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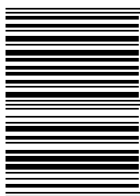
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Two-way monitor speaker Merlin by ELIXIR-Loudspeakers

A world of difference ...



A fresh face enters the slippery dance floor of High End Audio: Equipped with lots of guts and confidence Stefan Weber and Wolfgang Gehbauer take on the challenge to create more than „just another speaker”. To do so, you must have something special up your sleeve. So what’s their secret? Well, the Merlin speakers – and their bigger siblings – are built using Corian®. And not just the front panel is made of the mineral material patented by DuPont™ but the entire cabinet, that is. Corian® is unbelievably chameleonic in its use which ranks from cladding cover panels to kitchen work plates. Now we

can add loudspeaker housings to the list, making these speakers as consequently built as expensive. So as an exclusive first presentation we will now take a close look at the ELIXIR Merlin.

Materials and the idea behind

Corian® as the basic material is a non-porous substance boasting an easy-to-clean, dirt-repellent, massive surface. Solid-colored, durable, renewable and non-allergenic, Corian® is an acrylic-bound mineral material which in



conjunction with the glue used shows a low VOC value (Volatile Organic Compound) and is non-toxic to humans. As far as colors are concerned: Almost every imaginable color can be realized.

Only the best available components were on the list of the recipe for this exceptional „High End Audio” meal. To mention a few ingredients: The drivers were selected from the well-respected Accuton range, the crossover network impresses with its fine and therefore expensive parts and the overall workmanship and finish seems to be out of this world. Extraordinarily!

These extreme efforts in construction and production quality automatically result in these speakers being part of the top High End range. Stuff like this doesn’t come right off the shelf so it can’t be had for cheap money.

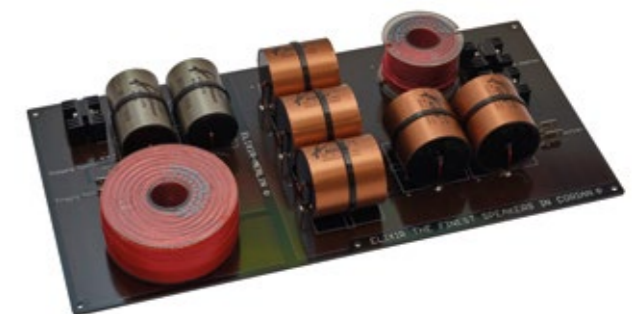
Every pair of Elixir loudspeakers will be delivered by its makers personally - worldwide. Even more: The Merlins are equipped with a life-long guarantee by Elixir-Loudspeakers. At least I haven’t heard of anything comparable in High End Audio yet.

The use of specially crafted flight cases for safe transportation is just a consequent continuation of the facts mentioned before, as Weber and Gehbauer follow one simple rule: „Only the best ingredients are good enough!” Or, as Oscar Wilde stated: „I’m a man of simple tastes. I’m always satisfied with the best.”

Prototype construction in communications engineering is Wolfgang Gehbauers home base while Stefan Weber has been developing loudspeakers for over thirty years now. Both are quality fanatics and avid supporters of the bevel design used for all of their speakers. Once the company name had been found (hailing from ancient medical science) it was just a small step towards Fantasy literature and the Artus saga. Naming the speaker models was easy then, they say. Right now the actual product line consists of „Merlin”, „Lancelot” and „Artus”, soon to be completed by the top system to be called „Camelot”.

„Merlin” (the legendary druid/sorcerer was not chosen by accident as the titular Saint here - but we’ll come to that point later) is the smallest speaker Elixir-Loudspeakers produces. On first sight not much more than a small, compact two-way loudspeaker (height with stands is 97.5 cm [3’2.5”], width 25 cm [10”] and depth 35 cm [1’2”]) you’ll be astonished when trying to lift these beauties. At least I was. 38 kg each (just under 84 lbs; plus an additional 11 kg [another 24.25 lbs] for each stand) make up for a solid weight of 49 kg (108 lbs) per side. Most of the weight comes from the Corian® material. It consists of some sheets being glued together to form the cabinet sides of 25 mm combined with a front panel of 37 mm thickness. This type of construction in combination with the material properties results in a great symbiosis of stiffness and lack of housing resonances.

The crossover network also weighs in with a hefty 3.3 kg (7.28 lbs) on its own. Located in its own chamber alongside the speakers back it triggered thoughts like „So much copper, masses of copper, a copper orgy!” on first sight. All of the parts used were carefully selected choices, says Stefan Weber. He chooses the „Audyn True Copper” caps simply because „...more copper isn’t possible...” and keeps explaining: „These are pure copper/Polypropylene caps made especially for audiophile use. We compared them to some well-known metalized types and the Audyns came out on top”, he states.



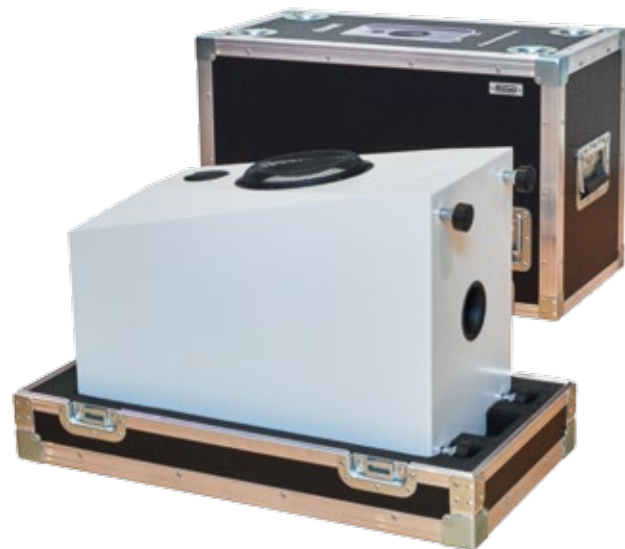


„The True Copper foil caps sounded superior, more musical than even the well-recommended Mundorf caps”, Weber told us. The same selective procedure took place with the coils used, finally resulting in the expensive, but great-sounding Tritec coils. These do offer constant inductivity on voltage and stress changes due to their hexagonal winding. Tritec is also the manufacturer of

the inner cabling. Finally there are two chassis involved in sound reproduction: The Accuton BD25 Cell with its diamond diaphragm reproduces the high frequencies while an Accuton driver with 173 mm ceramic diaphragm does the rest, aided by a reflex channel firing downwards. So we note here that high-quality copper is the main conductor inside this impressive speaker. By the way: the crossover frequency between bass-/midrange driver and tweeter is 2.500 Hz.

Musical experiences

This time we start with some Caribbean sounds – as you may already guessed from Cuba. Pasion De Buena Vista are our musical guests – on CD, naturally. „Para Siempre” with ease fills our listening room, the 2-way Elixir thereby revealing more power and authority than expected. Much more, that is it. Fourteen musicians spreading the spectrum of sounds as wide as can be: choir, lucent trumpets, congas, guitars, piano – you name it, they have it. Simply spectacular! This CD spins from first to last track while the attenuator is being turned right more and more. There it is again, this feeling of being enveloped in music, in well-tempered sounds.



„Looks like the Merlin is going to challenge me for more...” I think. So here we go: Honne’s „Warm On A Cold Night” (Japanese pressing) is the next CD I listen to. Firm electronic tones with impact and power, differing in tonal length but always extremely clean sounding, were put together to form a very cool, avantgardistic electronic music by the duo of Andrew Peter Clutterbuck and James William Hatcher. Music to „let go”? For sure. So what does the Elixir Merlins make out of it? Clean, realistic, resonance-free – the best words to describe what happened are „perfectly coherent sound impression”. Yes, sir! Using the best materials available in a most meticulous manner results in sound reproduction capabilities I hasn’t really expecting at all. At least not THAT way! So I had to dig even deeper: Analog was to follow suit. „The Common Linnets” play their „Sun Song”. A wonderfully harmonic take is being rendered in an almost magical style by these small speakers. Only to be followed by even more enjoyment with the next track „Lovers & Liars”. To try and find out more about the

Merlin’s strengths and weaknesses I try Allison Krauss’ „Live At Louisville Palace”, a lovely recording to cherish. Krauss and her Union Station show a lot of passion here – and so do the Elixirs. Strengths? Many. Weaknesses? Not yet found. Maybe full orchestral classical music will show some limitations? A recording of Igor Stravinsky’s Violin Concerto in D-Major (1931) in addition to his Symphony In Three Movements (1945), with Isaac Stern and the Columbia Symphony Orchestra, should provide me with some hints on what is possible.

The Merlin comes up with the rare ability to translate fastest impulses into sounds of the same speed. What a feast for my ears!

Finally there has to be some Jazz. This time I selected one of the fabulous „WDR Jazzline“ recordings in „Ella Fitzgerald – Live In Cologne 1974“ first. The music’s hot, Ella is in fire and the whole building is boiling with emotions. Won-der-full!



To get the best out of the Elixir Merlins I set them up in a typical stereo triangle with a side length of 2.30 meters. The speakers were placed facing straight forward. This way the presentation in the sweet spot is almost holographic with seemingly endless depth and width of the sound picture in perfect structure. Another example: Norwegian singer Kari Bremnes delivers a recording with great spatial arrangements on „E du Nord“, taken from her 2012 album „Og så Kom Resten Av Lievet“. Even when listening at low volumes the voice is clearly positioned in the middle in front of piano and string orchestra with the choir slowly setting in. Right now I've got goose bumps all over my body – throughout the whole song.

This shows another capability of this speaker: It can play as exceptionally well on low levels as it can play loudly when needed. The bass reproduction of Elixirs Merlin speakers especially caught my attention: Defined, clean and in no way as sterile as I had heard it from other speakers using the same ceramic midrange/woofer chassis. Here Elixir has worked some magic in perfectly blending the Accuton chassis with each other acoustically. Obviously „copper keeps it all together“!

If you own a room of around 20 qm (ca. 215 sq.ft.) the Merlin is a great alternative if you're into passive speakers.

It's a must-listen for everyone craving for fast, clean and perfectly precise sound reproduction and all of this independently of the volume selected. Except for rock music at high levels in large rooms the Elixir will provide enough sound pressure to create an exceptional sonic performance. The Merlins can be listened to for hours and hours totally stress-free, the only caveat comes when talking about amplification. Here you need to „feed“ these speakers with enough power from a really, really fast (transistor) power amplifier. Combine this with a tubed preamp and you'll feel the magic of Merlin!

On the spot

The Elixir Merlin has won me over as it is definitely one of the best, if not the best, passive two-way speakers I ever heard. It blew my prejudices versus speakers using ceramic drivers right away with the first notes it reproduced. I never ever heard these Accuton drivers sound so darn good – a really great product with a perfectly chosen name this is!

Information

2-way compact loudspeaker „Merlin“
 by Elixir Loudspeakers
 Pricing incl. stands: 33.000 Euro
 Elixir®-Loudspeakers
 Stefan Weber
 Mathildenweg 14
 D - 64367 Mühlthal
 Tel.: +49 (0) 6151/8505159
 info@elixir-loudspeakers.com
 www.elixir-loudspeakers.com

Alexander Aschenbrunner