

equipment

iListen



AKTIMATE MINIS

Give iPod a Powerful Presence

Christopher Jones



Now that the iPod speaker scene is coming of age, we're starting to see more well-regarded hi-fi companies join the party, with players like B&W and Meridian setting the bar high for design and performance. Creek Audio and Epos both have strong reputations for their amps and speakers, and the companies recently teamed up to build the impressive AktiMate Mini iPod speaker system. The speakers make a dynamic first impression, and the more you listen the harder it is to shut these babies down.

A WELL-CONCEIVED, STYLISH SYSTEM

White speakers? Tough sell. But with the exposed cones and high-gloss cabinets, the AktiMate Minis pull it off. There are nice, subtle touches, too: a blue LED power light and volume/power knob up front, and a remote—too often a cheap afterthought for most iPod speakers—with a cool retro design and bright orange buttons. It feels very sturdy and works like a champ, with snappy response from as far away as 30 feet. Another nice touch is the volume control.

When you pause a song, the speakers gently fade in when you restart the system, and if it was cranked up when you paused, it restarts at a more modest volume

One of the AktiMates has a built-in 40-watt amp and the other connects to it using the (included) speaker wire. If you want to patch in another digital music player, there are RCA and minijack inputs, though oddly, no switch to select between them. So they'll play alongside your iPod if you want to mix and mash your music. The system also has a composite video output and an RCA output if you want to hook up a subwoofer or another set of speakers.

The built-in amplifier pumps out 40 watts/channel, and judging from the weight of the speak-

Specs & Pricing

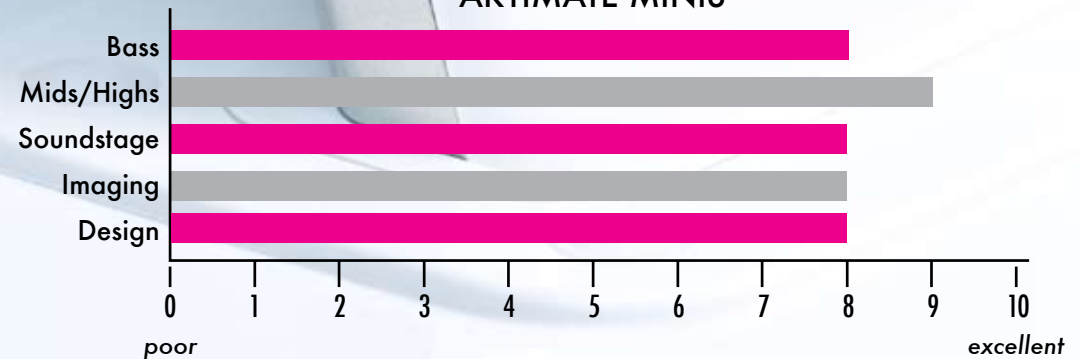
Aktimate Minis

Inputs: RCA Stereo; 3.5 mm Jack; Apple iPod dock
Outputs: Video, and RCA Stereo for subwoofer or to daisy-chain to second pair
Connections: USB (for charging iPod or MP3 players only)
Dimensions (HxWxD): 12"x 7.5" x 8.5"
Weight: 26.5 lb.
Price: \$700 (ED - double check with company reps)

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AKTIMATE MINIS



er, this is no chintzy amp. And once you hear it, there's no doubt about how well designed this system really is.

POWERFUL & ELEGANT SOUND

The AktiMates produce a well-rounded and dynamic sound and can handle any style of music, from bass-heavy hip hop to delicate jazz and classical arrangements. The tonal balance at all volume levels is solid, and the detail is excellent even at low volumes.

To see just how powerful this system is, I decided to put it through

the ringer with some heavy funk and hip hop albums, from Funkadelic to OutKast and the Roots. On the *Roots Illadelph Halflife* [Geffen Records], the band has a number of subdued, jazzy tracks, alongside a few powerful floor-shakers. The Roots are unusual among hip hop groups because they're excellent musicians who play live instruments, and then sample them in the mix. On "One Shine" their instrumental talents are on full display, as the track opens up with a sax, trumpet, and trombone trading riffs as vocal-



ists sing and hum along, with a tight, snappy snare drum driving the beat. All of the instruments had a natural tone and energetic presence, and there was loads of high-frequency detail, balanced with a smooth midrange sound. The bass was also impressive, and especially so considering the size of these speakers. On the Roots' "Section," deep, penetrating bass lines provide a heavy backdrop to the song, and the AktiMates managed to keep them sounding tight and powerful without the muddiness that's common in other speakers. It's a rare thing to hear an iPod speaker system that can crank up this high without any distortion, and I was amazed at how far these could go. Not to 11, but darn close.

With more subtle music, such as Miles Davis's *The Complete In a Silent Way Sessions* [Sony], the AktiMates were equally impressive. In these sessions, Davis is starting to take his band into new jazz-fusion territory, and on "Directions I" he comes out blowing fast and furious, with his upper-register blasts sounding lively and sharp without becoming too bright or abrasive. Meanwhile, the rhythm section is blazing a path and Jack DeJohnette's masterful drumming never sounded better, riding the cymbals hard as Wayne Shorter's sax moves in to steal the show. The wide-open feel of these sessions really comes through on the AktiMates, as each instrument has room to be heard in the spacious soundstage.



BOTTOM LINE: *The AktiMate Mini is a powerful, dynamic sound system that's easy to use, has a small footprint, and a sharp design. You can't ask for too much more than that. Of all the iPod/PC-oriented speaker systems I've heard over the last few years, this one has the most refined and powerful sound, and is great for any style of music. It's not an inexpensive product, but the price is justifiable for those who want high-quality, high-performance iPod speakers. PB*