

English Electric EE8 8 port Ethernet Switch

Price £499.00

Every now and again, a product or medium arrives on the scene, that turns out to be a game changer. The world of HiFi is no different. In recent years products have arrived that have changed the way we listen to recorded music, for example the compact disc, hi-res downloads, music streaming and of course MQA. Having ditched vinyl some 8 years ago, I now listen to my music streamed exclusively via Tidal/Roon. (For context, my last vinyl system comprised a Michell Orbe deck, Rega RB1000 arm, Grado Reference Master low output cartridge and a Whest Audio phono stage).

I read a lot of HiFi magazines. I try to keep up with current trends and believe that my current digital only audio system is of a high quality, has high resolution and first and foremost plays music. An article caught my eye a month or so ago about the Chord manufactured English Electric EE8. Also I noticed that a couple of contributors to the Facebook groups for Roon and MQA users, mentioned in posts that they had invested in an English Electric EE8 ethernet switch. According to Chord the EE8 features low and high electrical noise isolation reducing data issues that can be apparent during the playback of high-resolution material. The clock generation circuits within indicate an improved network signal performance of up to 90%. The unit is supplied with a high-speed power cable and a Chord C Stream ethernet cable.

I contacted Paul Clark at the HIFI Lounge near Biggleswade, who sent me one to audition about three weeks ago. Set up was simplicity itself. After plugging in the high-speed power supply in to my PS Audio Stellar P3 regenerator it was a simple case of connecting a length of Audioquest Cinnamon** ethernet cable into the input from my broadband hub (Sky) then some Audioquest Vodka from there into my Innuos Zenmini III and finally from there with some more Vodka into my NAD M10 streaming amplifier.

However, I am getting ahead of myself. Before slotting the EE8 into my system I chose some music to listen to, all streamed via Tidal:

Artist	Album	Track	Source
Cat Stevens	Tea For The Tillerman	<i>Into White</i>	TIDAL FLAC 48kHz 24bit 2ch MQA 192kHz
Nils Lofgren	Acoustic Live	<i>Keith Don't Go</i>	TIDAL FLAC 44.1kHz 16bit 2ch
Nick Warren	La Fabrica (EP)	<i>La Fabrica (Club Mix)</i>	TIDAL FLAC 44.1kHz 16bit 2ch
The Staves	Mexico	<i>Mexico</i>	TIDAL FLAC 44.1kHz 16bit 2ch MQA 44.1kHz

I know these albums well and chose them for their fine recording quality but also for musical enjoyment and the ability to draw the listener in. I had a really good listen to each track then installed the EE8 as described above.

Time to hear what the EE8 could do.

The opening few bars of *Into White* before Cat Stevens starts to sing are made up of multiple guitars. There was a feeling that the guitar playing was more precise, more tangible, I think because there was more space between each player. There was a feeling that Cat Stevens was more relaxed, the words felt like they were being better enunciated, the intonation on words more clearly appreciated. This album was recorded in 1970, November 23rd to be precise. I have owned many copies of this album, (my first vinyl copy in 1972) yet listening with the EE8 in situ there was a feeling that I was hearing low level information that I had not heard before, like a distinctive tinkling for want of a better word on one of the guitars during the intro and instrument movements within the sound stage for example the violin. It was subtle yet obvious at the same time if that makes sense?

The live recording on the Nils Lofgren album has been a staple demonstration album at many HiFi shows, *Keith Don't Go* in particular. I know it well. I heard this track recently on a high end all vinyl set up and was literally blown away by the song. Lofgren's guitar playing is just extraordinary and the audience enthusiastic to say the least. At home the song through the EE8 possessed some of that high end vinyl magic, taking a little of the gloss away that I heard when the EE8 was not in the data chain. It was also very subtle but again obvious, especially with the audience participation.

I like a bit of electronic dance music and one of my favourite artists is Nick Warren. His *La Fabrica* EP is one of his best in my view and I like *La Fabrica (club mix)* best. There is a lot going on in the mix as there is in many of this genre. With the EE8 in situ, the leading edges of high notes were better defined and the driving rhythm was intoxicating. At around 1minute 30 seconds low bass kicks in and again the leading edges and bass weight were better defined and the track was just irresistible that I had to play it again LOUDER such was my added enjoyment.

The Staves album could not be further away in sonic presentation from the Nick warren track. A female duet with simple guitar and drum accompaniment. I like this Mexico EP because of the pinpoint imaging of voices and instrument location within the soundstage. With the EE8 in situ the harmonies on the title track *Mexico* were as mesmerising as usual but when I closed my eyes, I was swept away with the simplicity, enhanced separation of the voices and instrument location within what seemed (as with the other tracks described) larger. I was able to more easily follow each voice individually.

In summary, removing the EE8 from the data stream did not make me feel that I had lost out on the enjoyment of my HiFi system. Putting the EE8 back in it was clear an extra dimension of enjoyment and sense of calmness to the renditions was being added to my emotional music enjoyment. The music flowed better which I guess was added tunefulness, an effect of the improved clock generation circuits and noise reduction afforded by the EE8.

A game changer? For me, I would say yes. Anyone not using an ethernet switch or using a data switch, (by which I mean not audio quality designed just for data transfer for example manufactured by Cisco), I think should have a listen to the EE8 for themselves. I have bought one that now resides in my system full time.

My system:

Sky Broadband hub
Innuos Zenmini III plus Innuos LPSU
NAD M10 streaming amplifier (Dirac pro in use)
PS Audio Stellar P3 power regenerator
Usher Mini Dancer 2 loudspeakers
Townshend Audio Seismic Podiums
Three tier Atacama Vogue bamboo equipment stand
Cables:

Route	Manufacturer/Model	Termination
ADSL	High Speed generic (non directional)	RJ11
Sky Hub to EE8 Zenmini III	Audioquest Cinnamon (directional)**	RJ45
EE8 to Zenmini	Audioquest Vodka (directional)	RJ45
EE8 to NAD M10	Audioquest Vodka (directional)	RJ45
Speaker cables – main single wire	Black Rhodium Proto 3200	Locking bananas
Speaker cables – jumpers	Black Rhodium Proto 3200	Locking bananas/spade
Power cables	Nanotec Strada 309	Furutech gold plated with gold plated fuses

** Audioquest Cinnamon ethernet used as the supplied Chord ethernet cable was not long enough.