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# Poetry in Motion

MartinLogan's newest electrostatic speakers leave **Danny Phillips** feeling a bit emotional

**M**artinLogan is famous for creating speakers that blend electrostatic panels with traditional bass drivers, an approach it's been perfecting since the 1980s. With most brands opting for conventional cone-based designs, it's ploughing a lone furrow with this tech, but reckons the results are better than anything else available.

Electrostatic transducers use a light plastic film diaphragm stretched tight between two 'stators' (perforated steel sheets coated with an insulator), which are charged by signals of opposing polarity – the push and pull of the stators' positive and negative charges then causes the diaphragm to move and produce sound. That's the tech-lite description, of course.

The thing is, electrostatic transducers are invariably found wanting in the bass department. That's why MartinLogan incorporates a woofer into the design, taking care to tailor the crossover network to the electrostatic panel, ensuring that these two types of technology work in harmony. Without the woofer, the panels would need to be huge to generate serious low-frequency depth.

This hybrid technology is the key feature of the £2,500 ElectroMotion ESL (or EM-ESL) floorstanding front speakers that spearhead this 5.1-channel system. Despite their great-looking spec, they're actually the most affordable electrostatic speakers MartinLogan has produced.

## AV/CV

**PRODUCT:** 5.1 speaker system with hybrid front speakers

**POSITION:** MartinLogan's most affordable electrostatic speakers

**PEERS:** Canton Chrono CL; KEF Q Series; Monitor Audio GX





The EM-ESL floorstander partners its electrostatic transducer with an 8in woofer in the base

Each one boasts a 34in tall XStat electrostatic transducer held rigidly within the same aluminium/composite AirFrame structure found on the brand's flagship designs, providing electrical and acoustical isolation to lessen distortion.

The curved shape helps with high-frequency dispersion, typically difficult from a large radiating surface like this.

All of this gives the EM-ESLs a distinct and striking appearance, one that's likely to divide opinions more than a Lana del Rey record. They look nothing like traditional floorstanders, with the curved XStat panel rising high in the air, attached to a sturdy black box at the bottom that houses the custom-designed 8in woofer.

As a result, they're not really the sort of speakers that slip into the background – they demand to be seen and discussed. And the MicroPerf holes also mean that you can see right through the panel, which is pretty cool.

On the back of each EM-ESL is a pair of push-clip speaker terminals, while banana plugs can be accommodated by removing the plastic covers. You'll also notice an input for supplied power adapters on the back of each cabinet. That's because the diaphragms need to be charged to create a strong electrostatic field around them. And, as they are a dipole design, radiating sound from the front and back, they'll need to be installed away from walls and given plenty of room to breathe.

### Supporting cast

The EM-ESLs are joined in this array by the £790 EM-C2 centre and a pair of EM-FX2 surrounds (£645 each), neither of which feature electrostatic transducers but do employ Folded Motion XT tweeters – another MartinLogan speaker innovation. There's no EM-branded sub, so we've used the active MartinLogan Dynamo 700w, deemed a suitable bass partner for this setup.

The £790 EM-C2 is a whopping centre speaker, using dual 5.25in woofers and a Folded Motion XT tweeter. About the same size as a small AV receiver, it will take up a sizeable chunk of your rack space. It's not exactly pretty, but the clean lines and black styling means it'll blend nicely with other components, while its wedge shape angles the speaker so it fires speech upwards.

The EM-FX2s are very much designed with surround sound in mind. Their twin Folded Motion XT tweeters are angled diagonally for



**Handiwork:** The EM-ESL comes with a signed certificate of authenticity tied to its binding posts

wide dispersion into the room, and joined by a front-firing 6.5in woofer.

The new £700 Dynamo 700w is one of four subs in the range, below the Dynamo 1000w. The 'w' means that it can use an optional wireless transmitter to beam LFE info from your AVR to its built-in receiver. You can use a regular lead if you want.

The 700w is surprisingly compact, measuring just 32cm high, making it a cinch to place. It packs a 300W amplifier and 10in driver, and can be

*"These craft a sonic image so deep, layered and natural that suspension of disbelief is mandatory"*

installed in the regular front-firing way, or reconfigured as a down-firing unit. On the back are dials governing volume and crossover frequency.

### Hell yeah!

Aptly, this system is absolutely electrifying in action. I was desperate to hear how the hybrid technology handled *Hellboy II*'s densely detailed DTS-HD Master Audio track (especially its manic action scenes) and was not disappointed.

The crafted sound is so realistic and believable that I found myself becoming emotionally invested in a movie I've seen a million times, opening my ears to sounds and textures I hadn't noticed were there. This is most apparent in the Troll Market scene, where the EM-ESL's detail retrieval is nothing short of phenomenal. I could only sit in a state of stupefied wonder as fairy wings spiralled around my head with the daintiest flutter, while tiny squeaking, crunching and cackling noises drifted faintly in and out of earshot. It's a sonic image so deep, layered and natural that suspension of disbelief is mandatory, even during a warped fantasy movie like this.

And given the disparate driver technologies at play across the system, the sound is remarkably coherent. When isolated as a stereo pair, the towers' electrostatic panels and woofers sound tight and unified, which works wonders with music material, while the EM-FX2 and EM-C2 are as well suited to the fronts as Eric Morecambe was to Ernie Wise.

But what really seals the deal is the way the system creates such a seamlessly enveloping sound, thanks to the EM-ESL's dipole design and the EM-FX2's wide dispersion. From my listening position it felt like there wasn't a single area of the room left untouched by sound, flooding the no-man's land between the front and rear speakers with precise, tangible effects. And when called for, sounds glide from speaker to speaker without you ever knowing where one ends and another begins. Stunning.

Flipping to an action scene found this array silencing the electrostatic naysayers with a muscular and bassy bravado. This mix of electrostatic and traditional drivers is an inspired move. During *Hellboy's* battle with the Elemental, it delivers drama on an epic scale, with massive explosions and ferocious crashes, but still retains the crispest HF effects.

The depth and agility of the Dynamo sub is a joy to behold, too, providing a solid bass bed without overdoing it, but turn it off and you'll find the EM-ESLs' own woofers offer fantastic depth on their own. Throw the EM-C2's wonderfully clear speech reproduction into the mix, which injects words with presence and subtle nuance, and you have a very accomplished performance.

True, the unconventional styling may not be your cup of tea, but I'm confident this 5.1 array will blow you away. That's what it did to me ●

## → Specifications

### EM-ESL fronts

**Drive units:** 1 x 34in XStat CLS electrostatic transducer; 1 x 8in high-excursion high-rigidity paper cone woofer  
**Frequency response:** 42Hz-22kHz  
**Sensitivity:** 91dB  
**Power handling:** 20-300W  
**Dimensions:** 229(w) x 1,323(h) x 414(d)mm  
**Weight:** 16.1kg

### EM-FX2 rears

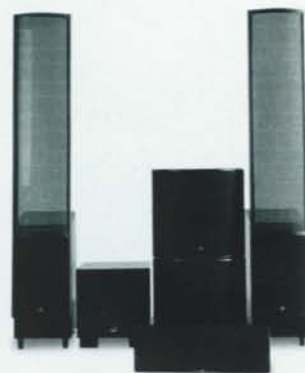
**Drive units:** 2 x 2.4in Folded Motion XT tweeters; 1 x 6.5in paper cone woofer  
**Frequency response:** 55Hz-25kHz  
**Sensitivity:** 93dB  
**Power handling:** 20-200W  
**Dimensions:** 355(w) x 379(h) x 172(d)mm  
**Weight:** 7.3kg

### EM-C2 centre

**Drive units:** 1 x 2.4in Folded Motion XT tweeter; 2 x 5.25in paper cone woofers  
**Frequency response:** 55Hz-25kHz  
**Sensitivity:** 94dB  
**Power handling:** 20-250W  
**Dimensions:** 482(w) x 164(h) x 365(d)mm  
**Weight:** 11.12kg

### Dynamo 700w subwoofer

**Drive units:** 1 x 10in  
**Frequency response:** 24-200Hz  
**On board power:** 300W RMS  
**Dimensions:** 297(w) x 319(h) x 318(d)mm  
**Weight:** 12kg  
**Connections:** Line-level and LFE phono inputs; built in wireless receiver (requires optional SWT-1 transmitter)



## HCC VERDICT

MartinLogan ElectroMotion 5.1  
 → £5,300 Approx → Supplier: [www.absolutesounds.com](http://www.absolutesounds.com)  
 → Tel: 0208 971 3909

**Highs:** Remarkably detailed; seamless cohesion; enveloping soundstage; deep punchy sound; reassuring build quality

**Lows:** Design not to everyone's taste – cats might scratch them!

**Performance:** 1 2 3 4 5

**Design:** 1 2 3 4 5

**Features:** 1 2 3 4 5

**Overall:** 1 2 3 4 5