

FULL STREAM AHEAD

AKTIMATE MICRO WITH BLUETOOTH \$430

AKTIMATE MINI+ WITH BLUETOOTH \$685

AKTIMATE BLUE \$1200

AktiMate burst onto the scene some five years ago with the original AktiMate Mini, a pair of self-powered speakers with an Apple dock on top and a massive ballsy hi-fi sound; sheer knock-out stuff. The brand didn't come out of nowhere — it built on the audio expertise of marques like Epos and Creek Audio, also distributed by AktiMate's manufacturer, the proudly Australian Epos. This performance — and their early entry to the nascent speaker dock category — immediately netted them a Sound+Image award. They became globally successful, often pictured in their striking fireman-red, though proving most popular in black and white gloss versions.

The Mini was followed by the Maxi, a pair of even larger speakers loaded with extras like internet radio. And then the Micro, usefully smaller boxes which added a handy USB DAC functionality, allowing direct digital playback from a computer.

Times have moved on in the dock market; indeed the dock itself is rapidly giving way to wireless streaming — AirPlay and Bluetooth. **So AktiMate, famous for its red, has gone Blue.** All three models are being upgraded to include Bluetooth reception; indeed the Maxi has been rechristened the 'Blue', to emphasise the point. They have also received various changes in electronics and new specially-designed drivers as part of the overhaul, along with redesigned remote controls and various other enhancements, including visual tweaks — the top-mounted dock on each is now under a neat hinged flap, and the woofers on all three are now neatly grilled and rounded to near-flush with the cabinet.

We've just taken delivery of production samples of all three, and it has been a great pleasure to get reacquainted with the AktiMate range; each represents exceptional performance at its price point. We have a special affection for **the sound of the Mini+**, which hits the Goldilocks spot of being not too large to get aesthetically intrusive, while delivering

a sound that has dynamite impact when used near-field in a desktop scenario, or room-filling richness as a set of TV/hi-fi speakers. A pair of the Mini+ speakers delivers a sound that knocks spots off any soundbar near the price.

Each model has various inputs in addition to the Bluetooth. The Mini+ is the relatively analogue member of the family — two sets of RCA sockets and a stereo minijack, plus its 30-pin Apple dock. Its amplification is analogue as well: 40W of Class-A/B power into its 25mm neodymium-magnet tweeters and now neatly grilled 130mm polypropylene cones.

The smaller Micro (pictured bottom right) switches to digital Class-D amplification, also 40W, with 100mm Kevlar woofers and the same tweeter. Its inputs are also more digital, with a USB-B socket for your laptop or computer, one minijack stereo analogue input, plus the 30-pin Apple dock on the top.

In their current form, the Micro and Mini+ receive Bluetooth by inserting a small dongle onto the 30-pin dock (pictured on the Mini+ below). This pairs under the name I-WAVE and works very effectively — enthusiastically, indeed, always showing up on lists and pairing quickly, which is less common than you'd hope in the Bluetooth speaker world. We gather a future iteration of the Micro

and Mini+ will have built-in Bluetooth, as has already been bestowed upon **the new 'Blue' model** (above left), the largest of the three and absolutely loaded with inputs — no dock here, but computer USB, two digital inputs (one optical, one electrical) and three analogue inputs (two on RCA, one minijack) — plus the Bluetooth. So the Blues can be the amp and speakers for a six-source system, plus streaming! There are line outs you could chain on to other equipment, and a sub out socket to add a subwoofer, which might be fun for movie nights if using the Blues either side of a TV.

We will review the Blue more fully in an upcoming issue. But a word on the updated Micro's performance — we were most impressed. It reaffirmed the benefits of true stereo separation (compared with one-box wireless speakers), and of the depth and size of sound that proper 24cm-high speaker cabinets can deliver. This appreciation came while listening to Bluetooth, but switching to USB lifted things still higher — cleaner and punchier, big sounds with a wide sonic landscape... not to the ballsy levels achieved by their Mini+ and Blue brethren of course, but we've not heard a wireless speaker at this price sound this good.

Think budget, think inputs, think positioning, then choose your AktiMate. There are no duffers here. JF + www.aktimate.com.au

