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## Hands on: Linn Selekt DSM review

Modern, modular, multi-purpose - and sonically promising too  
*Tested at £4000*

★★★★★ Not yet rated By [What Hi-Fi?](#)

2 days ago

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 FOR

Upgradeable  
Vast connectivity

 AGAINST

Display is text only  
Not cheap

Elegant, user-friendly design

Linn has been on the streaming scene as long as Spotify, so the fact it's still very much here, occupying the high-end music streamer space, shows the brand's success as well as that of the wider streaming industry's.

Linn recognises that while many hi-fi enthusiasts still reach for their physical music collection, streaming is very much the future. Delivering a slice of both pies in a versatile, no-compromise package has therefore been Linn's ultimate goal for its latest product.

Enter the Selekt DSM, an all-new network music player (the brand's fourth) with a full array of digital and analogue inputs, and the scope to become an all-in-one, just-add-speakers, AV-friendly system.

The Selekt DSM sits in the middle of Linn's streamer line-up, above the entry-level **Majik DSM** and below the Akurate DSM and flagship Klimax DSM.

But while it's in familiarly engineered (and familiarly spelt) company, it's a very different beast from its siblings. It's modular and configurable, made up of interchangeable modules (Linn calls them 'cartridges'), and more aesthetically akin to a **Naim Uniti** streaming system than another Linn streamer.



## Features

Linn has always prioritised upgradeability and backward support in its products, and this modular design promotes not only that but also greater flexibility for the user.

While the base streamer/preamp model is £4000, it can be bought - or later upgraded - with an integrated 100-watt-per-channel Class D power amplifier for an extra £1250, or with the Katalyst DAC architecture that features in its Akurate and Klimax siblings for a £1500 premium. With both built-in amplification and Katalyst? £6750.

Next year Linn will also make a headphone amplifier module, and those with an amplified Selekt DSM will have the choice to add a surround sound module with 5.1 speaker terminals, 4 HDMI inputs, 1 HDMI output and support for DTS and Dolby Digital Plus audio formats. The 'coming soon' list for 2019 also includes Bluetooth and wi-fi (2.4GHz/5GHz) support.



For now, streamers will no doubt be more assured by the Selekt DSM's inclusion of an ethernet socket for more stable streaming of music over DLNA or via the usual deluge of supported streaming services.

Joining it on the Selekt DSM's rear panel are several analogue and digital connections, including a USB, optical, coaxial and HDMI ARC. There's also a switchable MM and MC phono stage, for which Linn clearly has **LP12** turntable owners in mind.

## Advancing technology

Linn spoke of several hurdles it had to jump to ensure sound quality wasn't impeded by the modules and their multiple connection points, not to mention the submodules, such as the DAC section.

For one, Linn engineers have wrapped a control loop around the passive output filter of the system version's Class D amplifier in an effort to compensate for the innate inaccuracies caused by the filter.

Linn has also chosen to transport both digital and analogue music signals digitally through the Selekt DSM's electronics until it reaches the DAC module (where it's then output through the speaker terminals) - which it says is the way to best preserve the signal.



The volume control dial has 100 LED lights to show each increment

The Selekt DSMs with amplification installed are also fitted with a larger power supply to handle the 200-watt output of a stereo set-up as well as a 600-watt output in a 5.1 configuration.

Due to the upgrade ethos of Linn products, the Selekt DSM is the first in a while to be designed from scratch. Everything here is said to be new, from the software to the electronics to, rather obviously, the aesthetics.

A new core processing system, which Linn says will suffice for the next ten years of progression, utilises a dual-core platform that Linn says offers roughly ten times the computing power than the single-core processor found in its DS models.

The FPGA (Field Programmable Gate Array), meanwhile, supposedly has four or five times the audio processing capability of the original DS range, too.

In addition to an enhanced core processing system, the Selekt DSM debuts a new version of the Space Optimisation room equalisation technology that Linn introduced in 2015.



The technology's purpose is to make speakers sound as though they're in the ideal position wherever they're placed in a room, however it has always assumed that room was static and rectangular shaped. The next-gen variant, however, takes a more dynamic, practical approach, accounting for the different shapes and varying pressures of rooms.

Using the software, which is now accessible on Linn's website rather than via a PC or Mac software download, users will be able to paint a more accurate version of their room by adding features like windows or doors, right down to the materials of the furniture.

## Sound quality

The Space Optimisation part of the demonstration we were given at Linn's listening rooms at its factory in Glasgow proved the most interesting. The technology's advantages, even in a fairly good room, were pretty obvious.

With the feature applied, the sparkling synths that open Beck's *Seventh Heaven* sounded clearer and open compared to when it was switched off, while the beat that follows came through tighter and more succinct.



We then heard the Selekt DSM base model next to its Katalyst version and an Akurate (with Katalyst). As you'd expect, it demonstrated the natural evolution of Linn's line, with Katalyst technology proving its worth, as it has done before.

With the B&W 804 D3 floorstanders (£6750) at either side, the Selekt DSM retained much of the character of the Akurate DSM (£6350) as the demonstration jumped back and forth between Aidan Moffat's *Quantum Theory* and a classical Mozart track performed by the Scottish Orchestra. It only lacked that extra layer of transparency and same rhythmic cohesiveness, which bodes well for the newcomer and justifies the extra spend of its sibling.

We then, rather surprisingly, heard the amplified Selekt DSM next to its natural-born rival: the [Naim Uniti Nova](#) (£4199). And as the Linn's performance sounded encouraging next to its five-star rival, we're eager to get it into our test rooms for closer scrutiny.

## Design and build

Naturally, comparisons with Naim's Uniti range won't be confined to sound quality. Away from its siblings' wide, short, display-less chassis, the Selekt DSM sports an aesthetic that isn't a million miles from its rival's latest streaming boxes.

Linn has put emphasis on the physical usability of its new streamer, drawing on the vinyl revival not only for an MM/MC phono stage but also the design's tactile nature and interactivity.



It's a very hands-on product, and we needed no encouragement to approach its stand-out feature: a jewel-like, cut-glass control dial that you can rotate to adjust the volume. You can also use it to scroll through libraries and settings, and centre press to select. It proved smooth and responsive, and we have nothing but admiration for the way each volume step elegantly lights up on rotation.

Elegant is how we'd describe the entire presentation. The same 350mm-square footprint as the LP23, the Selekt DSM's chassis, available in black only, sports a lovely smoke cut glass exterior with a chrome base.

Even the positioning of the chrome feet have been considered to enhance its visual; the front one sits in the middle of the base, symmetrical with the top panel's control dial.



The onyx-black OLED display contributes to that aura too, although it's a shame it only shows text and no album art. Linn's argument is that larger-screen control devices such as smartphones and tablets can cater for that artwork experience much better. That logic is pretty sound we suppose, although during the demo we couldn't help but find our eyes drew to the Naim Uniti streamer's display because of the Selekt DSM's omission.

We do, however, like that the display is dormant when not in use, lighting up when it detects you approaching thanks to a sensor.

The last but not least ode to usability: 'smart' buttons. Spread along the top panel and much like piano keys, they're essentially shortcuts or presets buttons that activate whatever songs, artists, playlists, services or sources for example, is assigned to them.

You can 'pin' these manually on the unit or in Linn's [Kazoo app](#). The nicest of touches: you hold the button halfway to show the selection, and all the way to commit to it.

## Initial verdict

Linn appears to have come up with the goods here, with looks, user experience, flexibility and sonic performance all seemingly in check in a unique and thoroughly thought-out package.

Whether the Selekt DSM can ultimately knock certain class-leading competitors off their perch remains to be heard, but regardless of rivalry we have a sneaking

suspicion it won't have trouble finding a fanbase.

## WHAT IS A HANDS ON REVIEW?

'Hands on reviews' are a journalist's first impressions of a piece of kit based on spending some time with it. It may be just a few moments, or a few hours. The important thing is we have been able to play with it ourselves and can give you some sense of what it's like to use, even if it's only an embryonic view.



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