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Elac FS247 Sapphire Edition (£3000)

The first of two German speakers reviewed this month, the elegant Elac delivers a fine sound that's 'genre agnostic'
Review: **Richard Stevenson** Lab: **Keith Howard**

Elac, or to give the company its full name Electroacoustic, is an established German speaker brand that has only recently nailed its UK presence thanks to distribution by Atacama Audio. The brand has enjoyed international success but selling German speakers into the UK has always invited similes about coals and Newcastle. To address just that, Elac has given us the UK's first look at the FS247 in its tweaked and fettled SE or Sapphire Edition.

There is certainly no shortage of loudspeakers around this £3000 price point but precious few are finished with the sumptuous attention to detail of the Elacs. The gloss black coachwork is as near to a proper mirror-like piano black as I have seen on any speaker this side of £10k, and better than quite a few models well above this price point (you know who you are). This is a slim, elegant and fairly compact floorstander with an eye-catching front baffle. This features the metal housing of Elac's signature JET tweeter and a pair of its multifaceted aluminium mid/bass drivers that likewise appear across many of its ranges.

These unusual cones are an aluminium sandwich design with cellulose filling, shaped to reduce unwanted vibrations in the cone itself. The voice-coil is bonded to both the cone neck and the rear aluminium membrane, which Elac claims extends the bandwidth. The Elac also has an unusual twin-board crossover, the heavyweight coils being on a separate board, all wired together in the Sapphire Edition with cable from The Chord Company. We should report, however, that with two review samples, the heavy inductors had sheared from their boards, even though well packed for shipping from Elac's base in Kiel.

The cabinet itself is dual-ported with a large aperture firing straight down into the gap between the plinth and the cabinet, and another high on the rear of the cabinet. The latter comes supplied with a solid rubber and Elac branded port bung for fine tuning the LF response. This is certainly more sophisticated

than the usual lumps of sponge that most makers supply (or the old socks pressed into action when they go missing).

More interesting still is the supplied JET tweeter Dispersion Control tuning element. This comprises four metal clips that are fitted radially around the tweeter to hold in place a velvet-covered foam doughnut. As the JET tweeter has a very wide horizontal dispersion pattern in standard trim, this kit is supplied for installations in small or very lively rooms where excessive sidewall reflections would confuse the soundstage. In my room, damped by hi-fi detritus, a sofa and two acoustically absorbent hounds, fitting the inserts stymied the FS247SE's otherwise spectacular imaging, so the JET DC kit went back in the box.

PUT A SOCK IN IT(?)

The port bung instigated a little more head-scratching as the results were highly dependent on the speakers' room position. As with any optional tweaks like these, by the time you start thinking you like the bungs in with some tracks, and bungs out with others, only madness lies ahead. My eventual compromise was bringing the speakers some 1.5m away from the rear walls and leaving the bungs out – any closer and there was a little clouding of the upper bass. Thankfully these speakers are not massively heavy, so they're easy to move around, and the horizontal dispersion of the tweeter makes them fairly immune to toe-in angles.

Each speaker comes with a jamboree bag of well-engineered goodies: polishing cloths, white gloves to save the finger marks on that lush finish and a choice of traditional cloth or all-metal grille. The latter is rather 'industrial' and I'm not sure it will find many fans on these shores, but around the back of the speaker is another set of mounting lugs so you can store

RIGHT: Elac's JET tweeter uses a concertina foil membrane and neodymium motor. The mid-bass drivers feature a unique aluminium-cellulose sandwich cone



ELAC'S EVOLUTION

While Elac might not be a very common name in the UK, Electroacoustic was founded in Germany in 1926 – coincidentally the very same year Tannoy was founded in the UK. The company started off building military application echo-sounding equipment, but the end of the second World War saw the factory slim down from 5000 staff to less than 300. Rather limited as to what it could use its acoustic engineering experience for in post-war Germany, the company began building radio receivers for Siemens. Throughout the next three decades Elac specialised in radios, consumer electronics and turntables, until it went bust in 1978. The hi-fi heydays of the 1980s saw the company re-launched and producing a successful range of cartridges, tuners and, by 1985, its first high-end loudspeaker. By the mid 1990s the brand acquired its JET tweeter technology from another speaker company, A.R.E.S, and has concentrated on loudspeaker manufacture ever since. Elac's philosophy is one of designing and building product in-house at its Kiel factory, giving the company's speakers unique components and features throughout its various ranges.

the grille out of sight. A shame then that the mounts front and rear are traditional lug-and-sockets rather than hidden magnets, which would have made that unique driver array look even better.

Down at the base the Elac's plinth is fully lacquered to match the cabinet and each unit is supplied with an innovative foot pack. This has both stainless steel spike cones and tough silicone inserts made for hard floors, interchangeable without demounting the feet from the plinth. The feet nuts have a wide plastic outer grip that protrudes beyond the plinth making levelling the FS247SE's far easier than the normal crawling on your tummy with spanner exercise. I didn't personally like the plastic-chrome spacers between the plinth and the cabinet, but that really is being picky.

THE JET SET

The first thing anyone will notice when hearing Elacs for the very first time is the sound of that JET tweeter. It is breathtakingly sweet and articulate. Suddenly metal domes sound hard and 'ringy' in comparison to the JET's sophistication and detail. It sounds clean, crisp and seamlessly well balanced throughout the top end of the spectrum with wide, wide, projection. Clearly the design of the tweeter's baffle will encourage a considerable horizontal dispersion and the result is a soundstage you can measure in acres with a very generous listening sweet-spot.

The hard acoustic guitar on 'Liar's Dance' from Robert Plant's *Manic Nirvana* was delivered with lightning-fast leading edge attack and the track filled the room with genuine three-dimensional presence. The sound of fingers

sliding over the strings was immaculately detailed and built on the song's passion and intensity. You could slide from one end of the sofa to the other with barely a change in tone or focus, with parts of the soundstage projected so far into the room they created an almost surround-sound effect. Plant's dulcet tones joined the mix at the front of the stage, making up for *slightly* loose focus with power and a wonderfully dynamic edge.

Even on compressed pop the Elacs seemed to dig into the music and project it into the room with superb air and space. Bat For Lashes' *Fur And Gold* was delivered with festival passion and an infectious rhythm throughout. Natasha Khan's sumptuous Kate Bush-esque vocal

was wonderfully rich and breathy. On the virtually a *cappella* 'Sad Eyes', the Elacs delivered every detail right down to the movement of Khan's tongue in the saliva her mouth – which

'You could slide across the sofa with barely a change in focus'

sounded a whole lot better than it reads!

As expected from the tweeter's aluminium baffle-grille arrangement, the dispersion pattern is very wide but limited vertically. If you stand up, the balance noticeably changes, losing some of the JET's magic and clarity. Being prone to standing up boogieing behind the sofa this proved something of a caveat for me. There was not quite enough latitude in the screw-in feet to give the FS247SE sufficient backwards tilt to counter this dispersion issue, but a couple of large floor-cups under the front spikes saved the day. So long as you can tilt the speaker perpendicular to your listening height, Elac's tweeter is truly magical. So much



LAB REPORT

ELAC FS247 SAPPHIRE EDITION (£3k)

Elac's claim of 89dB sensitivity for the FS247SE is substantiated by our measured mean value of 88.6dB but our pink noise figure of 87.9dB suggests that a nominal 88dB might be more appropriate. To a degree this is bought via low impedance, Elac's specified 3.4ohm minimum at 210Hz being right on the money – we measured 3.4ohm at 213Hz. Impedance phase angles are quite modest, though, as a result of which the minimum EPDR (equivalent peak dissipation resistance) is 1.8ohm at 22Hz with the rear port open, or 1.9ohm at 20Hz with the port closed. Both configurations have a second dip to 2.2ohm at 114Hz, which is probably the more appropriate figure, indicating that the FS247SE is not a notably tough load.

On-axis frequency response [Graph 1, below] is only mildly concave, with a gentle upward trend above 7kHz which can probably be tamed by listening a little off-axis. Frequency response errors of ± 2.7 dB and ± 2.9 dB attest to the essential flatness of the response. Pair matching error is good at ± 1.2 dB (also 20Hz-20kHz) and would have been even better but for the disparities between 2kHz and 4.5kHz. The difference in bass extension with the rear port open or plugged may seem small (47Hz vs. 54Hz for -6dB re. 200Hz) but the nature of the two alignments is quite different. The former response is essentially flat before a precipitous roll-off, whereas the latter rolls off more gradually and will certainly have a superior transient response. The cumulative spectral decay waterfall [Graph 2, below] shows a fast initial energy decay at all frequencies but low-level midrange driver and tweeter breakup is visible. KH



ABOVE: Above these chunky bi-wire terminals the FS247SE offers mounting lugs on the rear panel to store the grille safely, if you prefer listening naked at the front

so it rather detracts from the very well balanced mid and lower frequency reproduction which in any other speaker would be the talk of the show. This is a very neutral sounding and well-balanced speaker and I suspect it will measure like a ruler [see Lab Report, opposite].

RIDING HIGH

Moreover, the Elac is not just a one-trick pony. Crossing genres from classical to blues it remains sweet, articulate and incredibly well composed, largely thanks to that superb top-end. With *Riding With The King*, by Eric Clapton and BB King, the Elac simply lapped up this well recorded traditional blues album. The very old-school 'Ten Long Years' powered into the room with weighty and infectious bass rhythm and with King's unmistakable voice rendered in superb detail.

The punchy 'Hurting Kind' from the same Clapton/King CD has a swift, substantial beat that was tightly controlled by the Elacs. The bottom end does not go massively deep but it was driven and potent with a tangible richness. Through to the mid-bass the LF reproduction was a real toe-tapping head-bobbing experience, with more grunt than any speaker of this size has a right

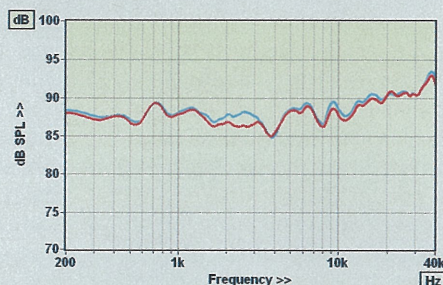
to produce. My notes say 'nicely fruity yet never overbearing', which sums it up perfectly. Even as the volume raised, the speaker's overall composure – given that this is quite a complex track – remained impressive.

The whole sound from the properly three-dimensional imaging to the driving rhythm was incredibly cohesive and enjoyable. Elac's gorgeous FS247 Sapphires are simply masters at capturing the whole picture, from the inflections in BB King's accent to the smooth slide guitar and warm ambience of the recording studio. ☺

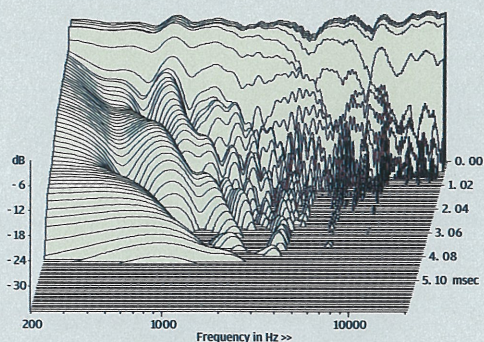
HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

The FS247 Sapphire Edition combines the sweetness and ultra-wide imaging of Elac's proprietary JET tweeter with pace and neutrality across the rest of the spectrum. Impressive from the outset it is about as music-genre agnostic as loudspeakers get and very easy to live with. The sumptuous good looks, fine attention to detail, accessories and superb finish make this sleek German speaker excellent value.

Sound Quality: 85%



ABOVE: The slightly 'hot' upper treble may be tamed by listening a little off the main speaker axis



ABOVE: The cumulative spectral decay is impressively quick but note low-level breakups in mid and treble

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Sensitivity (SPL/1m/2.83Vrms – Mean/IEC/Music)	88.6dB/87.9dB/87.6dB
Impedance modulus min/max (20Hz–20kHz)	3.4ohm @ 213Hz 13.7ohm @ 76Hz
Impedance phase min/max (20Hz–20kHz)	-38° @ 94Hz 42° @ 32Hz
Pair matching (200Hz–20kHz)	± 1.2 dB
LF/HF extension (-6dB ref 200Hz/10kHz)	47/54Hz / >40kHz
THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz (for 90dB SPL/1m)	0.7% / 0.2% / <0.1%
Dimensions (HWD)	1021x220x320mm