

HIGH END
HERO

Hunting for a multichannel package that's equally awe-inspiring with movies and music? Look no further than DALI's Epicon. It sounds... epic.

DANISH AUDIO MARQUE DALI (an acronym for Danish Audiophile Loudspeaker Industries, in case you're wondering) is renowned in the hi-fi world for its no-compromise high-end cabinets. Its flagship model, aptly named the Megaline, stands over 2.3m high and presents a front panel armed with no fewer than 30 drivers. It's the kind of speaker to send two-channel fans into a state of ecstasy.

For home cinema setups, DALI buyers have to look below the Megaline to the brand's Epicon range, auditioned here. Yet this really isn't much of a step down – the culmination of thirty years of meticulous R&D, the Epicon lineup is where DALI has focused plenty of effort and, thankfully for multichannel addicts often ignored by premium speaker brands, it's seen fit to offer standmount models and a dedicated centre channel enclosure. A high-end 5:1 array is therefore possible. >

Mark Craven's passion for multichannel audio has reached the point where he wants to fit a subwoofer to his bedside clock radio





And high-end it most certainly is. The six-speaker setup here comes to market with a £17,000 price tag. Budget buyers should look elsewhere.

Meet the team

The system comprises a pair of Epicon 6 floorstanders for the front left and right channels, the Epicon Vokal centre speaker, Epicon 2s for the surround channels and a SUB P-10 DSS subwoofer on LFE duty.

The latter, as you may have guessed from the name, isn't an official part of the Epicon range – there is, in fact, no Epicon-branded woofer. This means that, stylistically, it's not quite an aesthetic match, unless you get it in its gloss black finish and specify the Epicons in the same flavour. Our eclectic lineup features the Epicon 6s in the more sumptuous Ruby Macassar guise, while the Epicon 2s are dressed in Walnut.

'The lacquer finish begs to be touched and the curved edges and sloping cabinet are easy on the eye'

All the cabinets are highly attractive and built to exacting standards. The Epicon 6s are perhaps not as big as you might expect considering their £7,800-per-pair ticket, but that will make them easier to house. The lacquer finish begs to be touched and the curved edges and sloping cabinet are easy on the eye (of course, the shape isn't all about styling, as it helps eliminate standing waves). Each cabinet is constructed from six layers of MDF and given 10 coats of lacquer. The quartet of binding posts on each (enabling bi-amping should you wish) feel supremely solid.

Remove the magnetic grilles and you can feast your eyes on DALI's drivers. The Epicon 6 incorporates two 6.5in mid-bass cones, made from a proprietary wood fibre material, and a pair of high-frequency drivers, one a soft dome and the other a ribbon design. DALI denotes this as a 'two-and-a-half-and-a-half-way' design.

Behind the scenes, there's some clever technology going on. DALI's self-developed non-conductive Soft Magnetic Compound (SMC) is employed in the driver magnet system to reduce distortion across the frequency range of the mid-bass cones – and each of these is ported via its own internal chamber, allowing each to be individually tuned. DALI supplied me with its white paper, but to convey the engineering involved in these speakers would require a whole other magazine. Needless to say, the



The premium build quality of the Epicon cabinets extends to the impressively sturdy binding posts

engineers didn't spend a quarter of a century simply looking at different lacquer finishes.

The Epicon 2s, which would typically be mounted on optional stands, feature one 6.5in wood fibre driver and a soft dome tweeter, and sport a similar cabinet shape.

The Vokal speaker, on the other hand, offers the same driver complement as the Epicon 6s, housed in – and I'll be honest here – one of the largest enclosures I've yet seen for a centre channel speaker. You'll need to think about where you're going to place it.

The aforementioned SUB P-10 DSS woofer features a trio of 10in drivers – one downward-firing and powered by a 500W on-board

power plant; two side-firing and un-driven.

It's nice to look at and not outrageously large. A small remote is on hand to adjust levels from the comfort of your listening position.

The venue for this bout of high-end audio appreciation was Hi-Fi Cinema, a specialist AV retailer and licenced DALI dealer based near Reading. This was partly for convenience – I didn't fancy setting up this expensive array in my own house – and partly because it has the front-end to do the Epicons justice. So, with an Oppo BDP-105EU spinning discs and a combination of Anthem and Naim separates providing the grunt, I settled onto the sofa in Hi-Fi Cinema's spacious demo room. >

Alan Gornall, the genial, movie-mad general manager, even brought me a cup of tea. Time to begin.

Beautiful mixture

There's no point beating about the bush – this system sounds awesome, up there with the very best multichannel packages I've heard. It delivers a beautiful mixture of clarity, detail, energy and scale.

The Epicon 6s are the stars of the show. Floorstanding speakers designed very much with the hi-fi market in mind, the qualities they possess work equally well with film soundtracks. I did, however, begin with some straight, two-channel material, enjoying the way the second bass driver, which is active below 600Hz, plumbs the depths, quickly and tightly, to track the basslines of my Chase and Status CD. The higher frequency sounds, meanwhile, including the percussive 'tings' and various electronic ticks, were lush.

But enough of my roughly-mastered CD – time to don a hi-fi hat and savour some 'known-good' multichannel tracks – namely Pink Floyd's *Time* and, er, Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* (sometimes, you just have to follow the crowd). Here, the transparency and sheer clarity of the Epicon system really came to the fore, with the discordant clocks that open the Pink Floyd song ringing so sweetly from

'There's real scale here – with the rear channels in action, the effect is a wonderfully detailed wall of sound'

all around the soundstage, with such unnerving placement, that I felt like a cat burglar in a Howard Miller factory.

When the instrumentation finally kicks in, the speakers' effortless performance across the entire frequency range is apparent. Everything from the lightly-driven guitars and thumping drums to the iconic basslines and David Gilmour's vocals sounds cleanly separated and extremely articulate. Tonal differences are immediately apparent.

There's real scale, too. With the rear channels in action, the effect is a wonderfully three-dimensional wall of sound, only built from individual elements rather than an unseemly mush. The subwoofer, meanwhile, adds a musical, rich low-frequency presence to the whole shebang, without drawing overt attention to itself – until the climatic cannon fire of Tchaikovsky's masterpiece, that is, where it underpins the artillery with real force.

For movies, I opted first for *Casino Royale* and the famous free-running sequence, and

DALI's proprietary 'hybrid' tweeter arrangement delivers immaculate high-frequencies



the Vokal centre channel quickly earned its crust. This is no mealy-mouthed squawk box; character's voices come through with potent weight when required, but delicacy, too. Bond's mic'd voice whispers urgently in the ear of his inexperienced fellow agent, warning him to keep his cover in the presence of bomb-fanatic Mollaka, and it sounds frighteningly authentic. Then, when Mollaka realises he's been rumbled, the soundtrack introduces a number of effects which the DALI system revels in – Mollaka's panicked breathing, falling brickwork, whistling wind atop the crane...

The Expendables 2 offers a far more chaotic soundstage, with the film's sound engineers seemingly deciding to jettison any attempt at dynamic subtlety in favour of a relentless barrage of sonic mayhem. The Epicon array proves unfazed, keeping the various explosions, gunshots, engine rumbles and shouted dialogue of the opening sequence as distinct as possible even with the volume ramped up to ear-bothering levels. The room filled with noise, the subwoofer – called upon almost constantly here – sounded weighty and authoritative, and when Terry Crews pulls out the World's Biggest Gun to deal with a corridor of goons, the forceful impacts from the Vokal centre channel were so intense I whooped with glee. As I like to do. Further on, when the mercenary gang finally unveil the hooded captor as none other than Arnold Schwarzenegger ('dis embarrassing') I was keenly aware of crackling flames in a brazier in the room's corner, which I'd never clocked before.

Other movies continued to delight. The battle with the Romulan spaceship in *Star Trek* (2009) again highlighted the system's ability to create an immense, effect-filled soundstage; *Superman Returns*, and the sequence where our future hero crashes to Earth, gave the array a chance to really show off its low-frequency prowess.

Nothing to complain about

Criticisms? I have very few.

As mentioned, the centre channel does seem almost comically big, but considering its performance I'd be happy to live with it.

In terms of sheer scale and power, the JBL Synthesis array I reviewed last year outmuscles this setup – but that was a 7.2-channel system, built to be listened to but never looked at, with its own dedicated amplification and processing and an asking price of nearly £80,000. So hardly a fair comparison.

In short, this is a speaker package that I want. The build and design is superb. DALI has mixed traditional looks with a bit of modern styling, and I can't these cabinets being out of place in any environment.

Most importantly, they sound fabulous, whether it's with energetic movie soundtracks or more sedate music material. Audition without fear! ■

SPECIFICATIONS

EPICON 6
DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 6.5in wood fibre cones; 1 x 2in ribbon tweeter; 1 x 1in soft textile dome tweeter
ENCLOSURE: Rear-ported
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 35Hz-30kHz (+/- 3dB)
SENSITIVITY: 88dB
POWER HANDLING: 300W
DIMENSIONS: 1,025(h) x 232(w) x 441(d)mm
WEIGHT: 30kg

EPICON 2
DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 6.5in wood fibre cone; 1 x 1in soft textile dome tweeter
ENCLOSURE: Rear-ported
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 47Hz-30kHz (+/- 3dB)
SENSITIVITY: 87dB
POWER HANDLING: 200W
DIMENSIONS: 386(h) x 214(w) x 366(d)mm
WEIGHT: 10.3kg

EPICON VOKAL
DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 6.5in wood fibre cones; 1 x 2in ribbon tweeter; 1 x 1in soft textile dome tweeter
ENCLOSURE: Rear-ported
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 49Hz-30kHz (+/- 3dB)
SENSITIVITY: 89.5dB
POWER HANDLING: 300W
DIMENSIONS: 247(h) x 816(w) x 349(d)mm
WEIGHT: 18.4kg

SUB P-10 DSS
DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 10in active long-throw woofer; 2 x 10in passive long-throw woofers
ENCLOSURE: Sealed
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 24Hz-250Hz
ON BOARD POWER: 500W
REMOTE CONTROL: Yes
DIMENSIONS: 370(h) x 340(w) x 340(d)mm
WEIGHT: 19.5kg
CONNECTIONS: LFE input; stereo phono input

HCC VERDICT



DALI Epicon 5.1
 → £17,000 Approx → www.dali-uk.co.uk
 → www.hificinema.co.uk
 → Tel: 0845 644 3537
HIGHS: Gorgeous cabinets and rock-solid build quality; astonishing performance with music and movies; clean, full-bodied sound across the frequency range
LOWS: Subwoofer only available in black or white; very large centre channel; premium price point

Performance ★★★★★
 Design ★★★★★
 Features ★★★★★
Overall ★★★★★