASE OF DRIVE**
★★★★★

OVERALL

