

Egglestonworks Nico

by Jason Kennedy

I have to say I was surprised when Egglestonworks announced the Nico and Emma speakers it was to unveil at CES this year. They seemed almost affordable. Not a state of affairs that one associates with the upper price brackets of the high-end, but in truth the company has been overtaken in the megabucks stakes, and all of its models are relatively affordable by the highest standards. Nico, however, is the entry point to Jim Thompson's Memphis-based company, yet it still has the distinctive Egglestonworks style, thanks to elegantly curved flanks and a machined aluminium fascia that ranks alongside the best in terms of precision and finish. I particularly like the way that the protective tristar over the tweeter is held in by three ball sockets. No one needs to go to these sort of lengths in a loudspeaker, but it's nice when they do. The pearlescent white finish is very nice too; Nico may be small, but it's perfectly formed.

Nico and its floorstanding sister Emma are the first models in a new range for EW. They will be joined by home cinematically (or in the US, theatrically) oriented models including a subwoofer, centre channel, and surround speakers. The first two members of this series share an EW soft dome tweeter and the same size cone drivers. Emma is specified as having a carbon cone whereas Nico is not, presumably because the former is a two and a half way, not a straightforward two-way. The woofer in Nico is a polypropylene unit to suit its mid/bass duties. Apart from size and price, this is also the first EW model to feature a front-firing port, chosen in order to make siting more flexible. There is always a trade-off with such things; front firing ports are more

audible than rear ones but they allow closer-to-the-walls placement options, if desired. In Nico's case, this even extends to a bookshelf, or so we're told.

The cabinet is made up out of cold press laminated MDF flanks with machined MDF around the middle, the whole lot being hand finished prior to painting. Inside are two rib-like vertical braces in and one horizontal brace, which combined with the intrinsically stiff shape of the curved sides and the aluminium front baffle should make for a pretty rigid cabinet. The lack



- ▶ of parallel sides internally is also beneficial because it limits the potential for standing waves. The rear panel reveals a single pair of terminals which, while not as fashionable as a bi-wirable set of four, is often better from a timing and coherence point of view. It also saves having to find out which pair to connect to in a single wired set-up; inconveniently they often sound different.



The base of this speaker had me baffled for a little while. It doesn't feel like wood, but something slightly softer, more like plastic. I found out it's a branded variant of PVC called Sintra; it's used on the base of EW's floorstanders as well, and was chosen because it's less likely to damage floors than wood.

The aluminium on the front baffle is not just about looks; it also reinforces this critical panel and reduces vibration induced by the drivers. It also covers up the mounting points for the mid/bass unit rather neatly and provides somewhere for the company to laser cut its name. No grille is provided with Nico, but why would you want to put a piece of cloth over drive units anyway?

Distributor Tim Chorlton recommends using heavy stands and setting them up like PMCs; fortunately, I use PMCs as a reference so I know of what he speaks. I put them on 60cm Custom Design FS104 stands with mass loading and Blu-tack for the interface with the speaker. This was a combination that seemed to work well, although later I tried some ball bearing supports from a Naim Fraim stand, which were beneficial in tightening the bottom end and improving timing. Positioning the Nico close to the rear wall and setting them up parallel to the side walls seemed to work best in my narrow/long room. Tim recommends crossing their axis a metre behind your head but I found the sound a bit 'hot' like that, the midband being quite forward.

Thus arranged and with the Atoll IN200 integrated amplifier, Nico produced a polished yet clear cut rendition of Yello's 'The Expert' [*Touch*, Universal] with an appropriately large soundstage and big, relatively deep bass for the size of speaker. Further listening revealed it to be very good with voice; if a recording is good in this regard Nico will let you know all about it. Providing more power in the form of ATC's P1 amplifier and Townshend's Allegri controller resulted in increased low end control and credible double bass on Patricia Barber's 'Bye Bye Blackbird' [*Nightclub*, Premonition], the word ▶

► muscular seems most apt for that instrument as it underpins the full scale image that Nico is capable of. Barber's voice could be more focused but this didn't undermine a visceral performance that made me want to listen longer. Being a small two-way, it has decent timing skills as a matter of course, but what is less expected is the bass extension on offer and the overall transparency. This can be a little divisive about what you choose to play, however; the difference in recording quality is magnified, which is good if you have lots of great sounding albums but not so hot if your tastes run to less classy stuff. However, the timing skills make up for a lot, and I was able to enjoy early Parliament [*Osmium*, *Invictus*] with ease, while David Crosby's latest release *Croz* [*Blue Castle*] sounds very much better (as you'd expect of the chronological gap between them). It's plush and solid, a particularly good effort for such an ole timer.

With Herbie Hancock and Norah Jones' rendition of 'Court And Spark' [*River: the Joni Letters*, Verve] you get all the poise of these skilful musicians in the context of a slightly

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blurred voice; the upper bass is not as clean as can be achieved with the very best at this price but you don't notice it too often. ATC's similarly sized SCM11 offers similar enclosure volume, but is about half the price and is a little more relaxed and evenly balanced. It's important to note that the ATC speakers achieved these results with an ATC amp.

Tim Chorlton also supplied an amplifier which will be covered next month, the Rogue Audio Cronus – a push-pull KT120 valve integrated. I gave that a go with Nico. Tim knows how to match his components, that much was clear from the off; this pairing timed well and the smooth balance of the amp combines beautifully with the slightly exposed nature of the speaker's midband. The fluent rather than hard-edged character of its bass doesn't exacerbate the port output either and as a result of this balance I was prompted to join in with Mike McDonald in the chorus of 'Bad Sneakers' [Steely Dan, *Katy Lied*, ABC]; good thing I was alone. The scale and scrumptiousness of Hancock and Turner's rendition of 'Edith and the Kingpin' from *River...* was enhanced, albeit at the expense of the bandwidth extremes. But the heart of the music is well served; the message is clear because the emotional quotient is delivered in full effect. You can stop listening to the sound and let the music take you to a better place, a result that any good system should be able to deliver but not one that necessarily results from maximum tonal range.

Lorde's 'Royals' [*Pure Heroine*, Universal] is rather more blunt, but it goes down lower than this combo will reveal. What it does let you hear is the degree and nature of the compression used to give the song its pop appeal. Martha Argerich playing Chopin Preludes [DG] is a lot more rewarding; it works because Rogue and EW have such superb fluency with piano and high sensitivity to dynamics, the lifeblood of acoustic music. Brendel's Piano Sonatas [Philips] are even better in this regard, spritely, nimble, and rarely bettered.

Like any other loudspeaker, Nico is dependent on the choice of partnering amplifier – possibly more so than average, because the midband is so vivid that anything edgy in this area will have its limitations revealed. There are many great two-way standmounts at this price, but few which are finished to the standard seen here, and not that many which have the same balance. This is not a 'me too' product; it's a speaker that will fit some systems extremely well. If you have a push-pull pentode amp, yours could be among them. +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Egglestonworks Nico loudspeaker

Type: two-way bass reflex standmount loudspeaker

Drive unit compliment: 25mm dome tweeter, 165mm cone woofer

Frequency Response: 50Hz-20kHz

Sensitivity: 88dB

Impedance: 8 Ohms nominal

Dimensions (WxDxH): 19 x 33 x 38cm

Weight: 9.07kg

Price: £2,495 per pair

Manufacturer: EGGLESTONWORKS

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