

Group Test | SURROUND SPEAKER PACKAGES

Epos
ELS3 5.1

£956

↑ FOR

Marvellous timing, drive, midrange and musicality; excellent integration

↓ AGAINST

The appearance won't appeal to everyone – it looks a bit dated

→ VERDICT

An exceptional system with the ability to bring multichannel material bounding to life



DON'T LET THE rather strange colour and the dated angles of the cabinets fool you – this Epos ELS3 surround system is extraordinarily capable. The looks might be nothing to write home about, but the fit and finish are fine – and, crucially, the performance is exceptional.

You'd be forgiven for questioning the capability of the four compact monitors to cope with large-scale cinema sound, but be assured, they do their thing very well indeed. They don't reach down all that far – as one

would expect from smaller boxes, but the low-frequency content they produce is well controlled and exquisitely timed. At the top end they're crisp but not sharp, and the midrange is warm, weighty and beautifully poised.

The centre speaker, as might be expected, produces a well-judged, unceasingly human dialogue and communicates without restraint. But the star of the show might just be the ELS subwoofer, which gets close to the ideal for products of this type: it digs deep and hits with weight, but also manages to combine these traits with lightning speed and deft agility. And to add the final gloss, all six speakers integrate smoothly to produce a sound that's as convincing as can be.

A movie such as *Thunderbirds* might not rock anyone's intellectual world, but it's a really good test of a multichannel system's ability. The Epos delivers the soundtrack with stability, verve and a lovely neutral tonality. It's agile beyond belief, with effortless flow and telepathic effects steering. These are traits that make multichannel music a pleasure, too. Joni Mitchell's string-drenched re-recording of *Both Sides, Now* on



A star with multichannel movies, and it can also extract real emotion from your music

DVD-A exhibits fine drive and punch when required, but has sufficient dexterity to steer the gossamer intro around the speakers without apparent strain. Throughout, Joni's age-booze-'n'-fags-ravaged voice is effortlessly soulful and blessed with spine-tingling intimacy. Most impressive of all is the Epos system's prodigious timing, which can hold

every strand of a recording together with superb accuracy.

Here, then, is a system capable of fulfilling the every need of those who don't crave a sub/sat set-up. The ELS3 5.1 has barnstorming movie capability, can thrill with multichannel and stereo music, sounds a great deal bigger than it is and is priced realistically. Don't all rush at once: