

Epoz Aktimate Mini+ | Powered speakers | £360

Dock-busting speakers really sing

We've seen a few of Epoz's Aktimate speakers-cum-iPod docks over the years, and have been impressed by every one - so we were looking forward to getting our hands on these - the successors to 2009's Aktimate Minis, the Aktimate Mini+.

So what are they, exactly? The package is made up of a pair of speakers, one powered and one slave, capable of 40W per channel. The master speaker features an iPod dock on the top and all the inputs, which include two sets of RCA stereo inputs for hooking the speakers up to a CD player or even your TV, plus a 3.5mm jack. There's a stereo analogue output too, for daisy-chaining other Mini+ speakers together, or adding a subwoofer if you want to.

Well-built and great-sounding

The speakers are available in a choice of red, black or white gloss finish, and look identical to one another, save for a volume/input dial on the front of the master speaker and blue LED light that illuminates to show your interaction is being registered. There's also a small remote in the box - it does the job, but it doesn't have the same premium finish as the speakers.

The iPod/iPhone dock is of the old 30-pin style, meaning iPhone 5 or new iPod users will have to get a Lightning adapter, hardwire into

the 3.5mm jack or make use of the Bluetooth dongle instead. The dock can also be covered over when not in use to keep things looking tidy.

Compare the sound of what these speakers are capable of with even the most high-end of all-in-one speaker docks, and the difference is immediately apparent. For a start, they're capable of true stereo separation, and far outdo their dock competition when it comes to quality.

Dock your iPod or iPhone and the sound is solid, lively and punchy. There's a good dynamic variation here, and a wider sound than you'll get out of any dock at this price range. Playing Tensnake's *Coma Cat* lets the Aktimates show off their great rhythmic ability, delivering the electronic bass line with vigour and accuracy. They reach deeper into the bass than we're used to hearing in this type of product too, while the midrange and treble keep a sweetness to them that means there's a lightness of foot on offer when needed.

The Mini+s are a great house-party companion and go louder than most docks we've heard - but that doesn't mean you should go over the top. They'll easily fill a fair-sized room with nicely detailed sound, but push them to their limits and they'll start to lose the composure they had lower down. It's best to keep them at a reasonable volume level to get the most from them.

Round the back

1 Take care with placement

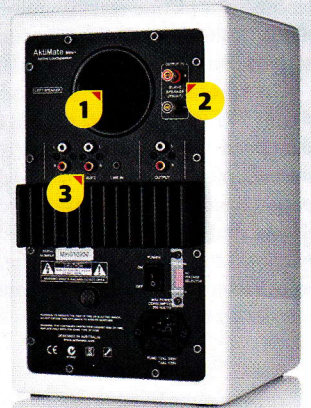
The rear-firing port means it's crucial to place the Aktimates in the right spot. Too close to a wall and they boom; too far away and they start to sound bright...

2 Speaker cable options

Binding posts let you upgrade your speaker cable from the bundled stock wire if you want. (We recommend the Talk Electronics Talk 3 cable at £4 per metre.)

3 Connect other equipment

A variety of inputs means you can hook up outboard kit such as TV sets to the Aktimates. There's an output for a subwoofer, too.



USE IT WITH

iPod Classic

The Classic is still one of our favourite iPods. There's a huge 160GB of storage to chip away at, plus it still has the old 30-pin connector.

We did find the Mini+s required some careful placement in order to get the best from them. They need to sit around 15-30cm in front of a wall, and preferably on stands. Sit them on a desk and the bass can sound slightly too boomy for our liking, whereas when too far from a wall they can start to sound bright. Play around with their placement to find what works best for you.

Bluetooth works well, pairing quickly and without issue. It would have been nice to see aptX Bluetooth on board, though - and its omission means you won't get the best Bluetooth sound available. There is an audible drop in quality from the docked sound - it's less solid and slightly brighter - but that goes hand-in-hand with streaming, and is currently the price to be paid for wireless streaming convenience.

The lack of Lightning connector might be an issue for some, and the size might be tricky for some rooms, but if it's something you can make work, it's hard to see why someone would opt for an all-in-one speaker dock over the Mini+.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Solid, detailed sound; wide stereo field; great bass; well-built; analogue connections

AGAINST Sensitive to placement; old-style 30-pin dock connector

VERDICT A versatile product that offers a sound traditional docks can only dream of

Also consider

Monitor Audio Airstream WS100
£250 ★★★★★

A smaller, more conventional speaker if desktop use is your top priority.

