

Engelholm Trill loudspeaker

by Alan Sircom

Engelholm is not a well-known name in audio... yet. The company makes a range of distinctly high-end designs increasing in size from the two-driver standmount Trill (tested here) to the ten-driver Solo tower, as well as cables, feet and room treatment. A three-man team running out of Sweden, the company is not exactly new – in fact, the brand has been going since 2001 – but has yet to break into international waters significantly. With the Trill, however, it might be a company that is about to have its time in the sun.

The reason for that is the Trill is part of a two-pronged attack on the more ‘affordable’ end of high-end (the other being the new three-way floorstander Staff). Although the Solo models have been well received in high-end circles, their sheer size and cost act to prevent a larger Engelholm following. Now the brand starts at a less lofty – although still distinctly high-end – position, there will be increased interest in the Swedish two-way standmount.

The Trill is based on a pretty easy formula, but it’s a pretty easy formula to get wrong too. Take two great drive units, put them in an appropriate and ported box and hope for the best. The Trill does just that, except it goes for the best, rather than simply hoping for it. Here, that fine made for Engelholm ultra-light 8.5x60mm ribbon tweeter joins forces with a custom spec 160mm Accuton-made ceramic drive unit in a cabinet that’s thick enough not to move around, and chamfered into the corners to minimise standing wave issues.

Everything right down to the solder used is taken under consideration. Nothing has been left to chance. One of the big aspects of the Engelholm ethos is crossover design – it’s “where the real magic happens”, according to Engelholm. It uses metallised polypropylene high-loading capacitors for the tweeter and cross-coil inductors on the bass, which is claimed to be less prone to mechanical vibration and have a larger surface area than regular wire coils. Climbing down from Magic Mountain for a moment, the network is a second-order affair with a crossover point at 2.3kHz.

The speakers have a flat base, but the finish is such that it might be best to use dedicated stands, which attach to the base of the Trill by removing the three large M6 bolts along the base and replace them with suitably larger bolts.

The Trill craves power. More than the specs suggest. It’s an 87dB sensitivity, relatively benign eight ohm load, with a minimum impedance of about seven ohms. Pär Engelholm provided an impedance plot with the manual and there’s nothing remotely resembling a nasty phase angle or huge impedance spikes. Engelholm also suggests ‘quality over quantity’ in power delivery. Nevertheless, it’s a speaker that sounds good with a small amp, but a whole lot better with a big beastie behind it. In our case, we used the AVM Ovation series products destined for an upcoming review, and hundreds of useful, solid watts really grip the speakers by their drive units. While we used Nordost signal and power cables throughout, Engelholm ▶



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also supplied us short lengths of its Legato speaker cable, which proved an outstanding match for the speakers. While I'm not a big fan of mix 'n' match cable systems, the Legato is a good cable nonetheless.

Trill is very much a loudspeaker cast in the 'absolute sound' mode, in the sense of the ethos rather than necessarily the magazine. That doesn't mean it's poor at playing rock music, far from it in fact, but it's the kind of speaker that doesn't give any quarter for a recording with a compromised dynamic range, and that usually means live, acoustic instruments recorded in a natural acoustic. It is extremely good at retrieving ambient information from a recording, and you get that delicious sense of a live event taking place. Cymbals in particular are given a fine portrayal through the Trill, so well in fact that it makes me wonder if the designer Pär is a sticksman in his spare time.

Vocals are also particularly well delineated. 'Clap Hands' and the outright weird 'Cemetery Polka' from Tom Waits' *Rain Dogs* are a particularly difficult test here, because of the way he sings (a stage-whispered carney barker is the best description) and the way his voice is recorded. You can always make out what he says, but the process is considerably easier here.

But it's classical music that really shows what the Trill is capable of. And what it is not capable of. The last is fairly easy, and fairly predictable... bottom end. It gives excellent bass for a standmount loudspeaker (Engelholm claims an impressive 35Hz and it achieves that comfortably in most domestic settings where a standmount is likely to be used), but listening to something like the overture to Wagner's 'Tannhauser' (von Karajan, Berlin Phil on EMI) should give one the desire to sweep majestically eastward and conquer something. Impressive though the Trill certainly is, the loss of some of the force of that underpinning made it sound a little more *The Adventures of Robin Hood* than it should.

In a way, though, that shows why the Trill is a good speaker. Wagner is film music before there were films, and if there's bass missing (due to the physics involved of trying to get true sub-30Hz bass out of a small loudspeaker) then it should sound more like a film score than most classical music, and it does. Swap this over for something less 'cinematic' and the whole feeling of waiting for Errol Flynn to make his entrance goes away and is replaced by music more sombre, sober, upbeat or danceable.

This danceable thing is strange. Playing 'A Message to you Rudy' by The Specials (a track that has been following me around since I was at school), it seems to follow Jerry Dammers organ lines closer than many other loudspeakers that follow the brass section. I found that a lot on several tracks I know well, finding myself following different musical lines than I expected. Some of this is because there is a heck of a lot of midrange and upper midrange detail going on, that it makes even your best-loved music shiny and new. There's a lot going on, but the

super-honest Trill can sound too aggressive in the wrong hands and with the wrong music. Even well-worn test discs like Lambchop's *Is A Woman* come in for the analysis treatment. There is a potential concern that using this speaker with a fundamentally bright system will send things over the



► edge. On the other hand, back off from that all-bright system and you get to hear new things from your music.

There's a term I tend not to use that often because it's prone to abuse, but this an extremely 'rhythmic' sounding loudspeaker. But it's not 'rhythmic' in the conventional way (it delivers a tidy, fast bass-line, but that's not it!), because it's taking its rhythmic cues from the attack of the rhythm guitarist or the hi-hat of the drummer, or the percussive hit of the piano, as this is traditionally the way 'tight' big bands (like Count Basie) used to tie down rhythm, this is probably a good way of doing things. In the process, it makes for a supremely detailed sounding loudspeaker in the midrange.

Trill's biggest feather in its cap is the maturity of sound it produces. It doesn't go for the quick fix, or the instant gratification demonstration technique. It is clean and extended in the top end, but that extension tends toward the natural, so long as the system you partner it with does the same. It is open and full of detail in the mids, and that extends down well into the bass. It's one of those box speakers that sounds like an electrostatic, but with the added drive and dynamic range a cabinet brings.

Finally, some richly deserved praise for the manual. It gives a lot of very clear, concise and useful advice on set-up, and then goes fairly deep into acoustics. Any loudspeaker brand that discusses the Schroeder frequency of a room (the frequency at which low frequency sounds change their behaviour, and the resultant changes in room treatment required) is taking the whole 'manual' thing seriously.

Overall, Engelholm's Trill is a welcome addition to the audio pantheon and I expect to hear great things of this company, because you hear great things through the Trill. Well worth seeking out. +

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TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Two way ported standmount loudspeaker

Drive units: ribbon tweeter, 160mm ceramic mid-bass driver

Frequency Response: 35Hz-40kHz

Crossover: 2nd Order, 2.3kHz crossover frequency

Nominal Impedance: eight ohms

Minimum Impedance: seven ohms

Sensitivity: 87dB/W/m

Dimensions (WxHxD): 45x22x35cm

Weight: 15kg (each)

Price: €6500 per pair (Walnut finish extra) excluding stands

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