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# Estelon YB Mk II Floorstanding Loudspeakers Review

By Eric Teh



*Eric Teh is absolutely beguiled by this radical looking high end loudspeaker...*

Estelon was founded in 2010 by Alfred Vassilkov and his daughter Alissa in Estonia. Alfred, who studied electro-acoustics in St. Petersburg, had been designing speakers for over a quarter of a century, at that point. The company is best known for its X series loudspeakers, which are famous for their radical looks and high performance – and, sadly, exotic price tags too.

The YB Mk II that you see here is the entry-level model and derives its name from the 'Y' shape of the asymmetrical driver positioning. In particular, the side-firing bass driver is at an offset angle. Said to be a result of form following function – like all Estelon products – the beautiful looks are not for the sake of aesthetics alone. As an example, the long and flowing lines avoid parallel cabinet walls. The speaker cabinet is made from a marble-based composite material that is highly dense and claimed to be resonance-free. According to the designer, the complex shape, internal bracing, and cabinet material allow the speaker drivers to perform at their very best.



## UP CLOSE

While the company's more expensive models use driver units from Thiel & Partner, Estelon departs from this in the YB. The woofer is sourced from SEAS, and the mid-woofer and tweeter from Scan-Speak A/S. The 8.6" lightweight aluminium cone woofer is coupled with a low-loss rubber surround. The 5.8" mid-woofer is a sliced paper cone Revelator driver. The slices have been filled with proprietary damping glue to reduce and modify the break-up modes of the driver. The 1" Illuminator tweeter utilises a beryllium dome.

This element, the lightest stable metal in the Periodic Table, has found popularity in high-end driver designs as it's extremely stiff for its weight, allowing great transient speed and an extended frequency response. Unfortunately, beryllium is also challenging to work with due to the toxicity of its dust particles during manufacturing. It is therefore very expensive to produce, which is why it's not commonplace in loudspeakers.

Internal wiring is from Kubala-Sosna. A single pair of Cardas CPBP binding posts is located at the bottom rear of the cabinet. A single large knob tightens both insulated terminals simultaneously. This system reduces the risk of stripping screw threads as well as accidentally shorting out your amplifier.

The midrange driver is placed at the top of the cabinet, unlike most designs. According to Estelon, this minimises sonic reflections from the floor. Similarly, the angled woofers allow the speakers to be placed close to walls in smaller rooms, without having to cope with overlapping sound.



The supplied grilles are magnetically attached to the drive units. I was surprised that the tweeter and mid-woofer grille frames were 3D-printed. The thickness of the grille frames did detract from the beauty of the cabinet lines. I also noticed that they added a light veil to the sound, so they were removed during listening sessions.



Frequency response is said to be from 30Hz to 40kHz. Nominal impedance and sensitivity are specified at 6 ohms and 86dB, respectively, meaning the speaker is not the easiest to drive but shouldn't present any modern high-quality amplifier with a problem all the same. Part of the reason for its lowish sensitivity is the fact that it's a sealed-box design, but this does confer benefits in other respects, as

we'll see. Physical dimensions are 1,260x332x394mm (HxWxD), and each speaker weighs a very substantial 45kg.

The cabinet finish is excellent, with paint on a par with any luxury car marque. While the looks of the YB may not appeal to everyone, I personally loved it. It has a stylish avant-garde look that would definitely serve as a talking point, especially in more striking finishes like the Champagne Gold Limited Edition or Red Racing. It would certainly look the part on the page of any luxury interior design magazine.

In my listening room, my review pair of YBs were positioned about 2 metres apart, with approximately 0.7m distance from the back of the cabinet to the rear wall, and 0.5m distance from the side walls. This was the position occupied by my daily drivers, a pair of Vivid Audio Giya G4 speakers. They proved to be quite easy to set up, and the initial placement was more than listenable. Some minor adjustments resulted in about 20 degrees of toe-in. As recommended by Estelon, the speakers were arranged with the woofers firing inward. My Hattor Audio balanced passive preamplifier and Apollon Purifi 1ET400A power amplifier served as partnering equipment. I also tried my Conrad Johnson GAT S2 preamplifier and ART monoblock amplifiers.



## THE LISTENING

This loudspeaker has a very tight and precise presentation, with a vice-like grip on the bass. Likewise, soundstaging and imaging are positive and explicit, and tonality is very good due to the lack of cabinet colourations. This speaker paints a vast and seamless sonic canvas, allowing itself to vanish from the listening room. Cranking up the volume does nothing to upset its composure. It is equally comfortable

serenading you softly, or delivering concert-like sound levels. I believe that Estelon's design goal has been successfully met, then!

Speaking personally, coming from a near-lifetime of listening to ported speaker designs, adjusting to the sealed-box cabinet of the YB required some acclimatisation. The initial feeling of reduced bass authority was replaced with an appreciation of the tight and tunefulness of bass lines, and I realised that the louder bass I had previously enjoyed was partly bloated. My Apollon amplifier's high damping factor ensured a fast and tight bass with speed and control. However, listening to acoustic double-bass, I felt that the texture and decay of notes was better rendered by my tube-powered Conrad Johnson. Regardless of amp, the Estelon delivered deep and sonorous low frequencies.

Fujiyama by Ondekoza is a fine track to gauge both soundstaging and bottom-end performance; their name is translated as Demon Drum Group in English, and they are a Japanese Taiko drum ensemble. Each strike was clear and distinct, while the powerful drumming on the massive o-daiko thundered convincingly. The YB allowed the listener to place each instrument in the soundstage and appreciate the varying angle and vigour of each stroke. The sealed cabinet design was in its element here, as the woofer accurately kept up with the tempo of the drum beats.

J.S. Bach's Cello Suite No. 1 in G, BWV 1007: 1. Prelude performed by Janos Starker in 1965 for Mercury Living Presence combines technical perfection

with profound phrasing. As Starker goes through the quick alternating range of notes, the YB reproduced the performance seamlessly with coherence and smoothness. Lesser speakers cannot reproduce the full range of emotional expression in these drum strokes, especially in respect of the textural nuances of his instrument. Yet the Estelon absolutely nailed it, with a deep insight into the cerebral and emotional heart of the performance.

I found the YB to have a subtly warmth midband. This gave vocals a light creaminess that made recordings very easy to listen to, with little trade-off in detail. Listening to Always on my Mind by Inger Marie Gunderson, her voice retained her sultry character but was richer and denser than usual. Anne Bisson's voice in Camilio floated ethereally, underpinned by her piano playing, double bass and drums. The simple music arrangement laid everything bare, and the Estelon delivered both voice and instruments with convincingly accurate tone and timbre.



The Estelon's high frequencies did not attract undue attention. Some beryllium tweeters can sound overly bright, resulting in a brilliant but etched and tiring presentation. Thankfully, this tweeter blended in gently with the mid-woofer, while retaining the speed, extension and highly detailed sound that good beryllium drivers are famous for. Olympic Fanfare by Erich Kunzel and the Cincinnati Pops has a lot of upper midrange and high-frequency energy and can sound brittle and harsh in the wrong system. Through the YB II, brass sounded authoritative and controlled, never straying into stridency while the bells rang with pristine clarity. Subjectively, there was subtly reduced energy in the highs, which would favour listeners who like a detailed yet non-fatiguing presentation.



## THE VERDICT

To my ears at least, there is nothing entry-level about the YB II except its position in the Estelon product range. It's an outstanding loudspeaker that proves that great looks and performance can be combined in a single package. Its strengths are a highly musical tone that does not sacrifice detail and other niceties that we audiophiles crave for. It is certainly not cheap, but sadly great things never are.