

Exakt science

Linn's Exakt system is a complex pursuit of a simple pleasure, but **Ed Selley** is sold on the science

Beautiful System is a broad church – and let me make it clear I'd have it no other way. Sometimes we go for the physically beautiful, on other occasions, either the performance or the single mindedness of the design is of particular interest and might be considered beautiful in its application. In this case, the system you see here could stake a claim to being included on any of those grounds. It exudes a clean and handsome aesthetic, it sounds absolutely magnificent and it is the logical conclusion of a single minded pursuit of a particular design philosophy over decades of research.

That philosophy is the principle of active speakers and while it has many advocates, few have been as devoted as Linn. Helped by its construction of both amps and speakers inhouse, the company has been offering the option of turning its systems active for

The Exact delivers nigh on constant pleasure with virtually no caveats

decades. Up until recently, the process by which the system went active was to introduce the speaker crossover between the pre and power amp – that is to say in the analogue domain. This offers benefits over a conventional speaker, but Linn has now taken the process a stage further.

The result of this is Exakt, an active system that operates almost exclusively in the digital domain. This comprises an Exakt head unit – a variation on Linn's highly regarded DS streamers – and Exakt speakers, which again take an existing Linn speaker and modify it to work on the ▶

SYSTEM £25,500

LINN EXAKT DSM

The DSM is a development of the DS streamer and acts as a digital preamp collating digital and analogue sources as well as acting as a 24/192-capable UPnP streamer

LINN EXAKT AKUBARIK

The Akubarik takes the source signal with any EQ adjustment from the DSM via five separate channels of amplification to the drive units including an opposed isobaric pair of 8in drivers



Exakt pattern. The two units communicate via CAT5 cable and the signal the speaker receives is still in the digital domain. This is divided among the drive units without any loss, phase distortion or interference.

Bonus beats

Were this all Exakt did, this would be an impressive step forward. It is what Linn's brainchild does additionally that makes it rather special. First up, the system can calculate and allow for the fractional variation in driver performance between individual speakers ensuring a stereo pair is just that. With the system able to adjust all aspects of the speaker's performance it can also be used to compensate for the position of the speaker if you choose to move it away from the optimum point in the room. If the practicalities of life preclude you from having the speakers stood in free space, Exakt can ensure that they still sound like they are.

Having the Linn on display shouldn't be too unwelcome a task, though. This system is the new Akurate Exakt, which comes in at a lower (albeit still substantial) price than the flagship Klimax system. Dare I say it? I prefer the aesthetics of the smaller system. The electronics might not come wrapped in the machined casework

of the flagships, but there is an understated elegance to the clean lines of the Akurate DSM that I've always liked. The Akubarik speaker that partners the system is equally pleasing – large without being bulky and exuding a certain purposefulness from touches like the hefty plinth and trademark '3K array' that handles high frequencies and midrange. This is rounded off by the metal housing for the Exakt electronics

Make no mistake, the convenience of the Akurate is compelling

that runs up the rear of the speaker like an exoskeleton.

That beefy plinth is an indicator that the Akubarik houses an even more established Linn tradition. The lower section of the cabinet is home to a pair of opposed 8in drivers in classic isobaric arrangement. By using this arrangement and placing the drivers vertically, the Akubarik promises to hit hard and go deeper than you might reasonably expect a speaker of these dimensions to do while also delivering on the promise of isobaric bass.

Above far left: The '3K Array' of the Akubarik gives peerless upper register performance

Centre: The Akurate DSM builds on the potential of the DS and uses the same excellent interface

Above far right: The Exakt communicates via 'Exakt link' which uses CAT5 cabling

A clever and especially welcome part of the system is that the streaming front end of the DSM is not the only source available. The back panel is packed with a wide variety of inputs plenty of which are digital as you might expect, but also incorporate analogue connections including one that can be configured as a phono stage, which means that Exakt is still happy to accept vinyl and any other sources you have to hand. It also meant that when I went to listen to the system at experienced Linn wranglers, The Sound Gallery in High Wycombe, there was an example of an LP12 connected to the system to play with too. *Beautiful Systems* is a tough gig, but someone has to do it.

Dress to impress

When I'm confronted with any system that uses tech that's dramatically different from the norms of hi-fi, I have a small existential moment where I wonder if I am listening to the technology in question or the performance of the piece that it is producing. Be under no illusions that Exakt is very sophisticated indeed – I sat through a technical presentation at Linn last year that produced that weird hot feeling behind my eyes when I know I'm out of my depth –

but the end result is totally unobtrusive. Browse your music using the lovely Kinsky app, choose your poison and prepare to be impressed.

And you will be impressed, mark my words. Across the various drivers in each speaker, the Akurate disposes of 600W per side. While it can go very loud indeed, the main by-product of this oomph is a sense of effortlessness that lends everything you play on the Linn a scale and refinement that some larger and more expensive systems can struggle to produce. Fever Ray's *If I Had A Heart* is a massive, brooding wall of electronica with Karin Dreijer Andersson's vocals suspended beautifully in front. The effect is at once arresting, but at the same time completely convincing.

Sounding off

This is perhaps the cleverest part of a very clever system. All the technology involved in the Linn is completely and utterly subservient to the task of producing a believable sound. This means that regardless of whether you ask it to produce the paired-back simplicity of Regina Spektor's *Consequence Of Sounds* or the vastness of Pink with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Linn simply gives you the recording, perfectly proportioned, tonally perfect and beautifully



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arranged. You can – if you are the tweaking sort – manually fiddle about with the frequency response in room, but for me at least, that would waste time you could be listening to music.

The other Linn technology at play – the isobaric drivers – also contribute to the performance. The Akubarik goes impressively low for a speaker of relatively sane dimensions, but there is so much more to it than that. There is a nigh on complete absence of

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overhang or any sense of sluggishness. The bass note is instantly ready at the moment it is needed before vanishing to nothingness the instant it isn't. There is a sense of controlled power that has you easing the volume levels upwards during extended listening sessions until you realise you have just passed the point considered anti-social about an hour previously, but because these towers of power seem totally unfazed you won't notice – at least that's the line you'll pursue when trying to avoid your first ASBO.

What Linn has built in the Exakt system is recognisably part of its ethos, but at the same time a step forward to something new and exciting too. Make no mistake, the convenience aspects of the Akurate are compelling.

Compact and bijou

While not exactly small, it is a good deal more compact than most similarly priced rivals. It is unfussy about placement and using it is an exercise in simplicity thanks to well thought out and beautifully integrated controls. To simply label it as a highly evolved lifestyle system is to do it an enormous disservice, however. The Linn is capable of taking almost any music and playing it at pretty much any level you choose and captivating completely while it does so. The long recognised masochistic streak in this industry suggests that the Exakt would probably earn more respect had Linn made it bulkier, more complex and less accessible to appease the notion that nothing good can ever be had easily, but it is to Linn's eternal credit that it hasn't done that. This is a system that delivers nigh on constant pleasure with virtually no caveats, conditions or compromises. If that isn't beautiful, I'm not sure what is ●