



## HANDS-ON REVIEW

# Elipson W35 Speaker: The Perfect Sphere?

BY DAVID SUSILO

**FRENCH SPEAKER COMPANY ELIPSON** teased its W35 back in May 2019, and the speaker finally launched late last year as the newest member of Elipson's Planet Series speaker lineup. The unit, a culmination of 80 years in loudspeaker manufacturing and three years of research and development, has a spherical enclosure and is unique in both its appearance and approach to sound.

When Genssen, the brand's distributor, sent me the unit, I was surprised by how heavy (about 22 lbs.) and gigantic it is. Opening the box, immediately I could see and feel the build quality. While it doesn't have the same structure as another uniquely shaped hifi speaker, the Devialet Phantom, the heft and solidity reminds me of that gorgeous unit. But why a sphere instead of the usual box cabinetry? For that, we have to look back at the company's history.

### A LITTLE HISTORY ABOUT ELIPSON

Elipson was founded in 1938, with a main engineer, Joseph Leon. He was the dominating figure throughout the first golden period of the brand,

from 1940 through to '73. Leon became the head of the company in 1948, and in 1951, the company took its current name. It was Leon's vision for Elipson sound, and he created and sculpted the speaker design by experimenting with all forms of sound reflectors, spheres, conches, and more.

Despite appearing as though Elipson speakers were born out of artistry, they weren't. Leon was known as a rigorous engineer who didn't care about marketing and advertising as much as he did about the technical qualities of his designs. The design of Elipson loudspeakers was based on systematic research and started from a clean slate instead of a preconceived notion of what a speaker should look like.

The basic premise behind all Elipson loudspeakers was that the driver constitutes the hardest problem in a loudspeaker; the enclosure deals with acoustics evils such as standing waves and all sorts of phasing problems.

A sphere was chosen as the enclosure form because it came closest to an infinite baffle, the only perfect loudspeaker cabinet there is,

which is the closest thing to an ideal pulsating sphere. To sound perfect, the sphere needs to be equipped with internal anti resonators to make it as rigid as possible. In order to do that, Leon developed a double resonator "anti-resonante" loading system that produces flat response at bass frequencies and decreased second and third harmonic distortions.

Another starting point for the design was that the human ear is much less sensitive to amplitude variations of the sounds (1.5-2dB variations in the frequency response) than in tracking the direction of the sound (0.5dB). Leon and his team particularly focused on the spatial diffusion of the sound energy, especially over the higher frequencies (against their high directivity), and on high sensitivity of their speakers. After all the calculations are said and done, at the end of the day, he recommends to always use subjective listening as an ultimate verification principle.

### THE LOOK

As you might have guessed, the Elipson W35 is sphere-shaped, and it can be mounted in five different ways: on a dark or light wood tripod stand, metal floor stand, mounted on a wall or ceiling using the bracket, or simply placed on a bookshelf or sideboard. Considering the speaker's size, I'd opt for using the monopod-like floor stand, which is pretty sturdy, not to mention looks really funky.

The 35cm diameter sphere has been designed with two cloth frames separated by a central band, where push buttons for on/off, source, mute, and up/down volume can be found at the

front and wired connections around the back. Housed within are two 165mm mid-bass drivers with two centrally mounted 25mm tweeters, both coupled to the latest specification digital Amps. The result of this unique acoustic design is a spherical shaped loudspeaker capable of producing stereo, omni-directional sound with 350 watts RMS of room filling HD audio power.

Although a remote is supplied, Elipson has also created its own free app, Elipson Player for the W35 so you can simply and intuitively control it from an iOS or Android smartphone or tablet. This app can be used to configure a multi-room system via Wi-Fi (up to 20 W35 speakers), explore more than 15,000 Internet radio stations, or access extensive music libraries in full HD audio quality streamed from Spotify Connect, Deezer, Qobuz, Tidal, and Napster. However, if operation via the remote or smart device is not convenient, the W35 is also compatible with Amazon Alexa for voice control. In my personal experience, however, I don't like mixing audio and video applications with voice commands. But to each his own.

## THE SOUND

Listening to *Carl Orff "Carmina Burana,"* the bass is superbly impactful and well rounded while the choir sounds like it emanates from everywhere in the room. I had the same experience when I listened to *Telarc's Time Warp's "Ascent."* The bass dynamics and impact are, well, extremely impactful, especially considering that this can be part of a whole-home solution, not a dedicated two-channel audio system. Time and time again listening to various *Telarc* albums of Don Dorsey such as *Bach Busters*, *Beethoven or Bust*, and *Erich Kunzel's Star Tracks* playing various orchestral soundtracks including the "Love Theme from Superman" and "Theme From Star Trek." Both dynamics and bass impact are mind bogglingly good.

While the high-end and the mids are nowhere near as impactful as that unbelievable bass, they still manage to impress. In fact, the other parts of the frequency spectrum were surprisingly subtle and detailed, spiked with detail that seemed to float on an ocean of sound. They aren't really going to compete with a pair of detailed floorstanding speakers, like my System Audio Aura 30 (they were about the same price as a pair of W35s), but they aren't meant to replace a two-channel speaker system anyway. And while they can't match the thunderous bass of the Devialet Phantoms, they easily match up to, and surpass them, when it comes to the sonic finesse and class act.

Overall audio quality was fantastic, with almost no downsides as the 47Hz bottom end at merely -3dB roll off is nothing to scoff at. Not perfect, but very good nevertheless considering the size and price of \$1,299 ea.

## SOUNDSTAGE

If there's one area that can be considered perfect in the W35 is that as a single speaker operating on its own, it has a mind-blowing soundstage and spacing. To test this, I used Kelly Clarkson's "My Life Would Suck Without You" and Carrie Underwood's "Cry Pretty." Not because they are good recordings; on the contrary, the wall-of-sound technique of Phil Spector's fame was done very poorly with nearly no dynamic range at all. So with most speakers, especially the single-point-stereo types, the sound will be nothing but one huge glob of mess. It's not easy to make

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## PROS

- + Super-wide stereo imaging
- + Super-wide dispersion
- + Five types of stylish mounting options

## CONS

- Spherical enclosure may not be for everyone
- Upper end of the pricing scale

these songs sound pleasing to the ears. But that wasn't the case with the W35.

This speaker reproduced the sound UN-faithfully in the sense that it makes these songs sound cleaner and clearer. In fact, it even made them enjoyable. The entire wall-of-sound was stretched and spread around the listening area, making the instrumental details clearly heard. It was almost such that I could pinpoint and name every layer of sound emanating from the speaker. Of course, this is not the criterion I would give a thumbs up for when it comes to a dedicated two-channel system. However, in the context of whole home audio, I'm giving both my thumbs and big toes up to this better-than-supposed-to-be sound reproduction.

Why? You don't want the sound to drown out your own speech intelligibility and vice versa. Listening to these songs (and others) I can always hear them clearly while having conversations with others. Others who visited my home during the one-month test period declared the same. If you want an even wider soundstage, there is a simple solution. Just buy two. The W35 can be linked as a stereo pair. While I didn't have two units on hand to test this feature, I can only imagine how generous the stereo imaging from a pair of these speakers would be. Magical!

## VERDICT

The speaker is detailed with great bass and spacious spatial cues, and while it is not faithful to the original recording, it's arguably better than the intended recording mix. The spherical structure is unique and eye-catching, but it might not fit every décor or personal taste. That's a purely subjective decision.

I truly think that whether you buy this speaker (or two, or more) or not truly depends on what you really want. If you're looking for a highly detailed, sweeter than intended sonic and soundstage reproduction, and the modern interior to suit the spherical shape of it, the Elipson W35 is highly recommended. [wh](#)