

Epoz AktiMate Blue | Stereo speakers | £600

Listen to the Blues and smile

We've long been fans of Epoz's AktiMate range, and these powered speakers simply reinforce that opinion. Not that they're perfect, mind.

The Blues are big, standing 32cm high. They also need to be placed on quality stands positioned at least 20cm from a rear wall to prevent their weighty bass becoming too dominant.

These things push them from consideration as a desktop speaker in our view. We think the Blues make most sense for someone who wants a high-quality alternative to traditional budget hi-fi.

Proper hi-fi

Connections are plentiful. Alongside the usual analogue stereo inputs there's a trio of digital connections - USB (24-bit/96kHz-capable), optical and coax (both accept 24-bit/192kHz data streams) - and the increasingly common Bluetooth (4.0) option. You also get a relatively smart and easy-to-use remote.

These speakers are well made. The white gloss finish on our samples is hard to fault and the enclosures feel nice and solid. The drive unit complement is a 25mm soft-dome tweeter and a 16.5cm polypropylene mid/bass driver per cabinet. The left-hand speaker - which is marked as such - is the brain. It houses a 60W-per-channel amplifier and all connections.

Member of the rotary club

There's a rotary volume control and a simple LED display on the front panel. Perhaps too simple, given there's no clear indication of the input chosen. The only sure way of telling as far as we can see is by pressing the appropriate button on the remote and waiting for sound to come out.

Start listening and any issues are forgotten quickly. We start with Bluetooth, pairing the speakers to a Sony Xperia S phone and are pleased with what we hear. Properly set up, these standmounters deliver a wide, nicely layered soundstage. It's certainly a world away in terms of spaciousness from the small-scale sounds most single-box alternatives offer.

Tonally, things are well balanced. There's a healthy dose of refinement, which helps the speakers cope well with less-than-perfect source material. But, it's all done without sacrificing bite and attack.

In their element

When we move to higher-quality sources - such as our reference streamer, Naim's NDS/555PS, or the vastly more price-compatible Marantz CD6005 - the AktiMates really start to shine. We're impressed by the way these speakers

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In detail



Quality remote The remote handset reflects the speakers' high build quality. It's also well laid-out and easy to operate



The business end It's the left-hand speaker that houses the 60W-per-channel amplifier and all those connections

They're forgiving with indifferent material and shine when used with a quality source

highlight the subtleties of a piece like *Time* by Hans Zimmer, and their muscularity when dealing with the seismic bassline.

Detail levels are good, as is made clear by the insight these speakers deliver with Michael Jackson's *Slave To The Rhythm*. They have no trouble tracking the multitude of instrumental strands or delivering the track's propulsive rhythmic drive with considerable enthusiasm. We're pleased with the AktiMates' way with dynamics too - these are rendered with determination when the music demands and subtlety when things change down a gear.

Provided you can accommodate the Blues' size and positioning demands, there's little else to complain about here. Fine connectivity, terrific build and a lovely, engaging sound make these AktiMates a superb buy. Highly recommended.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Excellent sound; well judged balance; powerful bass; good connectivity

AGAINST They're large and need a decent amount of space to shine

VERDICT Positioned well, these AktiMates are a great-sounding alternative to traditional hi-fi

Needs to beat

Triangle Color 123
£600 ★★★★★



A neat desktop sub/sat package that sounds as integrated and adept as we've heard at this price. Lacks the Blues' connectivity, though