

EgglestonWorks Emma EVOLution Speaker Review

[Trevor Doyle](#) January 10, 2019

When I was 15, my older brother gave me my first real stereo. I loved it. It was amazing to me. The amp was an Akai integrated, a brushed aluminum beauty with a lot of aluminum knobs and dials. It had very cool VU meters and a walnut case. The turntable was equally beautiful, also Japanese. It was a Kenwood with a granite-like finish and a very deliberate looking tonearm. The speakers were made by Realistic, and like most speakers of that time, housed in sealed particle board boxes, carefully veneered in a teak finish. I used to lay in bed when it was too late to turn the stereo on, and stare at its beauty. I don't know how long I had them before the magic wore off but it was years, of that I'm sure. Since that time, I would conservatively estimate I've owned 12-15 sets of speakers, from Tannoy and Mission to Scientific Fidelity. But none of them quite as beautiful as the speakers that stand proudly in front of me today which made me think... the golden ratio is a mathematical ratio that is frequently found in nature. It's been adopted in art and design for centuries. Its organic and natural works are visually pleasing. After my customary sitting and staring at the speaker, I broke out my tape measure and calculator. These Lamborghini black transducers are dangerously close to falling within the golden ratio. Their narrow face and deep profile are, to my eyes, near perfection in proportion.

EgglestonWorks are based in humid Memphis, Tennessee and have been producing world class speakers for just over 20 years. They found early popularity as the choice of legendary mastering engineer Bob Ludwig, during which time they became well known in recording circles. Soon after that the high end home audio crowd jumped on board and their line up expanded. The brand new, and vastly improved, Emma EVOLution speaker (\$5,490 US) stands as their entry level floor stander, positioned in the company's line between the Nico stand mount speaker and the larger Kiva floor stander. The build and finish quality of these models is astonishing. Never being prone to hyperbole, I can safely say these speakers are among the best looking speakers I've ever seen. Everything from the beautiful enclosure, the machined aluminum faceplate, the carbon fibre rear plate, to the chrome binding posts... EgglestonWorks left no stone unturned when designing these speakers to stand out in a market that already offers many good looking speakers.

Technically, the Emma EVOLution combines a 1-inch fabric dome tweeter with dual 6-inch drivers. It offers a frequency response rated from 32 Hz to 24 kHz, a sensitivity of 88 dB and a nominal impedance of 6 ohms. It has a footprint of 7.5" x 16" x 43" (W x D x H) and weighs 69 lbs. Its cabinet, internal bracing and porting system are derived from the technology originally developed for the company's higher end Viginti Limited Edition and Kiva loudspeakers.



I spent several weeks with these speakers and found that they are not particularly finicky about their placement, unlike their predecessor model called the Emma SE, which have been in my system for a while. At first listen, I found that the EVOLution model delivered the same kind of sound as the excellent sounding Emma SE model but now there was considerably more thunder. Through a total redesign, company President Jim Thompson and VP John Callery aimed for this new model to push low frequencies that normally don't get associated with speakers of this size. Thanks to an innovative use of a slot / shelf rear port they have achieved low end frequencies that easily hum a 32 Hz bass line. That's high 20's in a well thought out room. The use of mid range drivers combined with this new port and cabinet design and a totally reworked crossover have produced mid range bass that's both taught and detailed. Very believable and compelling. The lows aren't as earth shattering as their behemoth big brother the Viginti , but in all honesty not far off.



The tonal balance the Emmas exhibited, was for the most part very accurate and smooth. Their overall sonic characteristics lean slightly toward a warm sound, rather than bright – pretty much exactly where you would expect a good speaker to land.

To evaluate how the Emma EVOLution handled guitars, I turned to Exodus and their song called “No Love” – the first minute has a single guitarist playing, before the aggression of the track bursts out. Stringed instruments were extremely detailed when listening on the Emma EVOLution. On numerous tracks of different music genres, I was absolutely amazed at how accurate and detailed acoustic guitars sounded. I have lots of experience listening to live guitarists and with my eyes closed, these speakers made me

feel as if someone was playing a heavy-gauge 6-string guitar right in my living room.

After several hours of listening I realized that the Emma EVOLution may be one of the least fatiguing speakers I've listened to in recent memory. I enjoy silently critiquing audio show rooms and even more so friends' systems, whether praising or bashing them in my mind. The one thing I can't stand and won't tolerate is a fatiguing tweeter. The tweeter used in this EgglestonWorks speaker is made to their specs by Morel. It's as fine a driver as can be found today. My ears actually felt great after listening. Not

unlike my legs after a 100km road bike ride. In fact, my ears never asked for breaks, even after 4 hours of Genesis and a little wine. My legs did, however, require occasional breaks.

The original Emma SE speaker had a great sense of pace, rhythm and timing and this was further improved in the new Emma EVOLution. I attribute a part of this to the speaker's ability to dissect mid bass and low bass with a better precision than its predecessor. Asking these mid range woofers to work overtime isn't a tall order when you integrate them in a well designed, immensely strong cabinet. Timing is something that a lot of speakers, even big name brands fail to get right. Luckily that wasn't the case here.

A speaker's ability to image well and paint a large soundstage always impresses me. The Emma EVOLution offered spatial imaging in spades, and a depth that was generous and visual. As most critical listeners do, I often closed my eyes and was easily able to locate each musician within the soundstage. Case in point was Led Zeppelin's "Kashmir" track on their Celebration Day live album. Robert Plant, with his shirt wide open, was so far forward on the stage it seriously felt like he was standing on the edge. Meanwhile, Jimmy and the gang were nestled safely back from the crowd and in their respective positions. The keyboards on this version really add another dimension to this great song.

The perspective presentation of the Emma EVOLution was neither forward, nor laid back – it was presented exactly as recorded in the mix. If the vocals were front and centre in the mix, they sounded forward as they should, and if they were placed further back in the mix, that's exactly how the speaker played them.

Whether or not you enjoy the soothing melodies of Alice in Chains you have to admit they do have a few extremely well recorded albums. "Rotten Apple" on their Jar of Flies EP starts out with Mike Starr playing a beautifully clear and undistorted bass line. I replayed it a dozen times. The bass performance of the Emma EVOLution was simply unbelievable. Playing the Alice in Chains Unplugged album, I was immediately transported to the bar or hall it was recorded in. This is an amazing recording and these speakers were able to transcribe every note and nuance, with ease.

The depth of Peter Gabriel's voice on the track "Fly on a Windshield", from the Genesis The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway album, was a thing of scary marvel. His voice emitted from left of center and simultaneously also from outside the soundstage. This album is a recording that really requires some special gear to play it at its fullest potential. I've heard this entire album (which is possibly my favourite album of all time) on a system worth nearly \$175,000 and remarkably the performance of the Emma EVOLution wasn't that far away from that performance. This speaker approached a very similar level of realism, tonal balance and rhythmic timing as a system that costs many times that.

Is EgglestonWorks doing anything vastly different than any of their direct competitors? Not that I'm able to determine. Is the best turntable in the world that much different than the next best? No. So I can't say EgglestonWorks is doing anything revolutionary. What they are doing, they are doing very well however. As the name suggests, the Emma EVOLution is the evolution of the Emma SE model. But it is more than that, it is an extremely great sounding speaker at this price point, in a market filled with other great sound speakers at similar price points.

These Emma EVOLution paired exceptionally well with my Linear Tube Audio components, which also play very well with my Bryston digital components. I've been to dozens of audio shows and many homes with prohibitively expensive audio systems. For these speakers to make me think of the sonic

performance of such heavy weight contenders seems almost silly – but that’s exactly what these speakers did. In nature, a honey badger does that. Lions stand back from stand offs with this little guy.

If you’ve got a budget around \$5,500 US or even a few times that and are considering speakers from some of the better known brands in the business, I urge you to audition the Emma EVOLution as part of the mix. These speakers will feel equally at home with a reasonably priced NAD system or a truly high end Soulution system.

These speakers are very easy to recommend. Thanks to their sensitivity of 88 dB / 6 ohms and tight bass control, they will play very nicely with lower powered tube amps. I powered the previous Emma SE speakers with a Bryston 4B3 (Cubed) amp and they sang like an American Idol finalist, so I assume the Emma EVOLution will do even better with powerful amps [I’m told that one of EgglestonWorks’ reference amps is a Krell]. Listeners who like a big, broad sound, with tremendous detail, very precise and focused imaging will love the sound of this speaker. At \$5,490 US, the Emma EVOLution is not an inexpensive speaker but relatively speaking it is a tremendous value. I expect that the Emma EVOLution will quickly become EgglestonWorks’ best selling speaker.

Now it’s getting late again, so perhaps a few more minutes of looking at these beauties is in order... before I hit the hay.

The system for this review included the following components:

Digital

Bryston BDP 2, Bryston BDA 2

Preamp

Linear Tube Audio micro zotl

Amplifiers

Linear Tube Audio zotl 10 mono amps

Interconnects

Clarity Cable

Speaker cable

Skogrand Cables

Power Cables

Skogrand Cables, Shuntaya Research, BIS Audio

Accessories

Massif Audio Design rack, amp stands and power supply platforms, cable risers, Sims Navcom silencer footers

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