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Triangle Esprit Comète Ez

by Jason Kennedy

Esprit Ez was launched last year, more than 20 years after the release of Triangle's first Esprit range. The Comète Ez was added to the range at the end of 2014 and is the largest bookshelf model. Triangle is based in Soissons, which is known as "the cradle of the Kings of France" – perhaps an odd thing to shout about, given that French kings went out of fashion in dramatic style some time ago. Triangle has been making loudspeakers in this Picardy town since 1980, and the brand is synonymous with fundamental research into drive unit technology. A significant part of that research went into horn-loaded tweeters, and current tweeters in Triangle models are a direct 'trickle-down' from the drive units developed for the original top Magellan line from 2003. It's a tweeter that effectively distinguishes the brand from its competitors.

The advantage of a horn is that it gives the drive unit a mechanical advantage when coupling to the air. This increases sensitivity and power handling, which is why it has long been the approach used in public address systems. The drawback is that horns sound like their shape, they have a distinctive coloration that's hard to iron out. They also have a restricted dispersion pattern, so that they tend to beam considerably more than drivers placed on a flat baffle. As a result their sound will vary to a greater extent than usual when used in rooms of different acoustic character. That said there are a lot of tweeters out there that have a short horn, a radius on the mounting plate for the purpose of increasing sensitivity. The difficulty with using a horn loaded tweeter and a conventional baffle mount mid/bass like this Triangle is that it's difficult to align the character of the two drivers, to get the transition between them to be seamless.

I was lent one of Triangle's larger models last year – the Signature Alpha. This is an impressive speaker with a similar horn tweeter to the Esprit Ez, but I could not get it to work well in my room. This relatively compact model, on the other hand, worked well from the outset, and very well once I had established what it worked with in terms of partnering source and amplifier.

First the speaker itself. The Comète Ez is a medium size standmount that houses a 150mm main driver with a 'natural cellulose' (paper) cone and a conventional surround. The tweeter is the TZ2500B model, which uses a titanium dome in a compression driver arrangement with the aforementioned horn loading. The cabinet has twin, front firing reflex ports and a single pair of cable terminals, rather nice ones at that and far more sexy than is usually found on a speaker that costs less than a thousand pounds. Apparently they are made in house, which is the case with the drive units as well. Fit and finish on the pair submitted is excellent; the white gloss paintwork is superb and works well with the white cone. Alternatively you can have black or walnut, but note the latter is vinyl not veneer, and thus cheaper than either gloss finish.

The speaker is supplied with magnetic grilles, also white, and rubber strips with shallow cones moulded into them that stick to the base and act as feet. Their stated purpose is to reduce vibration, though Triangle does not say whether they are intended to reduce vibrations coming in or going out of the box. The Hi-Fi Racks walnut stands I use already have isolation pads attached so I didn't use the rubber feet.

Setting the Comète Ez up was straightforward because the loudspeakers worked well in a position just a little closer to the wall than my PMC fact.8s. I also discovered that the balance worked best with the Triangle speakers firing straight down the room, rather than with a toe-in toward the listener. Toe-in might work in some rooms, but was too fierce in a room where the seat is about four metres away. When it came to partnering equipment, I realised that anything with a forward or hard-edged sound would only be exacerbated by the speaker, but none of my regular sources and amps fall into this camp. Despite high sensitivity, the Triangle works well with high-powered amps like the ATC P1, a 150 watt beast with more grip than a Mole wrench. A good valve amp would also work however, and provide a smoother midband in the process. Sources were the Resolution Audio Cantata, a Naim UnitiQute, and a visiting Neodio Origine CD player, which is also of the Gallic persuasion.

The presence of the horn on the tweeter gives the Comète Ez tremendous energy. You really can't get close to the power and dynamics of a horn with a baffle-mounted speaker. And while this means a harder edged mid and treble it also means real get up and shake it life in the music, especially if that music contains trumpet as is the case with Patricia Barber's (somewhat overplayed round these parts) 'A Touch of Trash' [*Modern Cool*, Premonition]. The bass is taut and powerful but the voice not quite as one expects; it's a tonal variation

“The speaker is big on atmosphere too, reflecting the recording thanks to the weight and body the Comète Ez gives to lower notes.”

that’s different rather than wrong and doesn’t take long to accommodate. The whole ensemble are projected with good scale, too. It’s a big sonic picture populated by very solid musicians, none less than the vocalist. The balance is forward but not fatiguing in my well damped room. It could, however, go over that edge in more reflective environments, meaning that this is perhaps not the first choice of speaker for the minimalist.

The other side of this audio coin is that leading edges are very clear, so there’s no overhang and plenty of pace. It’s a fast sound: a different fast sound to that produced by a PMC for example, but speedy nonetheless. Voices are very well served; the reverb on John Campbell’s voice when he sings ‘Down in the Hole’ [*Howlin Mercy*, Elektra] is clear as a bell. OK, so the bass is not quite as richly hued as it can be, but the bass notes are well defined in terms of tempo. The speaker is big on atmosphere too, reflecting the recording thanks to the weight and body the Comète Ez gives to lower notes. Despite a specified roll off of 49Hz, the Triangle hardly plumbs the depths, though it is clearly well suited to real-world European living rooms.

The high sensitivity is reflected in a tendency among listeners to play music loud. This is not something that happens with many low and medium sensitivity speakers, because they start to harden up at higher volumes. Here, the opposite is almost the case, which is good because the Comète



► Ez's sound is not that smooth. We're only talking about a decibel or two of sensitivity above the norm here, so the horn must be a factor as well. It appears to relieve the strain that standard domes exhibit under duress, which undermines the presentation of many speakers when they're pushed hard. And, despite the dispersion limitations intrinsic to horns, the sound escapes these boxes pretty well. Not as well as the best – you can always pinpoint the tweeter with your eyes closed – but better than might be expected.

I tried a few alternative sources to see if they might smooth things out a little and found that a Naim UnitiQute2 did just that, and did it very nicely. It brought out the tonal qualities of the pedal steel on Chris Jones' 'Roadhouses & Automobiles' [*Roadhouses & Automobiles*, Stockfisch] really well. The gorgeous harmonies of the chorus were less well served partly because the speaker separated out the voices, possibly because of the disparity in dispersion between cone and horn or possibly because other speakers blur the distinctions between voices. But a harmony is essentially a co-mingling of sounds, so it's best if they are kept together. But the 'Qute did enhance musicality, of that there's no doubt. It brought out the lyrical qualities in a bass solo and the menace in dark electronica. It also delivered surprisingly weighty bass, this time from a kick drum sound. This track, Trentmøller's 'Chameleon' [*The Last Resort*, Poker Flat], also provoked the system to produce loads of peripheral sounds both to the side of the speakers and round the room. These must be created by phasing effects in the studio and other speakers have revealed them before, but they worked particularly well in this instance.

Moving on to the classiest digital source in the room, the Neodio Origine CD player, and playing The Legendary Marvin Pontiac's 'I'm A Doggy' [*Greatest Hits*, Strange & Beautiful Music] reveals the Comète Ez's ability to define detail; that is, to produce identifiable notes in a tonally rich and three-dimensional fashion. This player is rather

good at doing this, which helps of course, but it's impressive that a speaker at this price is up to revealing so much musical information with apparent ease. Maybe ease isn't the word; the Triangle is all about energy and life. It's not inclined to lull you with sweet vibes, unless of course those vibes are available in abundance from the music itself. This is exemplified by the cello on a later track, while John Lurie's larynx is as dark and lusty as it has ever been. On the other hand, John Eliot Gardiner's version of Beethoven's '7th Symphony' [*The Symphonies*, Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique, Archiv], doesn't reveal its full depth of image, so there is less sense of the orchestra being in front of you. The Triangle also hardens up on the crescendos in the Allegretto, so there are limits to what can be done in a bookshelf speaker at this (or any) price. ►



▶ The Hegel D12 DAC reviewed this month has a similar sound to the Comète Ez and as a result they are not happy bed-fellows in a system context, unless you are looking for an edge of seat experience on all fronts. The Resolution Audio Cantata in streaming mode is much better suited to the Triangle sound and produced a more complete and engaging result with a variety of material. Despite this, music remains more demonstrative than usual through the Comète Ez.

It's not an approach that one often comes across in contemporary loudspeakers, as they tend to be pretty neutral and even-handed beasts that offer differing levels of coloration, but none of them too obvious. The enthusiastic balance provided by this Triangle will no doubt polarise opinions: those after a refined and polished sound perhaps typified by the Japanese high-end will find it too aggressive. Others will be thrilled by the energy and dynamics this speaker finds in their music, and given that so few other horn-driven speakers exist at this end of the market Triangle is probably onto a good thing. The fact that they have been going for over 30 years is clearly testament to that.

Out of interest, I compared the Comète Ez to the other similarly sized standmounts I use for reference; ATC's SCM11 (£1,200) and PMC's twenty.22 (£1,969). Both made the colorations of the Triangle's horn element appear obvious – a slightly recessed image with a 'cupped hands around the mouth' effect – but not too extreme. The ATC makes a sound that is fuller in the mid/bass and the PMC manages to make backgrounds quieter, especially on a solo voice, but one assumes that the extra sound presented by the Triangle is a tonal emphasis rather than an intrinsically noisy cabinet.

Few buy a horn-loaded loudspeaker because they want the last word in tonal neutrality or natural presentation; often, they are bought because it's a fast track to the life in the music. This combination of horn treble and conventional cone mid/bass is well executed and covers its tracks remarkably well; you can hear the nature of the technology, but it doesn't take much to forget about it and immerse yourself in the glory of your favourite tunes. For this reason, the Esprit Comète Ez is one of the most enjoyable and entertaining speakers you can buy for less than a grand, and after all, 'enjoyable and entertaining' was why we got into music in the first place. +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: 2-way, two-driver stand-mount monitor with front-ported bass reflex enclosure.

Driver complement: One horn loaded titanium tweeter, one 150mm natural cellulose mid-bass driver.

Frequency response: 49Hz – 22kHz

Crossover frequency: not specified

Impedance: 8 ohms

Sensitivity: 90dB/W/m

Dimensions (HxWxD): 400 x 200 x 324mm

Weight: 9.3kg/each

Finishes: Walnut, High-Gloss Black, High-Gloss White.

Price: £950/pair

Manufacturer: Triangle Electroacoustique

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