

Hi-Fi Choice

P R E S E N T S

THE 2011 COLLECTION

A CELEBRATION OF THE WORLD'S FINEST HI-FI



techradar.com
THE COLLECTION 2011
Future £4.99
9 781858 704562
ISBN 1-858704-56-1

AUTUMN/WINTER 2011 £4.99



£4,900
Absolute Sounds
020 8971 3909
www.martinlogan.com

MartinLogan

Theos

An ESL that combines elegance, transparency and relative affordability

MartinLogan has established itself as a leader in electrostatic loudspeakers and one reason for this is the superb standard of build and finish it achieves with even its most affordable model.

Even though it stands 1.5m tall, the Theos is the smallest model to feature an electrostatic panel for mid and treble (there is a more affordable Electromotion model, but that has a Folded Motion tweeter).

It's a hybrid design with a passive dynamic speaker producing bass in a real-wood veneered cabinet and the driver is an 8-inch aluminium unit chosen to match the speed of the 112cm panel above it. If nothing else, it blends in physically; we had to look hard to realise that it was a metal driver.

The panel itself is what MartinLogan calls an Xstat transducer. It's the same height as the panel in a Summit X but is narrower at 230mm and thus has a tighter curve in order to achieve the 30 degree dispersion pattern that the company prefers. This has been achieved by reducing the gauge of the steel stators – the perforated metal plates that sit either side of the moving diaphragm. This results in a panel that is effectively translucent so you can see whatever is behind it, although we wouldn't recommend putting one right in front of the telly.

The crossover in the Theos was designed by 'professor' of engineering Joe Vojtko (see MartinLogan's promos on YouTube). It's based on the one developed for the mighty CLX full range electrostatic and uses point to point rather than PCB wiring. Electrostatics need a bias voltage to operate and this is usually very high, in the thousands range, albeit with very low current. This is supplied by a transformer which requires power and therefore a power cable.

The Theos has a low-voltage DC power supply produced by an inverter in wall-wart form that has a long, skinny lead so you don't need a big IEC cable connected to the speaker, nor do you need a mains outlet nearby. The only drawback with the supply for us Brits is that it comes with a two-prong Schuko plug, which needs an adaptor.

The manual for this speaker is a hefty tome, covering every aspect of ESL speakers in general and how to set the Theos up in particular. It details how to establish the correct toe in using a torch and what the best position is relative to the size of the room. In our 2.72m wide room the optimal distance from the side wall to the centre of the panel is 75.5cm – pretty close to where we usually place speakers. It also points out that it's a good idea to establish position prior to fitting the chunky floor spikes that are supplied. This isn't a particularly heavy speaker, but we'd certainly agree with that.

There is also a fair amount on room acoustics and how to get the best out of the speaker in your room, which is useful. The spec indicates a sensitivity of 90dB which tallies with our findings and suggests that you don't need an unduly powerful amplifier to get the best from a pair of Theos.

SOUND QUALITY

We used the D'Agostino Momentum monoblocks (p92) at one end of the scale and a Leema Tucana 2 (p110) integrated at the other and got differing, but wholly thrilling, results with

both. The speaker revels in the fine detail and fluidity of the Momentum and delivered a more muscular, punchy result with the Leema which suggests that it's the nature of the amplifier that counts, not the power rating – nothing new there, but with this degree of transparency on offer this message is clearly reinforced.

What makes this speaker so thrilling is the speed at which it produces notes. It's not until you hear a decent ESL that you realise the tremendous advantage they have in this respect. This is obvious at both low and high levels and results in further admiration of the playing abilities of the musicians on the recording. The source and amplifier have to be up to the job to make this apparent, but with a great turntable and a favourite record you can bask in the rhythm till the cows come home.

What ESL makers tend to emphasise is the imaging capabilities of the technology – and these are indeed spectacular – but pace is what really counts. Here, you can

“The speed at which this speaker produces notes is simply thrilling”

hear it wherever you sit and whatever the recording style; it's the nub of musical enjoyment.

The Theos makes almost anything you spin sound irresistible, as does the way it delivers voices. Rarely have we encountered a more direct line of emotional communication than this speaker achieves with a great singer. Stevie Nicks' voice on Fleetwood Mac's *Dreams* is enough to stir the feelings of the most stony heart imaginable.

Naturally, the imaging isn't shabby. It puts most dynamics in the shade, especially when it comes to height, which is up to the ceiling – if not sky-scraping – thanks to that long panel. It creates voices and instruments of palpable presence, especially if they happen to be in the mid and upper registers. The bass is solid enough, but naturally restricted by the relatively compact nature of the bass cabinet, so it's not surprising that the next model up in the range – the Ethos – has active bass.

The Theos is a beautifully constructed, room-friendly speaker that has pace that's to die for and the ability to raise the hairs on your neck with the right record.

Jason Kennedy

