

# Turn on This Can't-Miss Episode

Episode's 700 bookshelf speakers dole out detailed midrange and a well-defined soundstage. *by Robert Archer*

Episode's latest series of speakers includes the bookshelf Episode 700 model, a two-way speaker that incorporates a ported enclosure wrapped in a slick piano-gloss finish, rounded edges and a silver-trimmed bezel.

The design was approached with the goal of making the speaker perform greater than the sum of its parts. To its credit, Episode developed its own Catenary tweeter that's meant to improve off-axis dispersion, and a 6½-inch Natural Cell Structure (NCS) woofer that combines the best elements of a paper cone and Kevlar driver. The drivers, along with a second-order crossover, are housed in a cabinet made from ¾-inch MDF that provides strength and rigidity to minimize resonances. Rear-panel five-way binding posts accept spades, banana posts and bare wire cabling.

I set up the speakers with a pair of 24-inch stands and connected them to an NAD integrated amp with QED speaker cables. For sources I used a Denon universal disc player and an iPad 2 loaded with a variety of AAC, Apple Lossless and AIFF files; I ran the speakers through a break-in period.

Listening to songs like "The Pot" from Tool, Fleetwood Mac's "Silver Springs" and AC/DC's "Back in Black," I found the speakers to offer a nicely detailed midrange that perhaps was the result of a slight forwardness in the 500Hz to 1kHz octave band. I also thought the speaker imaged responsively. A good example was a drum fill in "Silver Springs" that the Episodes reproduced with speed, precision and space to allow each instrument to breathe within the image.

Digging into some complex recordings, I checked out two great rock tracks: Alice in Chain's "Would" from the *Unplugged* album and Steely Dan's "Don't Take Me Alive" from *The Royal Scam*. The Alice in Chains song features a bass tuned



down a half step to E flat, with Mike Inez playing the song's intro in F sharp minor. On some speakers this song can sound muddy and compressed because of bass and drums occupying adjacent frequency bands. The Episode 700 played it without mashing the bass line into the drums, and the speaker was able to pull out the kick drum that resides below the bass line without losing definition.

On the other end of the sound spectrum, the vocals on the Steely Dan track sounded huge in the mix, and the instrumentation of the song filled out the soundstage without feeling ragged and lifeless.

I would describe the Episode 700 speaker as a product with an open and detailed midrange, a surprisingly extended bottom end and a balanced top end. The speaker also throws a spacious soundstage, and it produces a well-defined image.

Add everything up—including performance, looks, price and build quality—and I have to say that this relative newcomer to loudspeakers just about nailed it with its Episode 700. **EH**

## AT A GLANCE

### SPECS

- ◆ Piano-gloss black finish
- ◆ Catenary dome tweeter
- ◆ 6.5-inch Natural Cell Structure woofer
- ◆ 6-ohm speaker
- ◆ 89dB efficiency
- ◆ Frequency response of 52Hz to 23kHz.
- ◆ Five-way binding posts
- ◆ \$299 each
- ◆ [www.episodespeakers.com](http://www.episodespeakers.com)

### PROS

- ◆ Front port design enables the speakers to be placed inside cabinets or against walls.
- ◆ Balanced tonal performance.
- ◆ Easy to drive, which allows a variety of receivers and amps to drive them without strain and damage.

### CONS

- ◆ In some rooms the speakers may look a little too large.
- ◆ Natural veneer finishes would make the aesthetics friendlier to more room environments.