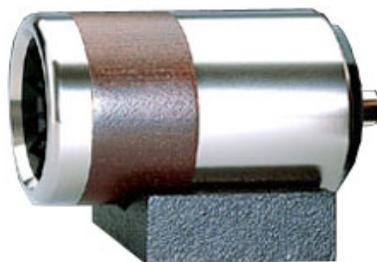


Jack Roberts uncovers the truth about the Murata ES103a Spherical Super Tweeter

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SPECIFICATIONS:

Frequency range: 15kHz ~ 100kHz
SPL: 90dB/W/m
Dispersion: ±45°
Self-resonance frequency: 103kHz
Impedance: 8Ω
Long term maximum power: 50W (pink noise)
Dimensions: 2.6 diameter x 4.3 L (inch)
Weight: 2.4lbs

MSRP:

\$2,495 (ES103a)
\$2,995 (ES103b)
1,995 (ES105)

Manufacturer:

Murata (Japan)
www.murata.com

U.S. Headquarters:

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U.S. Distributor:

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Before I tell you about the Murata Super Tweeters, please allow me a few paragraphs to explain why and when you will reap the appropriate benefits from this truly unique product. Doing so requires a little bit of “myth busting”, so here it goes.

THE MYTH OF “DIMINISHING RETURNS”

As a child I listened to my parents’ record player that was in the same console of a black and white television. The only records I could find in their collection were by Pete Fountain, Al Hirt, Cliff Barrows, Mahalia Jackson, Tennessee Ernie Ford, and lots of Christmas albums given away by different oil companies. From a very early age, I preferred listening to music than watching TV.

Then as a teenager I had a portable Magnavox that I listened to rock on, but around sixteen I discovered real Hi-fi and classical music. It was KLH 5s, Scott, and Garrard. From that day on, all I wanted was to have a real Hi-fi. The only problem was, I had no money and was in high school. That didn’t deter me. I got a job at the local Music and Hi-fi store.

The reason I shared all this is that because like most people, I can’t afford anything and everything I want. Thus over the years, I’ve bought into the prevailing wisdom that the audio game is one of “**Diminishing Returns**”. It seems so obvious, an amp that cost \$20K can’t possibly be twenty times better than one that cost \$1k. True enough; but there is a huge fallacy in this reasoning.

Truth is, a \$20K amp may sound better or worse; but it is likely to sound worse with a \$2K speaker. Why? Because the closer to the truth one piece of equipment is, the more it shows the untruths or colorations in the other. Once you get a speaker that can let you hear the glory of really truthful amps and front-ends, you may be shocked at how much better one preamp, amp, or front-end is than another.

So that settles it, and you say, “We should start with the best speakers we can afford so we can hear our other stuff.” Not true. A truly low-colored, low-distortion speaker will let you hear everything that is wrong with your system and that can be very irritating.

You see it’s not a law of “Dimensioning Returns”, it’s the law of “**Balanced Improvements**” that allows us to continuously enjoy music as we move closer to a system that sounds more like music. This is the law that is the curse of some outstanding loudspeakers: If they are priced at such a low price point, then they will seldom be heard with the equipment that would allow them to strut their stuff.

NOW BACK TO THE MURATA SUPER TWEETERS



Nick Gowan of True Sound in Campbell, California is the U.S. importer of the Murata’s. He is also a passionate music lover, a very accomplished technician, modifier of speakers and electronics, and most of all, a true gentleman. I want to start by saying how much I respect Nick and how he represents and sells these super tweeters.

Nick will quickly tell you when you ask him about the Murata Super Tweeters, that they are what you add to your system when you feel you have gotten everything else pretty close to right. He demonstrated this in actions when, over a year ago, I enquired about buying a pair. He said he would be glad to sell them to me; but that he thought I should

do other things in my system first. Well, it took me a while, but now I’m at the point that Nick and I agreed I was ready to listen to the Murata’s in my system.

You see, the reason for this is that the difference the Murata’s make in a system ranges from none-at-all to “Oh my, that’s what I knew my system could sound like!” It all depends on the resolution of your system. I want to assure you that if your system is ready for them, they can surely put the finishing touch on a work of art. What do I mean by “ready for them”? Well your system needs to be free from noise, digital hash, and have cables that clearly pass information without adding their own colorations to the music.

SETUP WITH THE AUDIO NOTE E SPEAKERS

The Murata's are very simple to set up. I want to thank John McDonald of Audience Cable for making a set of jumpers of their AU 24 speaker cable and loaning them to me. This enabled me to have the same cables throughout the system. No crossover is required. I simply plugged the banana plugs of the jumpers into the back of my Audio Note E speakers and set the tweeters on top of the Audio Notes in the center. I played around a little with placement, but could hear very little difference, so I just left them centered above the tweeters.

So what do the Murata Super Tweeters sound like?

I was surprised when I hooked them up all by themselves, that I could hear anything at all much less make out the words of songs; but I could if I put my ear right up to the speaker. It was kind of like putting your ear right up to a moving coil cartridge as it tracks a record. Still, they put out very little that I could hear. So I think we can agree that to ask what they sound like is the wrong question. We should instead ask:

What did my system sound like with the Murata Super Tweeters installed?

That, too, is an easy question to answer. My system sounded better; it sounded more like music; and it sounded clearer. I think before we go any further, I should tell you what they do not do. They do not make the system brighter, they do not add sparkle to the top-end, and they do not make your system sound super-detailed or etched.

What I want you to know is that they do not change the tonal balance of your system, and they will not change the basic character of your system. If your system leans toward the "yin" side, it still will. Likewise if your system is more "yang", they will not make your system brighter. No, they do something very different. We are used to looking for the cable that will calm the little bit of over-brightness in our system, or to tighten up the bass a little bit. That's not what the Murata's are all about. In fact, you need to try to get most of that cleaned up before the Murata's go in.

What they do is removing a scrim that covered your system from the lowest bass note to the highest treble. Your system needs to be transparent enough that you never dreamed it has this scrim over it. Then when you add the Murata's, you will be shocked when it disappears.

The Bass, I know – who would've thought that I would talk about bass in a super tweeter review. The bass sounds cleaner, just like you had removed that scrim from the drums and other bass instruments. Not only cleaner; but also with the scrim removed, the bass instruments are more articulate and seem to have more snap. I was simply amazed that a super tweeter could do such good things for the bass, and I expect you will be, too.

In the Lower Midrange and Midrange, you will discover that the system's micro-dynamics in these regions have improved. Mostly, it is in the midrange that you begin to realize that your system just sounds more real. It's a very pleasant surprise, but let me warn you it is also as addictive as sin. I would have never believed my Audio Note E speakers, especially after Nick had performed his magic on them, could have been more transparent; but they surely were.

The top-end where I would have expected a super tweeter to do its work is where I noticed the least change. Strings sounded a little sweeter. Cymbals seem to have a little more air and decay, but mostly they sounded like what I was used to – only better.

That last sentence should be the summery statement for the entire review, **Mostly the Same, only Better!** This is why it is so important that you have your system where you want it before you put the Murata's in, because they don't fix problems, they just finish a master piece.

ALONG CAME THE IKONOKLAST MODEL THREE SPEAKERS



A few weeks after I had been using the Murata ES103a with my Audio Notes, I received the Ikonoklast Model Three for review. These speakers are two ways with no crossover and have a “Walsh” type tweeter that goes out to 30kHz. The design of the speaker would make it impossible to sit the Murata above its own tweeter. So when I got started with the Ikonoklast, I didn't use the ES103a's initially.

I began to fall in love with the ES103a's, despite not having tried them with the Ikonoklast speakers. I didn't figure the Murata's would make much difference sense the Ikonoklast's own tweeter went out to 30K. I was wrong, very wrong! The difference was more subtle than with the Audio Note Es, but it was definitely there, and no less significant.

Well, one day the audiophile in me got the best of me and I just had to see how the Murata's would work with the Ikonoklast.

First, I checked to see if the Audience jumpers have enough reach, barely but they did. Then it was a question of where to sit the ES103a's; I ended up sitting the Murata's next to the Ikonoklast tweeters. Thankfully, this placement does not seem to have any negative effect on the Ikonoklast's sound or imaging. The difference with the Ikonoklast is not just more subtle than with the AN/Es; it is also more difficult to put into words.

While I was reviewing the Ikonoklast, I wanted to hear them with an amp a little more powerful than my Wavac MD300B. I called George Kielczynski of deHavilland and told him I would sure love to listen to the Ikonoklast powered by a pair of their 845G mono blocks. He graciously brought over a pair and we spent several hours listening to this amazing combination.

I mention this only because I asked George if he could hear a difference, and he replied positively. Then I ask what he thought the difference was with and without the Murata's. George was like me, he found it hard to say just exactly what the difference was; but he said it was very easy to say which way sounded best. He finally said there's just more “there” when the Murata's were in the system. I would agree, but there's more to it than that. My 23-year-old said it sounded like “someone's thrown a thin blanket over the speakers when you take the Murata's out”. That was just more like how it was with the Audio Note speakers.

What they seemed to do with the Ikonoklast as I heard it, was that they completed the sound.

Voices sounded a little more human or, put another way, fills them out just a little, because I've never heard this effect before; I'm struggling with explaining it. Not only did this effect come into play with voice, but with everything up and down the frequency range. For another example, take pianos, with the Murata super tweeter in the system, they have a little more body and slightly better harmonics. I could go on, but I don't want to overstate the case. The difference is subtle, but personally, I don't think I want to live without the ES103a. I feel they allow my system to sound less like processed music and more like natural music, and that's not something so easily accomplished... so I think I'll try to keep them.

I want to say it again: **Mostly Your System will Sound the Same, only Better!** The Murata super tweeters can be the finishing touch on your masterpiece.

NOW LET ME ASK THE TWO, SIXTY-FOUR-THOUSAND-DOLLAR QUESTIONS:

1. **Are they worth it?** If you system is where you want it, if it is revealing enough, and if you can afford them, then the answer is a resounding yes. I would really miss listening to music without them in my system. There is no doubt that with either the Audio Notes or the WGA Ikonoklast, my system sounds less like recorded music and more like real music with the Murata super tweeters.

2. **WHY?** Heck if I know! And, it's not like I haven't tried. I've asked Nick. I've asked Warren Gregoire the designer of the Ikonoklast speakers whose tweeter also goes way out there. I've researched on Google (my answer for everything I don't know). They all tell me things I don't understand, so why would I try to explain it to you when I can just tell you how they make my system sound.