

Akai EIE Pro | £200

Akai's EIE I/O is a flexible interface but features limited audio resolution. **Jono Buchanan** checks out its big brother, the Pro, and finds a remedy...

WHAT IS IT?

The Pro version of Akai's latest home interface

CONTACT

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Unique feature set wrapped up in a great design
- 2 Flexible input and monitoring options
- 3 USB 'hub' connectivity

SPECS

USB audio interface with up to 24-bit recording resolution supporting all standard sample rates (44.1kHz / 48kHz / 88.2kHz / 96kHz)

Four XLR-1/4" combo jacks with phantom power and gain control

Four nickel-plated 1/4" outputs

Two high-quality VU level meters with switchable sources and RED peak LEDs

Three additional USB ports for connecting other devices through to a computer

5-pin DIN MIDI interface

Headphone output with switchable source and direct monitoring dial

Table-top design

Size:

322 x 215 x 132mm

Weight:

2.5kg

Akai's product range has expanded over recent years but its EIE interface may have slipped beneath your radar. This unit offered four-channel recording but capped audio at 16-bit resolution. Fine for most applications but limited by the standards of some competitors, it's perhaps no surprise that Akai now return with a more commanding version of their intriguing EIE concept, the 'Pro'.

Connection hub

The interface is a chunky, solidly built unit. The rear panel features four audio outputs, designed primarily to drive twin pairs of studio monitors, as well as four inserts so input connections made on the front panel can be further enhanced with hardware effects such as compression or EQ.

As well as the USB connector which provides interfacing with your computer, a further three USB ports are offered which can be used to extend the number of connections your computer offers, so they can host external hard drives or even USB keys used to enable your plug-in libraries. Standard MIDI In

and Out ports are also supplied. At the front, four hybrid inputs sit beneath rocker switches which let you change input types between Mic/Line and Guitar sources and phantom power can be switched on in pairs, with a switch each serving inputs 1 and 2 and inputs 3 and 4. To the right, twin VU meters keep you updated with levels with options to monitor either pair of inputs or returns, while a master level dial serves as the main monitor in either mono or stereo. It's an impressive feature-set which allows for huge levels of flexibility. My only gripe is that the input ports are all on the front panel. I don't know a studio owner who is happy for mic cables to trail across the front of their workspace and would prefer EIE Pro to feature some rears too. But for a band who simply want to make 'four instruments appear separately in their DAW' then this is going to be magical.

Slick operation

In use, the EIE Pro is a joy. I was initially concerned that the VU meters might not provide the most accurate visual feedback when setting levels but this proved not to be the case as they're

back-lit and, better still, their lights change to a 'warning red' when signal overload is detected.

The EIE Pro's increased audio specs over the original EIE provide a pleasing openness in sonic character. There's a clarity and a natural brightness which doesn't colour the sound but adds a slight sweetness to microphone sources in particular. The unit doesn't quite provide the 'classic' Focusrite sound of the Scarlett 2i2 but this isn't to criticise it, as Akai's pres are more than capable of great results. It's the flexibility of this unit which really counts through, with monitoring offered across the input/output stages and two sets of monitors readily accommodated. I suspect this flexibility will be the secret to its success, particularly with the (to my knowledge) unique selling point of offering 'studio expansion' via the additional USB ports and the dedicated insert points. All in all, it makes the EIE Pro a real workhorse and the phrase 'jack of all trades, master of none' finds an exception here. **FM**

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD



VALUE



EASE OF USE



VERSATILITY



RESULTS



With unique features and enhanced audio resolution, the EIE Pro is impressive at this price.

