

English Electric EE1 network noise isolator

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A few years ago, the concept of an audiophile-grade Ethernet noise isolator was unheard of. Today, it's a prominent feature. The English Electric EE1 stands out as the latest addition to a rapidly expanding range of network accessories. English Electric, a sub-brand of Chord Company, draws its name from a classic British manufacturer of supersonic jet fighters. Chord Company saw the trade name was available and acquired it at, er, Lightning speed. Its first products were network switches, which led to the English Electric EE1.

The English Electric EE1 acts as a bulwark against noise from the outside world, which undermines our inky black silences. It's meant to be used between your network switch and your music streamer. You can put noisier parts like servers and NAS boxes on the other side of the EE1. You can also add more EE1s, such as placing one between router and switch and another between switch and streamer.



A Good Combination

English Electric combines filtration and galvanic isolation in the EE1. The filtering is 'targeted' where network-induced noise is at its peak. It's a small, inline box, roughly the size of two-thirds of a Mars bar. The filter is classed as 'self-powered' rather than fully passive. It has just two RJ45 Ethernet connections, one at either end. Little arrows along the top plate denote the direction from the router to the hi-fi system.

The EE1 is supplied with a 0.75m run of C-Stream CAT7 network cable from Chord Company. C-Stream is an excellent cable and – at £62 – sets the price level where the EE1 shines.

Considering its compact size and affordable price, the English Electric EE1 is a perfect entry point for network-ready audiophiles. It's not designed to overhaul a well-established network but to bridge the gap between a switch and a server. It can even be used with a standard router from your service provider. This means saying goodbye to the typical high-end switches and welcoming back a reliable but basic Netgear eight-port model. I also used a generic CAT6 Ethernet cable.

I also think the EE1 noise isolator isn't going to feature in super-high-end systems, so I used it between said Netgear switch and a Primare I35 Prisma.

This network DAC, included as part of a well-respected integrated amp, is of similar performance grade to the EE1. In other words, it's no slouch.

Proof of Concept

Because of the EE1's 'entry-point' nature, it's a *de facto* 'proof of concept' introduction to audiophile network architecture. Get it right, and the EE1 unlocks audio-dedicated network products. If you get it wrong, generic network equipment becomes the fallback position for the listener. The EE1 is also small enough and simple enough to be a 'loaner' for dealers.

I expect many of those EE1 boxes will never return. The difference the EE1 brought to that system was marked in all the right ways. There was a sharper focus to the sound across the board. Bass notes had more 'shape' and definition. The midrange was more precise and articulate. Treble had more 'snap' and directness; just the right side of bright without sounding too forward or etched. I expected to roll out the 'lowering the noise floor' cliché, but this wasn't a primary benefit of the EE1. Instead, the sound was 'bigger' and more detailed. Yes, it was quieter, making music more 'in the room'. Where some isolators just cut noise, the EE1 had more cards up its sleeve.

The English Electric EE1 is a little marvel. It makes a lot of sense, and it makes sense of your music. If this is your first step into upgrading your network, the EE1 ensures it won't be your last! +

Price and contact details

Price: £250, \$295, €299

Manufacturer The Chord Company

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