



# Standard deviation

Just another mid-price standmounting speaker? Not likely! **Tim Jarman** finds Elac's BS 142 JET to be something out of the ordinary...

**D**efining new boundaries, Elac's BS 142 compact standmount speaker is a two-way design that unusually offers a ribbon tweeter, instead of the standard-issue fabric dome normally found at this price. This type of tweeter should give smoother, cleaner treble than is available from some of the other methods of construction, as well as extended frequency response which carries on well beyond the bounds of what is normally considered to be audible. This is because the ribbon diaphragm is much thinner (hence lighter) than stock cloth or metal domes, meaning faster transient response, greater linearity and less distortion. Elac's own ribbon design is called JET, more of which is revealed on the company's website ([www.elac.de](http://www.elac.de)).

Ribbon tweeter aside, the BS 142 appears essentially conventional, being housed in a simple rectangular box with a large bass port at the rear. A pair of simple screw-type terminals permit cables with both forked terminals and standard 4mm plugs to be used, but there are no facilities for bi-wiring or bi-amping.

The woofer is interesting inasmuch as it uses a sandwich-type cone where the outer layer obscures the end of the voice coil, so that the familiar centre dust cap isn't visible. Even though you can't see them both the voice coil and its surrounding magnet are large, the former has a diameter of 31mm, which allows for good heat dissipation when the loudspeakers are being worked hard.

The main cabinet finish is a black ash effect vinyl wrap, which is not particularly luxurious, but reasonably discrete in the right surroundings and easy to keep looking presentable. The baffles are made from high-gloss moulded plastic and again have a clean, non-nonsense look about them. Grilles are included and these fit into place on invisible magnetic

catches so there are no ugly holes in the baffles when they are not fitted.

A common misconception on the subject of loudspeakers is that larger ones require more amplifier power than smaller ones do. Often the precise opposite is true; attempts by manufacturers to obtain a broad frequency spread from small cabinets result in poor sensitivity, meaning that it takes a lot of watts to make a decent amount of noise. There are rare exceptions and the Elac BS 142 is one – since it has a claimed sensitivity of 88 dB/1W/1m. When I see figures like this, partnering with a 30W (or thereabouts) amplifier springs to mind, given the scale of sound that one would expect and the size of listening room in which loudspeakers like this are likely to be installed in. This is excellent 'starter system' territory and I can see the BS 142 working well with high quality 'style systems', for example.



## ► DETAILS

**PRODUCT:**  
Elac BS 142

**Origin:**  
Germany/China

**Type:**  
2-way standmount  
loudspeaker

**Weight:**  
4.5kg (each,  
without stand)

**Dimensions:**  
(WxHxD)  
260x160x262mm

**FEATURES:**  
• 5" woofer

• ribbon tweeter

• bass reflex cabinet

**IMPORTED BY:**  
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Sensitive loudspeakers are also often chosen for use with valve amplifiers, where the pounds-per-watt ratio is often considerably worse than it is with transistor models. While the basic figures certainly stack up, I would advise some caution here since the BS 142 is very generously ported and there appears to be little in the way of internal damping, evidenced by the fact that you can see the back of the tweeter if you look down the reflex port.

This type of construction tends to give strong bass for a given cabinet size, but does require an amplification setup that offers a good damping factor to compensate for the mechanical freedoms which the cabinet offers. High damping factors are typically achieved by using powerful directly-coupled transistor amplifiers and high quality loud-speaker cables, by these means the signal is better able to place the woofer cone and so it is less likely to flap about.

## This box is all about giving a big, punchy sound, something in which it excels

Small valve amplifiers tend to do poorly in terms of damping factor, so I would hesitate to recommend a ported design for use with them, unless you like a lot of bass and are not too troubled about retrieving the rhythmic information that exists in the lower frequency ranges. Elac do supply a foam bung which you can use to tune the bass ports to work best in your surroundings, and comes in two sections. The middle part is removable so that you can use the bung to just cause a restriction, rather than blocking the entire port with it completely.

When auditioning loudspeakers like this I prefer to place them well out into the room (about 1m from the back wall) and with the ports open, this being one way to reduce colouration effects which have more to do with the building than the loudspeakers. The source for the tests was a Cyrus CD 8 SE CD player and an Arcam FMJ A38 amplifier, which is, perhaps, a little large for the task at hand, but has more than enough power to keep almost any loudspeaker under tight control. The cables used were from the Chord Company, Odyssey II for the loudspeakers and Calypso for the interconnects between the Cyrus CD player and Arcam amplifier. ▶

## Q&A

Max Lowe

Elac UK sales manager



**TJ:** These loudspeakers have an interesting background don't they?

**ML:** The BS 142 started life as an exclusive model for one of ELAC's business customers, but it has been so popular that it has now become part of the normal range.

**Where does the BS 142 fit into the Elac range?**

It is the most affordable speaker in the range featuring the JET tweeter, a distinctive feature of all the top range ELAC loudspeakers.

**What advantages does the Elac ribbon tweeter offer?**

The JET tweeter is a concertinaed foil membrane driven by a strong magnet system of neodymium rods. This motor drives the air considerably faster than the conventional piston technique. High sensitivity and extraordinary dynamics are the result.

**Are there other finishes available?**

Due to their origin as a limited edition speaker, the black ash cabinets with the gloss black front is the only available finish.

**Finally, can you recommend some suitable stands for the BS 142?**

Most high mass speaker stands, such as the Atacama HMS 1.1 will be ideal.



THERE ARE PLENTY of fine small standmount loudspeakers for around £600, but the most interesting are surely the Boston Acoustics M25 (£570) and the Monitor Audio Silver RX2 (£525).

The former is a new design from the dynamic duo that is Ken Ishiwata and Karl-Heinz Fink, fellow analogue addicts who love a nice smooth sound. Frankly it shows in the voicing of the M25, which is wonderfully deep and even, without the usual small box shriek. It's a consummate music maker and images beautifully too - with the right amount of toe-in.

Still, the Boston isn't the most forensically detailed, and in some systems with some sources will sound just a little dull. That's why Monitor Audio's RX2 is a good alternative, with an altogether tighter and more 'spry' sound. There's a lot more treble detail, and what there is, is beautifully crisp and open - this gives the speaker a very spacious feel. Still, if you use this with shouty sources, you'll wish you kept to the M25s - or these Elacs which have much of the smoothness of the Bostons with the incision and detail of the Monitor Audios. As such the Elac is a great working compromise, giving you in many respects the best of both worlds.

## IN SIGHT



- 1 available in black Ash vinyl wrap cabinets only
- 2 bass driver with sandwich cone and rubber roll-edge
- 3 recessed single-wire binding posts!
- 4 JET-type ribbon tweeter deals with the high notes

## Sound quality

Black Ash cabinets and the promise of bass made me think of *Violator* by Depeche Mode, and I was not disappointed. The BS 142s sound larger than they actually are, and in a blind test you'd scarcely believe that pounding beats that run right through tracks like *Police of Truth* were coming from a pair of five inch woofers. The track came across as lively and full of energy. For this type of music the overall tonal balance was good, with no undue emphasis to any one band of frequencies and no particular problems with bass overhang or boom.

Of course, you can't expect absolute low-end precision with small ported cabinets and there was some blurring of the bottom end detail which larger pressure-chamber loudspeakers can reveal, but overall the results were very enjoyable. The treble around percussion did seem to lack bite, while some instruments had a slightly lispy quality, even with a bright sounding source like CD. This is not a unique quality of the Elacs, as I have encountered other two-way loudspeakers with ribbon tweeters with this character. It's a lot to ask of one drive unit to work from 2.6kHz right up to 50kHz as Elac claims, and in this case the trade-off seems to be a slight loss of treble sparkle. In their favour, the tweeters don't beam as much as some do, so the listening sweet spot is reasonably large.

Listening to *A Sorta Fairytale* by Tori Amos, once more revealed the surprisingly warm and embracing sound which the Elac BS 142 can produce considering its diminutive dimensions. I heard heavily struck piano chords coming across in a way that gave a solid sense of realism. In absolute terms, vocal texture could sound slightly opaque, while Tori's

beautiful voice sometimes gave the impression of detachment. Imaging was vivid, as it so often is with small two ways, and broad - it was amazing how these little boxes were so easily capable of filling my listening room with music. Within the broad soundscape, the focus could have been a little sharper, but this is a minor observation. Overall, as an introduction to stereo these loudspeakers do a very good job.

## Conclusion

Priced at £599, Elac's new BS 142 isn't a cheap speaker, but nor is it prohibitively expensive either. Its all-black finish and the preference for rock and other beat-driven musical styles means that a certain type of listener will love it. It's very zesty, but conversely those seeking subtlety should look elsewhere. This box is all about giving a big, punchy sound in a smallish space, something in which it excels. Highly recommended then, if you enjoy a bit of weight behind your music but want or need it to come from a small speaker - but as ever with this sort of product, do try and audition it with your own amplifier first ●

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### OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Big sound from small boxes; lively and dynamic with beat-driven musical styles
- VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Soft treble not for all; lack of spatial focus
- BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Decent sensitivity and fine sound make these an essential audition
- EASE OF DRIVE** ★★★★★

### OVERALL

