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9 PAGES OF YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

New Arrival

Adam Smith listens to Audiaz's stylish Eta loudspeakers...



"a vivid, crisp and detailed sound that I can see winning them many fans..."

As I mentioned in my column in the July 2008 issue of *Hi-Fi World*, one of the delights of my first trip to the Munich High End Show earlier this year was stumbling on a number of manufacturers that we simply do not hear of in the UK. Whether the manufacturers in question feel Britain is not a suitable market for their products, or they lack the funding to initiate a suitable distribution network I do not know, but the fact remains that there are many products that we are unlikely to ever see, officially at least, in this country.

However, thanks to the UK distributors and dealers doing the rounds at the show, some of those elusive names are starting to appear. For one of the first, we have to thank John Sampson of JS Audio Consultancy and also JS Audio Repairs, a company specialising in hi-fi repairs, servicing and modifications. The manufacturer in question is AudiaZ, a German loudspeaker manufacturer with a current lineup of three models in their range. The history of AudiaZ dates back to the founding of Hartl & Weber Audio-Design GbR in 2000, by Helmuth Webers and Günter Hartl. Webers is an audio enthusiast with knowledge of electronics and a background in the build and repair of loudspeakers, initially for musicians. In 1995 Webers met Hartl, a fellow enthusiast and a craftsman, well versed in the complexities of cabinet design. Pooling their resources, AudiaZ was the result, with the aim of "designing and crafting exclusive loudspeakers".

All three of AudiaZ's current models are handmade and make use of high quality drive units, such as Accuton's ceramic-coned bass and midrange drivers, allied to Heil AMT, diamond dome or ribbon tweeters. All models are resplendent in stylish and very well crafted handmade cabinets.



The Eta under review here is the base model in the range, something of a surprise considering its starting price of £10,500. For this, your money buys you a three way floorstanding loudspeaker featuring a pair of

150mm Accuton bass drivers, a 100mm Accuton midrange unit and a single Air Motion Transformer tweeter. These are mounted in a heavily braced and beautifully finished 'multiplex' cabinet, connected by cable that uses surface polished solid core silver conductors in a Teflon dielectric and using nothing but the highest quality components in the crossover.

Further options are available however, firstly a 'Silver Edition' which costs £3,800 extra, upgrades the internal crossover components to solid silver types; secondly the tweeter can be substituted for a 20mm Diamond dome unit (also £3,800 extra) and, finally, the driver cones themselves can be supplied with a black finish instead of silver at no extra cost, although this latter change is purely cosmetic and does not alter the sound.

The Etas are neat and compact, being based on a simple box that measures 1070x210x210mm (HxVxD) and weighs in at 22kg, although they are a little wider given that the front face is actually a diagonal formed by slicing a portion of the box off. Consequently their 'real' width and depth dimensions, if my Pythagoras is right, are actually around 270x270mm. Standard finishes are Walnut and Maple real wood veneers, but other veneers, Piano Lacquer finishes or custom paint requirements can be catered for on request.

SOUND QUALITY

Having already heard more than a few pairs of loudspeakers using the Accuton ceramic drive units and having liked pretty much all of them, I had a feeling I was unlikely to dislike the Etas, and this did indeed turn out to be the case. AudiaZ have come up with a loudspeaker that performs with a real sense of dynamism and authority, that offers a fine blend of

resolution, speed and detail. The Etas' overall balance is quite a forthright one, and the slight lift in output towards higher frequencies [see MEASURED PERFORMANCE] makes itself known by the way in which they add a pleasing crispness to performances.

I have to say that I'm rapidly becoming a big fan of AMT drive units, and the Etas' tweeter adds a superb sense of air and spatiality to proceedings that makes many other loudspeakers at or near the price sound rather half-hearted. Finer details from the back of recordings are pulled out well, but without making the 'front of house' action becoming overblown or harsh. The result is an all-encompassing whole that offers a fine sense of depth to proceedings, stretching nicely back beyond the listening area but focusing the main action beautifully right in front of you.

Nicky Holland's piano on 'Ladykiller' from her eponymous debut CD was vivid and full of detail, and the lady's vocals were a delight, being strongly centre-stage and nicely emotive. Moving on through the disc I did start to detect a hint of upper treble hissiness at times on sibilants, however. That is to say that the Etas never actually sounded overly sibilant as such, but seemed to turn the occasional 's' into a longer drawn-out 'sss'. This was most obvious on poorer quality source material and was exacerbated further by more strident-sounding partnering equipment, so care in matching such items is a wise move...

Lower down, the Etas offer fine upper bass and midband resolution. Instrument character was easy to discern and orchestras were fanned out with pleasing effectiveness. Sometimes lesser loudspeakers make it difficult to easily discern the difference between the likes of a violin, viola or cello, but the Etas captured the innate timbre of each of these items with ease, making orchestral material a vivid experience.

At the low end, things continued well, with fine bass detail and pace. Bass lines were confident and impressively tuneful

but, as might be expected, those twin 150mm drivers did not dig thunderously deep. I also had to carry out a certain amount of experimentation with regard to spike height in order to optimise the down-firing port's performance. Initially, with the spikes screwed fully in, the low end had something of a 'bloom' to it; unscrewing them to lift the 'speakers up helped greatly but did remove an element of extension. Experimentation is the key here.

CONCLUSION

The AudiaZ Etas are a very stylish and well designed pair of loudspeakers that turn in a fine performance across a wide range of music. Some care does need to be taken with partnering equipment in order to fully appreciate their top end, and in terms of positioning to optimise bass performance, but they offer a vivid, crisp and detailed sound that I can see winning them many fans.

I feel that their only real problem is their price and, more specifically, the competition they face at this level, such as the Isophon Cassianos and the B&W 801Ds. The Etas are ultimately no less capable than these models but I feel that they cannot quite match either of them for that instant "Wow - where's my cheque book?" effect. In pure sonic terms then, firmly recommended, but they are up against strong competition.

VERDICT 
Well designed and beautifully finished loudspeakers with a dynamic and sophisticated sound.

AUDIAZ ETA £10,500
JS Audio Consultancy
+44(0)20 405 9043
www.audiaz.de

FOR

- superb top end
- fine imaging
- low end detail and pace
- build and styling

AGAINST

- occasional sibilant hiss
- price & competition

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

The Audiaz Etas are tricky loudspeakers to measure as a result of the different directions in which their drivers face, but all measurements were taken directly facing the midrange and treble units. These drivers integrate well, with just a gentle dip in the 1-3kHz region that will assuage any harshness in the ear's most sensitive region, along with a rise around 5-10kHz which will lift the balance of the loudspeaker towards the top end. There are no sharp peaks or dips though, which bodes well for an even-handed performance.

At the low end, bass actually starts to tail off below 400Hz, before finally dropping off below 80Hz. The port reinforces things down to 40Hz but this gradual tailing off is likely to rob some impact from the low end, although judicious positioning will undoubtedly help here. There is also some potential for fine tuning by varying the height of the loudspeakers on their feet, as the port is down-firing.

Electrically, the Etas have a 'roller-coaster' type impedance curve. This does not vary wildly however, leading to a fairly amplifier-friendly load and an average measured impedance of 6.4

Ohms, dipping to a minimum of around 4 Ohms. This means they do present a genuine 4 Ohm load to an amplifier but, with a measured sensitivity of 87dB, should not need much more than 40 Watts to work well. AS

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



Green - driver output
Red - port output

IMPEDANCE

