

# DALI Epikore 7

The most compact floorstander in the Danish brand's premium range is a statement speaker in its own right...

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**W**hen DALI launched its flagship KORE speaker [*HFN* Dec '22], followed by the Epikore 11 [*HFN* Feb '25], the Danish company clearly wanted to turn heads in a higher-end segment. Which worked out fine, but both speakers have a 'downside': they are colossal. Applying trickle-down technologies from the £85k KORE and £40k Epikore 11, the smaller £20k Epikore 7 floorstander might just be the more sensible choice for typical living rooms.

The Epikore range is the follow-up to the top-tier Epicon series launched in 2012, and there's no doubt these latest loudspeakers are a premium offering, the three-and-a-half-way Epikore 7 being significantly pricier than the Epicon 6 model it replaces. Considering the time elapsed between both ranges, a price hike was perhaps inevitable. DALI also points to improvements carried over from the KORE flagship, including its Clarity Cone drivers and hybrid EVO-K tweeter array.

## LET IT SLIDE

This model is the smallest of three Epikore floorstanders, but that hardly means tiny. It's an ample speaker measuring 112cm tall, and with a sizeable footprint once DALI's sturdy metal outriggers are installed. These can be fitted with adjustable spikes, and discs are provided to protect a soft floor. Cleverly, these are magnetic, allowing you to move the speaker around with the discs remaining in place. Then again, playing around with toe-in in this case is not required. Like most DALI speakers, the Epikore 7 is explicitly designed to be placed parallel to the side walls, where they sound their smoothest [see PM's Lab Report, p89].

Thanks to its curvy cabinet design, the Epikore 7 is an elegant-looking floorstander – albeit a heavyweight courtesy of its 18mm-thick MDF panels, internal bracing and alloy baffle plate. Still, as the rear is slightly taller than the front, the

appearance remains nicely streamlined. Indeed, with the black or white high gloss versions, in particular, it's hard to spot the edges, with all attention drawn to the die-cast aluminium baffle in which DALI's trademark hybrid tweeter and two large 180mm bass/mid drivers are mounted.

## MADE IN DENMARK

All DALI's speakers from its Opticon series and up are built in its factory in Nørager [see boxout, p87]. This includes the Epikore 7, with its cabinet dressed in multiple layers of paint and varnish by a sophisticated robotic set-up installed as part of recent production upgrades. The resulting high gloss finish – at first available in colourways of black, walnut and maroon, the latter with very nice wood veneers [see pic, opposite] – is stunning. The gloss white

option is a more recent arrival. Taking a cue from the KORE, the Epikore 7's curved cabinet is both stiffened and designed to minimise internal standing waves. This ties into DALI's design goal of providing 'outstanding bass', made possible by those dual 180mm drivers working into separate cabinet volumes and supported by two large and internally angled reflex ports at the rear. The paper and wood pulp cones are illustrative of DALI's typically conservative approach, shying away from high-tech materials others have embraced. In practice, the Clarity Cone technology marries the excellent damping properties of this natural composite with calculated depressions stamped onto the cone surface to enhance its stiffness.

The motor system also incorporates the latest version of DALI's favoured

**RIGHT:** The Epikore 7 has two 180mm paper and wood fibre 'Clarity Cone' mid/bass units, reflex-loaded at the rear [p89] and crossing over to a 35mm dome/10x55mm planar 'ribbon' hybrid EVO-K tweeter array

'The Epikore 7 is designed to be placed parallel to the side walls'





'The Clarity Cone and Hybrid EVO-K tweeter array are carried over from the KORE flagship'





**ABOVE:** Available in high gloss white, black, walnut [see p85] and maroon, the Epikore 7's cabinet comprises a curved MDF rear shell attached to a thick MDF front panel. The bass/mid drivers and hybrid EVO-K tweeter are set into a die-cast aluminium baffle plate

## JUTLAND'S HI-FI HUB

There's an iconic photo of company founder, Peter Lyngdorf, putting the first spade in the ground for the DALI factory in the mid-'80s. This was in Nørager, a hamlet in Nordjylland (or North Jutland), where the company is still based to this day. The location is a remarkable choice, as the Jutland peninsula is a sparsely populated area of flat countryside far removed from bustling Copenhagen (situated on the Zealand island). Not coincidentally, it is also a global hub for the wind turbine industry. But it's also a hotbed of loudspeaker and hi-fi manufacturing. Draw a wide circle around Nørager and you'll encounter Audio Group Denmark, Bergmann, Buchardt Audio, Densen, Dynaudio, Gryphon and Raidho, next to some well-known pro-audio companies. It's also the stomping ground of various loudspeaker driver manufacturers, with Scan-Speak and (formerly) Vifa as the most famous.

There's no consensus on why this part of Denmark is home to so many hi-fi brands, including Bang & Olufsen, having a great influence on audio design since 1925. Brüel & Kjær, founded in 1942 to develop acoustic measuring equipment, has also played a role. A scientific approach to sound is part of the Danish tradition, with qualifications in acoustics offered at the Technical University of Denmark (near Copenhagen, where a second hi-fi cluster is located) and Aalborg University.

Soft Magnetic Compound (SMC-2 in this instance), the non-conductive magnet limiting both heat build-up and hysteresis. Also, for the first time, DALI is using a version of its SMC in the crossover inductors. The dual tweeter set-up is another DALI fixture, albeit in updated EVO-K guise here, combining a 35mm soft dome tweeter with a 55x10mm planar-magnetic driver operating above 12.5kHz.

### **MAGNIFICENT 7**

PM's Lab report [p89] indicates that the Epikore 7s are not the most demanding loudspeakers to drive, which is refreshing for a model at this price level. In any case, a Primare A35.8 power amp [*HFN* May '22], configured in bridged mode and fed from a PRE35 preamp [*HFN* Dec '19], provided ample power for DALI's floorstanders, allowing them to fully reveal their talents.

There should be no beating Tom Waits' original rendition of 'Train Song' from his 1987 album *Franks Wild Years* [Island CDITW 3], which the Epikore 7s delivered with a lovely warm presence to his trademark gnarly vocals, and smooth accordion tones. However, it was Holly Cole's cover [*Temptation*; Metro Blue 72438 3434824] that really shone through these DALI speakers, being a slightly cleaner-sounding recording with a very prominent role for the acoustic bass of David Piltch. The rich, weighty portrayal of the latter immediately caught the attention, but careful listening found the Epikore 7s also unearthing plenty of little 'twangs' and rustling textures.

*'There was a figurative "more, more" call to turn up the volume'*

On occasion a bass note would appear overemphasised, but not in a way that detracted from the listening experience. Low-frequency performance is a highlight of these speakers, and a delightful one at that – a lot of tracks I played sounded fuller and carried more emotional impact.

Such powerful, well-extended bass does open the door to prominent room modes and interactions, even with the speakers installed more than a metre from rear and side walls. Yes, there are foam bungs to be inserted into the Epikore 7's reflex ports. But, in my room, I preferred the occasional overexuberant note to dampening this speaker's low-frequency fervour – it's just so much fun.

DALI's hybrid tweeter approach has its merits too. While the vocal range of Holly Cole on 'Falling Down' impressed,

I was equally enthralled by the character of the harmonica. This is not an instrument high on my list of favourites, regardless of countryman Toots Thielemans' hero status, but its nimble, crisp portrayal here *nearly* changed my mind.

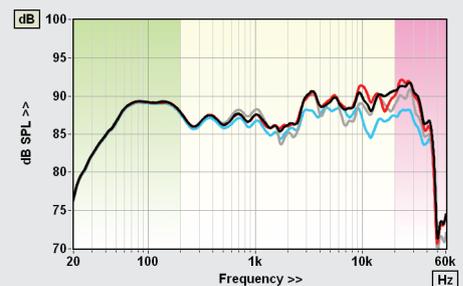
### **PUTTING IN A SHIFT**

Many Portishead songs hold their own decades after release, including 'The Rip' from the Brit group's aptly named *Third* album [Island 1766400]. This melancholy track sounded *spectacular* through the Epikore 7s, the speakers shifting from the delicate opening passages to a dense climax built around a thick, analogue synth melody. Likewise, with Daft Punk's 'Get Lucky' [*Random Access Memories*, Columbia; 88.2kHz/24-bit], the speakers filled the room but didn't ☞

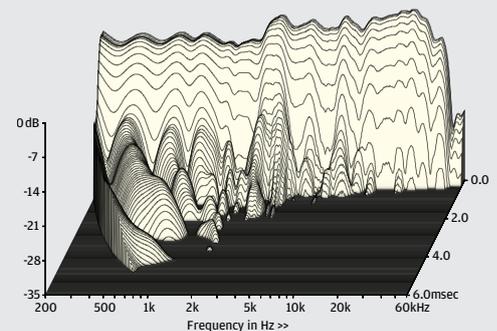
## DALI EPIKORE 7

The Epikore 7's forward response [Graph 1] is clearly related to that of the Epikore 11 [HFN Feb '25], albeit with a shift in balance towards the hybrid treble array. The 'bump' following the 2.5kHz crossover is a resonance visible on the CSD waterfall [Graph 2] and while the presence/treble is flat in trend and low in harmonic distortion (~0.1% at 90dB SPL/1m), the mid/bass cones' 200Hz-3kHz output is some 3dB lower in level. This pushes the 1kHz sensitivity down to 87.6dB (or 87.7dB from 800Hz-5kHz) and contributes to the (still excellent) ±2.6dB and ±2.8dB response errors, respectively, (re. 200Hz-20kHz). One of the film tweeters has a slightly more 'ragged' output than the other [red vs. black traces], otherwise pair matching between 200Hz-9kHz is a very tight 0.4dB. Also, the grille exacerbates response errors [grey trace] and should be left off. Keeping the speakers parallel to the side walls delivers a far smoother response [blue trace] – this recommended siting brings the 7's output into balance with mere ±1.9dB and ±2.1dB response errors (re. 200Hz-20kHz).

Strong bass is an Epikore trait – the 'Clarity Cone' drivers are reinforced by a broad port tuning (17-82Hz, -6dB) that delivers a deep, corrected extension of 28Hz (-6dB re. 200Hz). A strong 820Hz quarterwave mode also escapes the two rear vents but at least the amplifier loading is not as tough as seen with the '11. The 7's load impedance dips to 4.82ohm/32Hz (plus 4.9ohm/131Hz and 6.3kHz) and hovers from 4.9-7.1ohm from 100Hz-10kHz as DALI's conjugate loading holds phase angles in check. Below 100Hz, swings in impedance phase of +49°/-60° push the EPDR down to – a still very acceptable – 2.1ohm/96Hz. PM



ABOVE: Resp. inc. nearfield summed drivers/port [green], freefield corrected to 1m at 2.83V [yellow], ultrasonic [pink]. L, black; R, red; ±15°, blue; grille, grey



ABOVE: Cabinet is well damped and while there are cone resonances, they are less obvious off-axis

**LEFT:** Both bass drivers have a separate, continuously flared reflex port venting to the rear. The three-and-a-half-way (800Hz, 2.5kHz and 12.5kHz) crossover is split between bass and mid/treble arms – hence the two sets of substantial 4mm/spade connector binding posts

Czech Philharmonic/Simon Rattle for Pentatone [96kHz/24-bit]. Dynamic orchestral moments were handled without sign of compression, which amounted to a figurative 'more, more' call to turn up the volume. The gentler parts of 'Series I, B. 83: No.2' were not lacking in fine detail either, proving these speakers are not only about overwhelming the listener with dynamics and bass.

### GLASS ACT

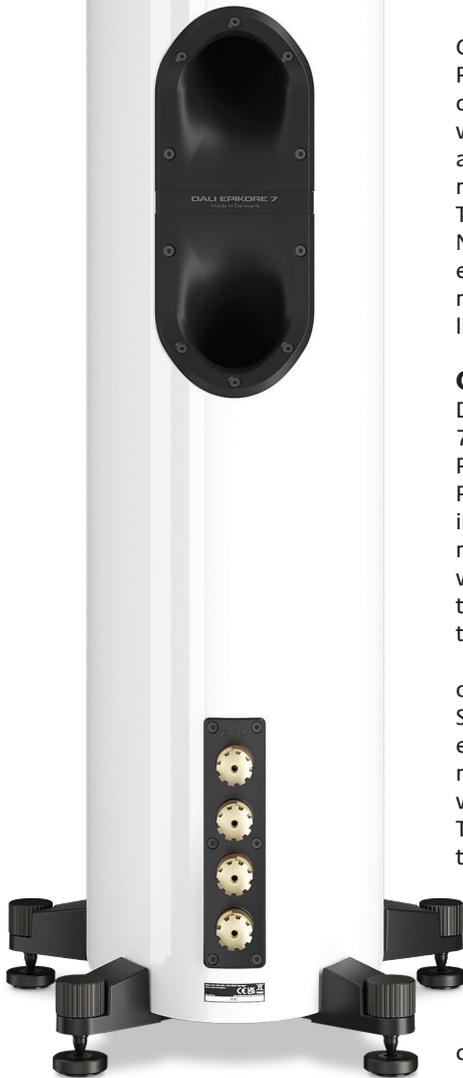
During my period with the Epikore 7s, I swapped the slightly colourful Primare pre/power amps for NAD's Purifi Eigentakt-based M33 V2 integrated. The result was a slightly more even-handed performance, with the bass tightened up through the amp's Dirac room correction tool, but it was no less enjoyable.

The 'Metamorphosis' pieces on *Philip Glass: Solo Piano* [Sony SMK87976] are the ultimate expression of repetition and minimalism, with a swirly, almost waterlike feeling to the production. The Epikore 7s submerged me in these crystal-clear soundscapes, every change of tone or pace exposed and rapid, high piano notes underpinned by substantial lows. This 1989 recording can sound thin and lifeless on some loudspeakers... this was very close to hearing Glass play live. 🎧

### HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

The Epikore 7 is a delight to listen to, demonstrating that tried-and-trusted DALI techniques can be brought to a higher level, creating a superb speaker which offers thrills and refinement in equal parts. The richness of its bass suggests that care needs to be taken regarding room interaction, but that aside it is a loudspeaker that enthralls as much with its sonic performance as with its lavish aesthetics.

Sound Quality: 88%



stuff it – excellent separation and a relatively airy portrayal (including effects positioned far left and right) led to near-complete immersion. 'Relatively'? Yes, because even with that planar unit dedicated to 'top-end' treble, the subjective impression is that DALI has prioritised driver integration over blasting out ethereal details. To my mind this is a sensible choice, one which makes the speaker distinct from rival models that explicitly chase rarified audiophile objectives.

Not that the Epikore 7 is unsuited to said audiophiles. *Au contraire*, it deftly handled Dvořák's boisterous Slavonic Dances, recorded by the

### HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

<b>Sensitivity</b> (SPL/1m/2.83V – 1kHz/Mean/IEC)	87.6dB / 87.7dB / 86.2dB
<b>Impedance modulus: minimum &amp; maximum</b> (20Hz–20kHz)	4.82ohm @ 32Hz 39.7ohm @ 64Hz
<b>Impedance phase: minimum &amp; maximum</b> (20Hz–20kHz)	-60° @ 71Hz +49° @ 56Hz
<b>Pair matching/Resp. error</b> (200Hz–20kHz)	2.0dB / ±2.6dB/±2.8dB
<b>LF/HF extension</b> (-6dB ref 200Hz/10kHz)	28Hz / 45.5kHz/43.7kHz
<b>THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz</b> (for 90dB SPL/1m)	0.6% / 0.1% / 0.3%
<b>Dimensions</b> (HWD) / <b>Weight</b> (each)	1120x380x420mm / 41kg