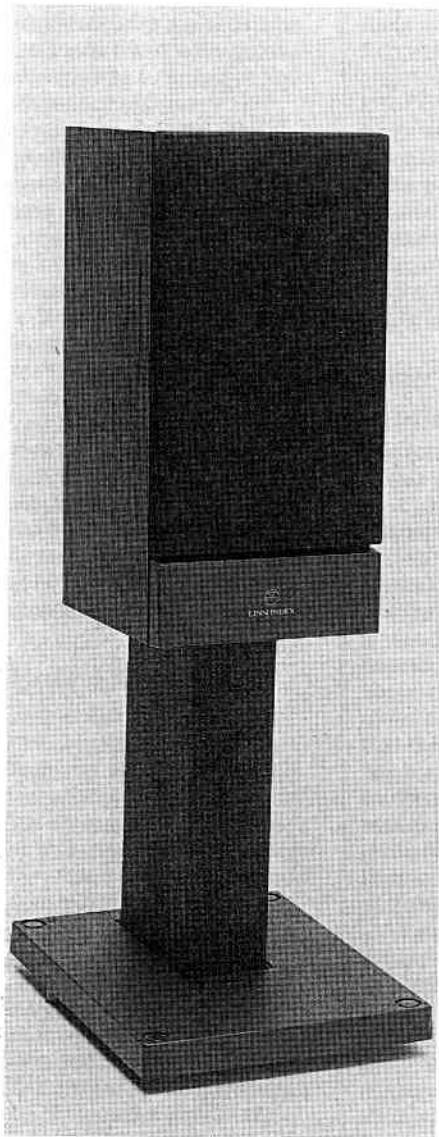


Linn Index II/KuStone

Best Buy

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The original *Index* was Linn's first attempt at a modestly priced loudspeaker, and was (predictably enough) a pretty controversial product, tending perhaps to give mechanical considerations priority over acoustic criteria. The resultant brew was strongly favoured by some dealers but almost ignored by others, and now - several years down the road - the rather dumpy enclosure looks more than a little dated.

Index II is therefore a complete redesign, slimmer and altogether prettier than its predecessor. It's a conventional enough 2-way sealed box, very smartly presented and pretty good perceived value for £235, especially given Linn's fine reputation for build quality.

But the loudspeaker is only part of the story. More interesting perhaps is a radical new stand, the £109 *KuStone*, which *Index II* is designed to partner. It's not obligatory, but most customers are opting for the

combination, and as a personal believer in the concept of the integral stand I decided to test it that way - as a £344 compact floorstander.

Aesthetically, it's very neat: the stand is lower than most while the central pillar is shaped to tilt the enclosure back a few degrees - a handicap for home horticulturalists, but discrete and almost cute when mounted close to the wall as intended. Anthracite grey plastic trim conceals the driver mounting, tidying the baffle very smartly and providing the spacing and grooving for the clever (optional and sonically inconsequential) stocking mask grille.

Though the sealed box loading only requires a modest main driver magnet, the speaker itself weighs a solid enough 6kg. The baffle is built from high density 18mm board while the vinyl covered wrap is 15mm stock, stiffened by a circumferential brace, with light damping fill. The generously rated PCB crossover is fixed behind the bi-wire 4mm sockets and hardwired to the drivers using hefty multi-strand cable. The main driver uses a 115mm plastic cone, the tweeter a 19mm soft dome.

KuStone consists of a large and substantially spiked metal baseplate, neatly disguised with plastic trim. This gives a good footprint and bolts directly to the speaker with long metal rods tensioned against what looks like a shaped metal breeze block, an expanded metal described as microporous. The whole caboodle weighs in at 10kg, and can be used with other loudspeakers via a spiked top plate (Blutak coupling is not an option here).

Test Report

It must have been kind-to-amplifiers week in Scotland when this design was put together - certainly there's no sign of the low impedances found in other Linn designs. Which is one of the factors behind the lowish (86dB/W) sensitivity rating, the other being an exceptionally good bass extension for the size of the box - compare the 20Hz figures.

Measured only at its designated close-to-wall site, the response is both smooth and well balanced, if a shade rich in the mid-bass (50-200Hz) and slightly peaked up around 6-9kHz. The crossover transition is virtually seamless.

Sound Quality

To describe any Linn speaker, let alone an *Index*, as a good overall compromise seems like a contradiction in terms, but that was

how the panel heard - and liked - it. Certainly this is a much tamer animal than its predecessor, though that should not be taken to imply criticism, and the slightly bright and obvious treble and the generally quick and well defined bass are both links with other Linn speakers.

Above all, the music remains nicely coherent and the soundstage delivers a fair measure of transparency, at any rate by wall-mount standards. Speed and timing are both pretty good, but the sound is actually slightly soft dynamically, rather laid back and somehow lacking power and energy. The bass region is clean, clear and quite extended, if a bit lacking in authority. Somehow the dynamic range is rather more impressive than the dynamics themselves.

Conclusion

Not as fast or dramatic as one has come to expect from Linn loudspeakers, *Index II* plus *KuStone* nevertheless make very nice music together, delivering generally good resolution and clarity throughout the frequency band, including the bass region where most speakers of this size and price run into trouble.

At £344, the package is sonically very competitive, aesthetically way ahead of the pack, and good engineering and material value too. Which leaves me no alternative but to hang a Best Buy hat on the corner of the review, adding just the caveat that my drive system uses several Linn components, which might have given *Index II* a bit of a head start.

TEST RESULTS

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| Size (h x w x d) | 44 x 21 x 23.5cm (box only) |
| Weight | 6kg (stand 10kg) |
| Recommended amplifier power | 20-80W |
| Recommended placement | <i>KuStone</i> stands close to wall |
| In room averaged response limits 50Hz-10kHz | +/-7dB |
| Large room/wall LF roll-off (-6dB ref midband) | 28Hz |
| Large room output at 20Hz (ref midband) | -12dB |
| Estimated midrange sensitivity (ref 2.83V, 1m) | 86dB/W |
| Impedance characteristic (ease of drive) | very good |
| Typical price per pair (inc VAT) | £235 + £109 stand |

