

QUICK REFLEX: THE LINN HELIX

Comprehensive revisions have transformed Linn's mid-price bass-reflex speaker design

by Trevor Butler

it is mechanically good at damping while being rigid. Dedicated fixing kits give direct connection to Linn speakers while optional top plates allow the stands to be used with a variety of speakers. At just 350mm high, the Ku-Stone plus Helix II is obviously for those with low armchairs.

Sound quality

Auditioning the Helix IIs coincided with my change of amplification, and so allowed tests with both Musical Fidelity P140s and an Aragon 2004. The immediate sensation was of a very fast, very tight, punchy bass – particularly evident on drums. Control of the lower registers was

excellent throughout, with a good crisp sound maintained, without loss of air. The speed of LF attack was such that at times it verged on excess with some choral symphonies.

Linn had felt that the treble required attention, calling it 'bright' to the extent that a dealer modification to the crossover was announced. This resulted in a 2.2ohm resistor in the crossover being changed for a 2.7ohm. Certainly with the amplifiers I tried there was no apparent over-brightness, the HF merely smooth and natural. The alteration is intended to allow the Helix IIs to be used with a greater range of amps and sources.

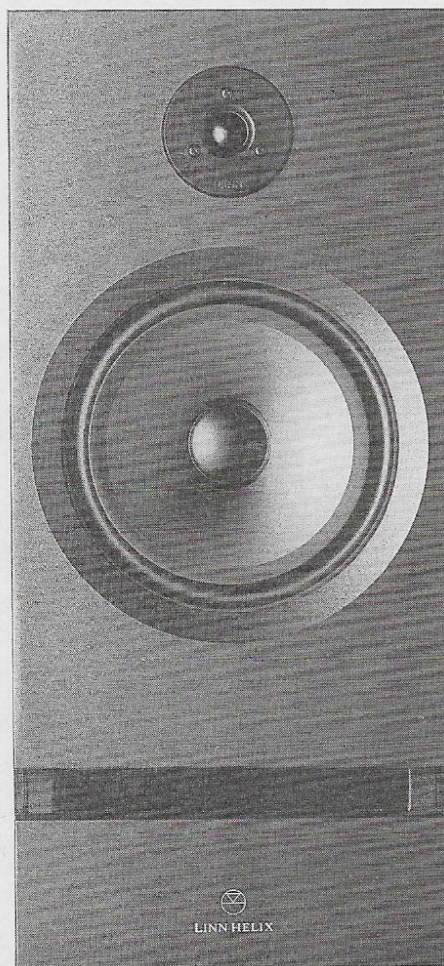
While I was happy with the detail provided by the Helix IIs, it was not until I changed amplification to an Aragon 2004 that the full potential of these speakers was reached. The results suggested that, for the first time, Linn has designed something approaching 'monitor quality'. (Such was the effect that one listener thought Rogers or Spendors were in use.) Imaging was superb, with ambient details presented in a most convincing manner. The treble remained crisp, the bass deep and generally accurate – if on occasion veering slightly towards boominess. The results were lively and cultured.

By adopting a soft dome tweeter Linn has avoided any tendency for the treble to become metallic or brash – even if these were the words to describe the application of the HF unit in the original Helix. The only weakness of Linn's latest model is the mid-band which is not as strong as in some of the competition, giving rise to minor problems on speech. However, a direct comparison with the recently acclaimed Epos E11 (*HENRR* May '91), showed that the Helix had the edge when it came to bass response and control.

Conclusion

Why Linn retained the 'Helix' name on a product which is so greatly improved is beyond my comprehension. Leaning slightly towards the rock rather than classical repertoire, the Helix II can now stand up to the competition without fear of falling at the first hurdle. It is undoubtedly assisted by the Ku-Stone stands, and shows itself capable of being partnered with amplifiers which tend to reveal weaknesses in lesser speakers. ↯

Supplier: Linn Products, Floors Rd, Eaglesham, Glasgow G76 0EP. Tel: 041-644 5111.



Good marketing philosophy is one thing, but the products have got to be right. And a number of the early Linn speakers weren't. The old Helix was a case in point, a product unlikely to woo newcomers to the Linn camp. It was prone to delivering unruly amounts of bass, with boxy colorations and a splashy treble. Last year, Linn's designers sought to improve the matter. The result barely resembles the earlier model – everything has been addressed, even down to the price which is now set at £349, the new Ku-Stone stands £109 extra.

The old 200mm bass driver with its light yet rigid carbon-loaded polypropylene cone (also used in the larger Nexus) remains, together with its large magnet assembly. Still a reflex design, to increase the bass response from a relatively small box (515x235x350mm hwd), it preserves the rectangular port in an effort to reduce standing waves. Above 3kHz a Linn-designed treble unit with damped 19mm polyamide dome takes over, its aluminium voice coil ferrofluid-cooled for 80W power handling and better control. The crossover is a 2nd-order Linkwitz-Riley type, completely revamped from the earlier Helix. Higher quality capacitors are now used, alongside the former powder-forged cored inductors.

Careful attention has been paid to the baffle, with the plastic front now an integral part, which sits flush with the drive units to avoid diffraction problems associated with the earlier design. Although removable to facilitate the fitting of a black stocking cover, the baffle is well damped with foam. The bass unit is now fitted through the entire 18mm thickness of the enclosure for added strength, rather than the earlier idea of recessing it by 9mm.

The speaker enclosure is made from 18mm chipboard panels, finished in vinyl wrap, and internally braced to reduce resonance. The internal volume is less than the first variant, to give improved tuning and reduce the boominess. Wadding has been applied around the tweeter, with the remainder of the cabinet relatively empty. Efficiency is average, and quoted sensitivity is 88dB/W at 1m.

As before, bi-wiring is possible, the speaker connections being soldered to the crossover pcb, thus reducing internal wiring. Four millimetre banana plugs are the order of the day, with bare wire or solder tags hard to connect successfully.

The four-page instruction manual suggests placement 'close to a wall', with 'ideally the rear of the speaker between 4 and 12in from the rear wall and at least 18in from any corner'. I certainly agree about avoiding corners but on some material preferred the 12in as a *minimum* from the rear wall, with the speakers angled in very slightly towards the listener. The manual suggests 5-10°.

One of the major changes concerns the matching stand. Gone is the former steel upright box affair with its plastic moulding containing MDF, now replaced by Ku-Stone. Not only is this more stable, but