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10>



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Q Acoustics introduces 'Concept 40', an elegant new floorstanding loudspeaker which sets new standards of sonic performance at its price.

Award-winning pedigree

In common with the Concept 20, its award-winning little brother, the new Concept 40's unparalleled soundstage and sheer musicality is achieved by incorporating outstanding drive units into a lacquered, State-of-the-Art, 'Gelcore™ Construction', ultra-low resonance cabinet.

'Gelcore™ Construction', specially developed for acoustic enclosures, is in effect a 'cabinet within a cabinet', separated by a resonance absorbing compound. This enables the drive units to simply reproduce music, unencumbered by the level of cabinet induced distortions found in conventional designs.



"Superlative... brilliantly balanced package... excellent value"

Hi-Fi Choice Recommended,
June 2014



"Surprising sonic agility and composure... a wonderfully inviting sound"

What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision,
May 2014



www.Qacoustics.com

Helps me win when I might lose, so I pick and choose

At the risk of stating the bleedin' obvious, the only purpose of every review we publish in this magazine is to help you get the best value possible for your money.

But, as we never tire of pointing out, there's a bit more to building your ideal system (and thus making the most of your cash) than just throwing together some five-star products. The relationship, the synergy between each element is absolutely critical if you're to achieve hi-fi and home entertainment Nirvana.

It's a process examined pretty thoroughly in our **guide to building the perfect hi-fi system (p68)**. And I firmly believe this is the best way to go about it - draw up a shortlist using the expert advice within these pages, arrange a demonstration and don't stop experimenting until you're satisfied.



Simon
Simon Lucas, Editor

My products of the month



Sony KDL-40W605B

Group test p43

£450 for a TV this well-specified, this accomplished? You've never had it so good etc.



Shure SRH1540

First test p27

Great sound, beautiful fit and you don't need a full head of hair to make them look good.

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION

Reviews you can trust

Experience & heritage



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experience under our collective belts - so you can count on our expert opinions.

Dedicated test facilities



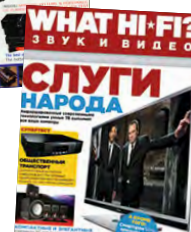
We test every product in the magazine or at *whathifi.com* against its peers in our bespoke £1m reviewing facilities. And we test every product as a team,

so our opinions and conclusions are always the result of collaboration.



We spot big trends first

MP3 player tests before the iPod even existed? High-def video before it even had a name? That was us. We keep you in touch with big stories and future trends.



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NEXT MONTH

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There's always a demand for 'small-but-perfectly-formed'

GROUP TESTS SPEAKERS

£1500 buys some absolute belters

MULTI-ROOM AUDIO

We examine all your (many) options

PROJECTORS

Sometimes you want the biggest picture



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Andy Madden Reviews editor



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"Few products balance glitzy appearance and real sonic ability with such skill"

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"It isn't just about packaging five-star names together... a little experimentation can go a long way"



68 Hi-fi systems When you're building a hi-fi system, putting together the most obvious choices isn't necessarily the best way to go. Whether you want to keep your costs low or are eager to splash the cash, we have systems to cater for any budget.

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"There's a great sense of enthusiasm and excitement behind every track you throw at it"

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With new categories and key tech specs, we've made it even easier for you to pick the best



Temptation

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Our ratings explained

We always test products as a team, in dedicated facilities, and always compare them with their peers. That's why our ratings are the most authoritative in the industry.

One of the best

A serious contender

Worth a look

Disappointing

Awful

★★★★★

★★★★☆

★★★☆☆

★★☆☆☆

★☆☆☆☆

WHAT HI-FI?
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If it's one of our winners, you know it's top quality

Exclusive reviews of the latest kit

FIRST TESTS

**MORE
FIRST TESTS**



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Bring smarts to your TV with this Stick

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The ring around the volume knob lights up - we like these design touches

EXCLUSIVE

Onkyo amp promises to bring Atmos to the party

Onkyo TX-NR838 | AV receiver | £1000



System builder total build £30000

Speaker package
KEF R100 5.1

★★★★★ **£2850**

Kef's R100 package is the one to beat at this price level. You'll get great sound combined with super build



Blu-ray player
Marantz UD7007
★★★★★ **£500**

Our favourite premium Blu-ray player still delivers excellent picture quality and a class-leading sonic performance



Projector
Epson EH-TW6100W
★★★★★ **£1200**

Our current mid-priced Award-winner is even better value with £400 knocked off the original price.



This is one of the most musical systems we've heard of this ilk

Bluesound Pownode, p16

This is one of the first AV receivers we've seen that caters for Dolby Atmos

- a surround sound technology that expands on the current 5.1 and 7.1 set-ups.

When it comes to AV amps, Onkyo hasn't set our world on fire recently. Its receivers have lately tended to be a matter of features and specification over outright sound quality. But now we have the £1000 Onkyo TX-NR838: are things about to change?

Yes. Well, a little. It's clearly still a matter of features over performance, but one of those features is stand-out. This is one of the first AV receivers we've seen that caters for Dolby Atmos - a surround sound tech that expands on current 5.1 and 7.1 set-ups. It enhances the spread of audio images and the sensation of being enveloped by increasing the number of speakers and improving the sense of sonic immersion.

The features are good, then, and we're mostly impressed with the sound quality. We start off with our *Man Of Steel* Blu-ray. The film may be iffy but the audio is an

advanced assault course, particularly the scene where Zodd is bombard by sound from every angle. Sound is nicely spread, with tight panning and precise placement.

There's no shortage of power. Scale is effortlessly conveyed, and it gets loud. The presentation is very fluid. It's smooth enough that you could listen all day and not feel tired. Tonally it's a balanced affair, with no undue emphasis on any part of the frequency range. There's also good weight to the delivery.

But it's a soft sound. Leading and trailing edges don't offer much in the way of definition. That results in an unsubtle performance that doesn't quite manage to convey some of the nuances in the way notes are played.

Lacking differentiation

We put on a Blu-ray of Michael Jackson's *This Is It* documentary and skip to the scene where MJ instructs his musical director to alter the way he hits the piano. On the Onkyo, it's unclear exactly what changes are being made as the notes all sound similarly soft, with little differentiation.

Switching to the Award-winning Pioneer SC-LX57, it becomes clear that the hand is hitting the piano in slightly different ways, with the notes all feeling mildly different until Jackson gives his approval.

Elsewhere, we find dynamics to be a bit too restrained. We love an easy listen, but we also want to be thoroughly moved. The Pioneer offers far-reaching dynamics that offer excitement. The Onkyo needs a greater sense of energy, and a sense of attack.

Experiment with options

It helps to turn on the Pure Direct mode, which isolates the analogue path and turns off unused digital circuitry. The sound definitely tightens up a little, and dynamics are mildly extended, but overall the effect is the same: it's not that engaging.

Make sure you fiddle with impedance settings. Switching from six ohms to four, we manage to make the sound tighter and punchier. Then again, it is less fluid and a fair bit harsher.

As for the features, Onkyo really has gone all-out. This is a 7.2-channel affair with more connections than Heathrow. Wirelessly, you get wi-fi and Bluetooth 2.1. It's quite rare to see these on an AV amp without faffing with dongles.

Time for the good old hard-wired stuff: there are seven HDMI inputs - one at the



For a full list of specifications and other useful info visit whathifi.com

In detail...

Ancient and modern

1 It's nice to see some good old-fashioned composite and component connections to go alongside the digital HDMI and ethernet.

2 There is a set of pre-outs for connecting power amplifiers – if 180W per channel isn't enough for you

3 There are plenty of HDMI inputs, and we like having two outputs, so we can hook up a TV and a projector at the same time. It means there's no faffing about when we want to watch on a really big screen.



front, MHL-compatible for transferring mobile content – and two outputs; four composite video – four in (one frontal) and one out. There's also a set of component connections.

Audio? There are five digital audio inputs: two optical and three coaxial. You also get seven analogue inputs (one frontal), two parallel subwoofer pre-outs, and a moving magnet phono input.

To ensure 4K readiness, the Onkyo is certified with HDMI 2.0 and HDCP 2.2. That's High-bandwidth Digital Content Protection, the type used for future 4K streaming, broadcasting and premium studio content, and 4K upscaling.

Online and streaming

Elsewhere, you get a buffet of internet-based services: Spotify Premium, Deezer, Pandora, Aupeo! and TuneIn Radio. Not enough? You can add your own content with a USB drive. The amp is also DLNA-certified, which means you can stream content from a compatible networked computer.

File compatibility is good. The Onkyo will cater for MP3, WMA, WMA Lossless, Ogg Vorbis, AAC, Apple Lossless, WAV, FLAC and DSD 5.6 MHz – up to 24-bit/192Hz.

Hold your breath for Atmos

And then there's Dolby Atmos. In cinemas, that means up to 64 speakers, with some in the ceiling. That's not practical in the home, so Dolby's hardware partners will produce side-speakers and speaker-top modules able to emulate the sensation of sound coming from above your head.

It's very exciting. We're very excited. But sadly it's not quite ready yet, and this amp will be able to do those tricks only after an update. Onkyo says it will deliver the update some time in September. We'll be sure to come back and re-evaluate things then.

Back in the present, the standard non-Atmos set-up is a breeze. The auto room-calibration process is swift. Onkyo has dropped the Audyssey calibration this year in favour of its own AccuEQ system.

We're not entirely convinced it's a good move: it labelled our large speakers as

small, and there were issues with distance measurement. Double-check your settings after auto-calibration.

As for physical attributes, this is a very handsome amp. We think it looks particularly fetching in silver, but you can get it in black too. The design is neat and clean, and we love the thin band of illumination on the volume knob. The overall impression is a box of high quality.

The remote control isn't quite as sexy – a shrunken thing that feels a little cramped. The Onkyo Remote app, though, (free on Android and iOS) is excellent. It offers a neat interface, and gives you general control abilities as well as easy streaming from online services and network devices.

A fully featured package

The Onkyo TX-NR838 is a comprehensive AV receiver. It has an unbelievable number of features that cater for all reasonable AV needs, and even looks to the future. It's really quite surprising this box isn't a lot bigger. The sound is impressive too, but this is the area that still needs a bit of work.

Most buttons are usually hidden by a flap – it makes for a good-looking unit



TECH SPECS

Type AV receiver • **Power** 180W/channel • **HDMI in/out** 8 • **4K upscaling** Yes • **Wi-fi** Yes • **Bluetooth** Yes • **Dimensions** 34 x 58 x 51cm • **Weight** 15.5kg

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Good effects steering; fluid presentation; extensive feature set

AGAINST Needs more attack and edge definition

VERDICT A most commendable amplifier, but not quite an all-rounder.

REVIEWER'S NOTES... GETTING TO KNOW THE ONKYO TX-NR838

1 What a lovely looking thing. That's the smartest volume knob ever. The buttons feel nice too.

2 The number of connections is a little intimidating – but good news for future-proofing.

3 Auto-calibration is fast. But not comprehensive and not that accurate either. Time to readjust settings.

4 The Pure Direct button improves the sound a lot. But overall it still sounds a bit lethargic and soft.

5 It can do Atmos! This is very exciting. That update can't come quickly enough.

Bowers & Wilkins



The new 600 Series.
19 years in the making.

In time, everything changes. That's progress. The new 600 Series brings 19 years of Bowers & Wilkins engineering advances, including the new Decoupled Double Dome tweeters for amazingly precise treble. But one thing hasn't changed: the new 600 Series offers the same amazing value now as when the award-winning original launched in 1995.

www.bowers-wilkins.co.uk

Focal Dimension | Soundbar | £890

A sonic blockbuster for the big screen



Soundbars are big business. In fact, they're one of the most searched-for products on *whathifi.com*. But where budget designs are 10-a-penny, high-end soundbars aren't, and some traditional hi-fi companies see these products as a way of entering the market without the intense competition.

Brands who know a thing or two about loudspeakers, such as Bowers & Wilkins and Monitor Audio, have all had success in this field, and now it's the turn of French

subwoofer. The sub is designed to fit behind the soundbar, transforming it into something resembling a soundbase (see panel opposite).

The soundbar is ported at either end and uses five ultra-flat drivers and six channels of amplification (this includes one for an external subwoofer - the Dimension or other brand). Unlike some rivals that claim to bounce sound off your walls to create a surround-like experience, Focal says it uses

a feature that's sometimes overlooked on products like this.

You can feed audio from your TV a couple of different ways, either through the Focal's optical digital input or via the ARC (Audio Return Channel)-enabled HDMI output (provided your TV has a compatible socket).

There's also a single HDMI input for connecting an external Blu-ray player, games console or set-top box. The Dimension can't decode high-res soundtracks, but it can strip the core Dolby and DTS mixes from Blu-ray discs.

Unlike some rival designs that claim to bounce sound off your walls to create a surround-like experience, the Focal Dimension claims to use clever sonic processing to achieve that end

company Focal to come up with something that makes us stop and listen.

Aptly named Dimension, Focal's soundbar is quite the unit, measuring just under 116cm wide and 11.5cm tall. Those with small racks or tiny TVs need not apply - Focal suggests using it with 50in screens and bigger, and we'd agree.

Two choices

There's a wall-mount kit in the box or, if you do happen to have a rack of suitable width, you can perch the soundbar on the supplied feet. Installed that way, the unit lies back at an angle but doesn't slouch - indeed, it looks purposeful and stylish. Alternatively, you can hand over an extra £300 and buy it with Focal's matching Dimension

clever processing to achieve that end, and manipulates the audio signal in an attempt to place you in a bubble of sound.

Wave your hand over the right-hand side of the bar and a touch-sensitive control panel comes to life. It's a classy touch (excuse the pun) and allows you to change volume, switch input and engage the night mode, which reduces the unit's dynamic range to make quieter late-night viewing easier. That control panel is in stark contrast to the measly credit-card remote that comes with the bar. It does a job, but hardly matches the appeal of the Dimension. At least you can use it to make adjustments for lip-sync,

Woofers and dongles

A dedicated output means you can connect a third-party subwoofer - if you use it with the Dimension sub, you'll need to use the small spring-loaded terminals on the back panel and run the supplied umbilical cable between the two.

A lack of built-in Bluetooth isn't the end of the world, but at least Focal includes its aptX-friendly Bluetooth dongle as part of the deal. It plugs into the rear 3.5mm input, but given the other cables in close proximity, things can get quite crowded. Flexible HDMI cables come in handy here.

Before you unleash the Dimension, you need to complete the



System builder Total build £3440

Television

Samsung US55H7500 ★★★★★ £2300

We wouldn't use the Focal with a set under 50in, and this Samsung fits the bill perfectly. Its 4K ability makes it future-proof too.



Blu-ray player

Sony BDP-S7200 ★★★★★ £250

Currently one of our favourite Blu-ray decks, the 'S7200 delivers wonderful picture and sound. Perfect for the Focal and Samsung.



Smartphone

★★★★★ £free on contract

The LG G3 is a great alternative to everything iPhone, not least because you can stream music to the Focal using its Bluetooth aptX ability.



Play the Reboot of *Robocop* on Blu-ray and as our heavily armoured hero goes through his final training exercise in the huge warehouse, cracks of gunfire sound precise and powerful



Bluetooth dongle uses an adapter for use with the Focal but can also slot into a stereo amp



set-up process. This involves flicking a selection of switches which correspond with how and where the bar is being positioned, how far you are away from it, how damped your room is and whether or not you're using a subwoofer. It's definitely worth going with the instruction manual on this one, since using the wrong setting can throw the sound out of kilter.

Expanse of sound

We hate to burst Focal's surround bubble, but the Dimension doesn't really immerse you that way. Play *Fast & Furious 6* and during the chase scenes as helicopters fly into frame, you're aware of a slight back-to-front shift in sound but it doesn't have the same impact as listening through dedicated surround channels. But then again, it's very hard for any soundbar to match a *bona fide* 5.1 system.

What the Dimension does offer is a very solid, stable and impressive soundfield. The bar has no trouble filling large spaces, and that includes our largest home cinema test room. You're presented with a huge expanse of sound which the Focal creates effortlessly and packs full of detail.

Precise realism

Play the Reboot of *Robocop* on Blu-ray and, as our heavily armoured hero goes through his final training exercise in the huge warehouse, cracks of gunfire sound precise and powerful. It wouldn't take much for these effects to sound hard and harsh but the Focal falls on the right side of the line. The Dimension also does a good job of recreating echo around voices and giving dialogue a great sense of expression.

Given the bar's dimensions, bass weight isn't an issue. Sure, you could get more from adding a subwoofer, but as *Robocop*

From bar to bass...



Focal's soundbar is £890 on its own, but an extra £300 brings the matching Dimension subwoofer to the party. It's a big unit, but the front is angled so it slots in behind the soundbar, transforming the whole thing into a soundbase. We're not huge fans of the way the two connect via a short run of speaker cable; it's a little crude. Something else to bear in mind is the design of your TV's stand. It will have a big say in whether the overall aesthetic works.

Subtle but significant

Once the sub is wired and the relevant switch is flicked on the back of the soundbar, the subwoofer brings a subtle increase in weight. You don't quite get the bombastic levels of bass you may have been expecting, but adding the subwoofer allows the system to sound clearer, more open and more dynamic than it does without. Our only minor grumble is that this two-box configuration doesn't sound quite as cohesive. Highs sound more exposed and a touch harsher, but that doesn't dampen our enthusiasm for the duo.

assaults OmniCorp HQ and battle ensues, explosions have enough force and heft to convince. Even something less obvious, like *Robocop*'s footsteps, have a nice, solid, rounded, robotic crunch.

As his mind is being force-fed an entire criminal database, the Focal does a great job of communicating the tension and drama as it all becomes too much for Murphy's brain to compute. This shows the Focal's impressive dynamic range, and its musical flair too. Switch to music, play Metallica's *Nothing Else Matters* over Bluetooth, and the Focal shows great fluidity and finesse. It's fun to listen to and never distracting, which can't be said for most soundbars out there.

Jumping straight in at the deep end with a premium soundbar is a bold move, but Focal's Dimension delivers the goods in spectacular style.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Striking design; finessed, exciting sound; impressive bass weight; great with music

AGAINST Cramped input panel can make things fiddly; cheap remote

VERDICT Dimension is a bold move for Focal but it's paid off. A high-end, high-quality soundbar

Needs to beat

Monitor Audio ASB-2 £800

★★★★★

Direct and powerful, this is the Focal's natural rival. It's a very close call.



Samsung Galaxy Tab S | Tablet | £320

A mini victory for Samsung

Samsung's tablet strategy has not always been clear. At times, it's been downright confusing with the number of options it's had on offer at any one time.

To clear things up somewhat, the Galaxy Tab S is Samsung's current flagship range and it's available in two sizes, 10.5in and 8.4in. We're testing the smaller of the two here and, in short, it's the best tablet we've seen from the company to date.

When it comes to features, the Tab S 8.4 matches its bigger brother spec for spec, packing an Exynos octa-core processor (yes, that's eight cores), 3GB of RAM and a Super AMOLED display.

It's a largely plastic construction, and while it can't match the luxury feel of the aluminium-bodied iPad mini with Retina display, it feels solid and well made. It's slim too, 6.6mm thick, and weighs 294g.

One thing it has over its Apple-flavoured rival is a microSD card slot, allowing you to boost the 16GB on-board storage by up to 128GB - much cheaper than forking out for the largest capacity iPad mini, which is worth considering if you store a lot of music and movies on your tablet.

better balanced - there's more subtlety to tones and textures in scenery and faces. The Samsung palette is subtler than it has been previously, but could still go a little further towards neutral for our tastes.

When it comes to contrast, it's no surprise the Tab S's AMOLED screen does a great job at producing seriously inky blacks that are noticeably better than those on the iPad. However, while bright, its whites aren't as defined and have an occasional blue tinge, when viewed off-axis especially.

To be clear - the Tab S is capable of crisp, detailed and enjoyable video performance that is a big improvement on what we've seen on previous Samsung tablets, but the iPad mini still has the balance we'd pick.

Sound and vision

Audio is a step up from previous Samsung devices too, with high-res playback a feature on this device (first seen on the Galaxy Note 3). With regular WAV CD rips, it's a more precise performance than we've noted before, with improved timing and more get-up-and-go.

The screen on the Tab S has to be one of the most visually impressive we've seen at this size. The brightness of its Super AMOLED panel is what really sets it apart, at first glance

The fingerprint scanner from the Galaxy S5 has made its way to the Tab S, and works in the same way, by sliding your finger over the home button. You can register up to three fingerprints per device. While it worked almost every time during testing, it's a still a little awkward, and not as slick as Apple's TouchID - entering a PIN to unlock the tablet can be as quick. We do like the ability to use it to authorise payments via PayPal, though.

Super AMOLED screen

The screen on the Tab S has to be one of the most visually impressive we've seen at this size. Packing a resolution of 2560 x 1600 and squeezing 360 pixels into every inch, it pips the iPad mini when it comes to on-paper specs - but it's the brightness of its Super AMOLED panel that really sets it apart at first glance. This makes it great for using outside in sunlight, and superb for browsing and general day-to-day use, with crisp text and vivid colours. However, it doesn't actually translate to the Tab S doing a better job with video when put up against the iPad mini with Retina display.

Compare the same HD clip and you will see that the iPad's colour palette is much

Switch to Michael Jackson's *Thriller* (24-bit/176kHz) and there's understandably more detail and a touch more subtlety, but it's still on the lean side when compared with the full-bodied iPad mini, ultimately losing out on bite and attack.

Usability and performance is noteworthy. The Tab S's battery life is good, and we found we could easily make it through a day of regular use, at a sensible brightness level, with plenty to spare at the end of it.

Watch stacks of HD video and you will drain the battery quickly, though even then you should get through at least a couple before you start to see any serious dent.

Whizzing around menus and jumping in and out of apps is lag-free, as it should be with as much power under the hood as the Tab S has. We like the new Multi View screen that allows you to run two apps on a split screen - we've seen this before but they were always independent of one another. Now you can share text and images between them - a nice touch.

The camera on the Tab S is one of the better ones we've seen on a tablet, though that's not automatically a recommendation. But its rear-facing 8MP snapper does a good job of capturing crisp, detailed and



USE IT WITH

**SONY
MDR-
EX650**

These are simply superb in-ears, and are night and day compared with the throwaway earphones included.



well-balanced images in good light, supported by, unusually, an LED flash.

The Galaxy Tab S 8.4 is the best tablet we've seen from Samsung, and it's up there as one of the best Android tablets we've tested too. The nearly year-old iPad mini with Retina display still outperforms it in both audio and picture quality (though it has limited capacity, of course), and that's not something we can overlook.

So while this may well be one of the best Android tablets on the market right now, it's still just the best small tablet that isn't an iPad mini. Not enough for five stars.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Nice design; bright, vivid screen; deep blacks; high-res audio capable; good battery life

AGAINST Finger scanner still a little awkward; audio and picture quality don't beat the best

VERDICT The best from Samsung so far, but we need more in the audio and video stakes

Also consider
iPad Mini with
Retina Display
£320 ★★★★★

Still the champion of the small tablets category.



THE BEST VIEW IN THE WORLD




LG ULTRA HD 4K

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www.lg.com/uk/ultra-hdtv

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Photographer: Andrew Rowat. Images not to scale.

Simple is the New Smart

LG G3



Available in Metallic Black
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THE NEW SMART**

Now It's All Possible

• 5.5" Quad HD Display • 13MP Laser Auto Focus Camera • 3000mAh Removable Battery

"The best smartphone in the world."

Stuff
★★★★★

LG G3, Stuff.tv, 24th June 2014



Cambridge Audio Aeromax 6 | Stereo speakers | £900

Aeromax steps out in style

Cambridge Audio's Aero loudspeakers have already made their mark at *What Hi-Fi?* towers – we gave a 5.1 Aero set-up an Award just last year.

The front left and right speakers in that surround package are the Aero 6 floorstanders, good speakers in their own right. But Cambridge Audio believes it can take their performance to another level, in the shape of the Aeromax 6.

Not to be confused with a certain sports brand's iconic footwear range, the Aeromax 6s improvements aren't restricted to just a shiny new finish (although the gloss white and black options do certainly give them a classier look).

A change from traditional tweeters

The Aeromax upgrade features a whole host of changes. One of the key design aspects of Aero is the use of Balanced Mode Radiators (BMR) instead of traditional tweeters. BMRs have a much wider operating frequency range than conventional drive units. In this case, the BMR drivers – the small, top-most drivers – handle treble and midrange. They cross over to the bass driver at 250Hz, where ears are less sensitive to the phase issues such circuits suffer from.

In pursuit of greatness

The BMRs on the Aeromax 6s have been modified, with Cambridge claiming that the new drivers offer a more detailed and immersive sound.

But it's not just the BMR that's different. These speakers have been fitted with new crossover components, improved internal bracing (for additional rigidity), improved internal cabling and higher-grade speaker terminals. Cambridge hasn't left many stones unturned in its pursuit of a great speaker.

The 6s aren't overly fussy about placement thanks to a front-firing port and wide dispersion. Just make sure you give the bolts and spikes on the plinth a good tighten before you start

listening. A speaker's stereo imaging can really help to draw the listener in, and the Aeromax 6s do that well. Play Sam Smith's *I'm Not The Only One*, close your eyes, sit back and you're just drawn into the music. There's a fantastic sense of depth and breadth, with the piano and Smith's vocal sounding wonderfully direct without coming across too forcefully.

The way the 6s position the elements of a track is pretty exceptional – arguably unrivalled at this price. The speakers sound solid and meaty in the bass too – there's good extension and weight when playing Kanye's *Black Skinhead*.

Superb imaging

The Aeromax 6s image so well that it's easy to become distracted and almost overlook some areas that could be improved. For example, they don't have the same turn of pace as the top speakers at the money; low-level dynamic shifts of a track aren't as apparent as they could be.

Play *Brave New World* from the *Skyfall* soundtrack and we'd like a bit more conviction and drive to the sound – it would help keep your attention and communicate the tension of the track. Rivals such as the Q Acoustics Concept 40s show greater subtlety and differentiation between the notes.

Potential to be tapped

You can hear a lot of potential in the Aeromax 6s. They're easy to position and tough to beat in terms of stereo imaging. In our opinion they need just a couple of tweaks here and there to transform them into really serious contenders.



Make sure to give the bolts and spikes on the plinth a good old tighten before starting



The Aeromax 6s are front-ported, giving you plenty of options for placement

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Neat looks; awesome soundstage; wonderfully direct vocals; weighty bass

AGAINST Lack drive and low-level dynamic expression of the very best

VERDICT The Aeromax 6s aren't without ability, but they struggle in some areas

Also consider

Q Acoustics Concept 40
£1000 ★★★★★

Talented floorstanders, bringing refinement and dynamics in equal measure.



System builder total build £2440

CD player

Audiolab 8200CD ★★★★★ £800

We've been fans for years and its USB input means you can hook up a computer.



Stereo amplifier

Arcam FMJ A19 ★★★★★ £650

A stellar amp, capable of beautiful subtlety and truly barnstorming dynamics.



Bluetooth receiver

Arcam miniBlink ★★★★★ £90

Free your music by plugging this Bluetooth receiver into the back of the A19 amp.



Bluesound Powernode | Wireless music player | £600

Streaming dream for the discerning listener

When it comes to multiroom audio, Sonos has had the lion's share of the market for some time, winning consumers over with its reliability, ease of use and lifestyle-led design. What it's never been able to do, though, is scratch the itch for high-res audio so craved by the hi-fi community. The community's response? Go and do it itself.

With its tagline of "hi-fi for the wireless generation", Bluesound is made up of many of the same people who pioneered respected hi-fi company NAD back in the 70s. But rather than dip its toe into the market it's taken a running leap at it, introducing five new products that offer a solution for every situation.

We're testing the Powernode here, an amplified streamer that just needs a pair of speakers and an internet connection to get it going. Also in the range is the Node

App facts



The Bluesound app is has been designed with simplicity in mind and is made up of three main screens – one for the menu, the second for your playlist and what's playing, and the third for your list of Bluesound players. You simply swipe between them to get to where you want.

The menu page is where you'll find access to local sources and streaming services and playlists, as well as the information you need to set up and configure your player.

Grouping players together to play in a multiroom set-up is done by a simple button-tap. This means all speakers in that group will play the same music. Or you can choose to play music independently, and control all of it from your single device.

Perhaps the only thing we'd add is a 3.5mm socket, but it's no huge omission.

You'll need to download the app (free on iOS and Android, see panel) to control it whether you're using it solo or as part of a multiroom set-up.

No discrimination

Part of the beauty of the Bluesound system is its inclusive outlook, offering high-res music support up to 24-bit/192kHz alongside a handful of the most popular streaming services, including Spotify, Rdio, Deezer, Qobuz and TuneIn Radio. It can't quite match the 30 services currently available through Sonos, but it should cover most bases. We'd like to see Google Play Music and Napster added next, while Pandora would be a good addition for the US.

We hook up the Powernode to a pair of Q Acoustics Concept 20 speakers to get going. Using the app, the Bluesound is able to pick out our NAS drive on the same network and display its contents, artwork and all, under the local library tab.

We start off with a 24-bit/96kHz resolution file of Dire Straits' *Money for Nothing*. Sting's opening falsetto vocal is portrayed with softness and subtlety, the warm electronic sequence that beds down underneath it agile and exciting in contrast.

When the drums kick in they're tight and controlled, hitting with the urgency that helps build the track up to the song's iconic guitar riff. By the time we get there, we're in full-on air-guitar mode. It's lucky our listening rooms don't have windows...

When the drums kick in, they're tight and controlled, hitting with the urgency that builds the track up to the song's iconic guitar riff. By the time we get there, we're in full air-guitar mode. It's lucky our listening rooms don't have windows...

(unamplified, for hooking into an existing system) and the Pulse (an all-in-one speaker system), both of which act similarly to the Powernode, plus the Vault (see panel) and the Duo – a 2.1 speaker package.

Unusual cube

Taking a look at its design, the Powernode is shaped like a cube off-axis, with an aluminium band going around the middle, and the volume control placed on the top.

The rest of the chassis is made from a choice of black or white gloss plastic, which looks nice enough but does feel a little insubstantial when you pick it up.

While the Bluesound range might be aimed at people who place audio performance above all else, that doesn't mean they're going to put up with a clunky experience to get it, and Bluesound has

worked hard at making sure that is not the case. After getting the Powernode out of the box and powering it up, the first thing to do is get it onto your home network. The quick-start guide walks you through the steps to do this, with the LED on the top-mounted mute button glowing solid blue once it's successfully connected.

It's worth remembering that streaming high-res audio over wi-fi is pretty bandwidth-intensive and you'll want to make sure your router and/or network is up to it. Consider hardwiring the Powernode if you have a busy network, or you may experience intermittent dropouts.

The Powernode features two stereo speaker outputs and a subwoofer out, alongside an ethernet socket and A-type USB port for external hard drives or for adding a Bluetooth dongle, for example.

Plenty of functionality but no compromise on the treatment of high-res music files

Bluesound Vault £899

The Bluesound Vault is an all-in-one music streamer and CD ripper, offering 1TB of on-board storage and the ability to rip CDs in bit-perfect lossless FLAC without the need for a computer.

It will also search out any other music stored on the network, in NAS drives or on computers, and bundle it all together with its own for seamless streaming to other Bluesound devices, or by connecting it up

to an existing system via its stereo outs. There's even the ability to bolster your high-res music collection by downloading directly from the Highresaudio online store onto the Vault's hard drive via the app.

In use, we found it to be as smooth and problem-free as the Powernode, with CDs ripping quickly and reindexing without issue. It does need to be hardwired to your network at all times, though.



Ready for Bluetooth

The Pownode's already-ample connectivity includes an A-type USB input, to which you can attach a Bluetooth dongle (typically £10-12) and expand your wireless capability



and starting with superb timing, the bass notes reaching deep and the cymbal rhythm completely free of harshness.

It's superbly balanced - there's a slight smoothing of the treble at the top end, but it's done in a way that never dulls the presentation. It remains exciting and enthusiastic throughout - great for lower-res recordings - but is also capable of being pensive and brooding.

Into the stream

We change tack and opt for streaming some music via Spotify, a process that is achieved via Spotify Connect (you'll need a premium subscription).

Once you've added your login details within the Bluesound app, it will appear under the streaming services tab and clicking it will open the full Spotify app on your device.

Going from high-res tracks to 320kbps is always going to show in the listening, but the way the Pownode has been

acoustically balanced is very clever indeed. Of course there is a drop in detail and transparency, but it's just as listenable, offering an endlessly entertaining presentation that complements its high-resolution capabilities nicely.

We play N.O.R.E.'s *Nothin'*, and the Pownode jumps to life, sounding rich and weighty, yet light enough on its feet to keep up. There's a real warmth to the bass here, which is predictably less defined, but still punchy, with enough clarity across the frequency range to keep us from switching back to high-res immediately. The level of choice in streaming services has always been their strong point, and it works to good effect here.

The Pownode is one of the most musical systems we've heard of this ilk, presenting itself in a very likeable manner indeed. Squeezing both streaming and amplification smarts into a box of this size is no mean feat, but to get it looking good and sounding better is even tougher.

USE IT WITH**iPad Air**

The Bluesound app looks great on the iPad Air, which is still our favourite full-sized tablet.



What really makes this a product to be reckoned with, though, is its user experience. The app has been well designed and carefully considered on both phone and tablet, making it simple and seamless to jump between the music on your various home network sources and your streaming service playlists.

The Pownode is a superb way for hi-fi fans and audiophiles to get their high-res kicks while enjoying the flexibility of streaming services, all on a system that's ready to go multiroom with the purchase of a second component.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Capable of 24-bit/192kHz; highly musical; exciting and dynamic; well balanced; taut bass; expressive midrange; great control app

AGAINST Slightly cheap-feeling construction

VERDICT Multiroom has finally come to hi-fi, and it's been worth the wait for something this good

Dali Rubicon 2 | Stereo speakers | £1600

An expression of all-round quality

Speed, agility, balance. This trio of physical facets doesn't just apply to the sporting world, but the speaker world too. Dali's Rubicon 2s tick all these boxes, and then some...

The new Rubicon range sits just below the company's high-end Epicon line of loudspeakers. The 2s, the second rung on the Rubicon ladder, use the same 29mm soft-dome tweeter found in the Epicon and also feature Dali's trademark SMC (Soft Magnetic Compound) magnet system designed to reduce distortion.

Dali doesn't seem to know how to make an ugly speaker. The company's budget offerings always look and feel beautifully made, and at this price the Rubicons go to another level. They're available in four finishes: high-gloss black, high-gloss white, Rosso and Walnut (pictured here). Each cabinet boasts a subtle curve both front and back which adds to their elegant appearance. The rear is punctuated by a bass port and chunky speaker terminals. Round the front you can see the soft-dome tweeter above a 16.5cm wood-fibre driver.

Space to breathe

Positioning the Dalis requires a little care. You're not going to want the Rubicon 2s hugging a rear wall - the positioning of the ports means bass does get boomy, especially at high volumes, but as long as they're given around 30cm or more breathing space you'll be fine. As with all Dali speakers, the Rubicons have been designed with wide dispersion of sound in mind. There's no need to toe them in, as the dispersion comes with excellent stereo imaging as part of the package.

Play Nina Simone's *I Put A Spell On You* and every element hangs beautifully, the piano and double bass just right of centre with percussion floating just above. Simone's expressive and emotive vocal blends warmly and then the sax kicks in, punctuating the relative calm with its natural rawness of tone. The Rubicons really paint a vivid, involving picture.

The speakers are as happy floating along to Nina as they are rampaging along to the track *Mombasa*, taken from the *Inception* soundtrack. Here the Dali's hit with force. There's plenty of bass weight - providing you take care with positioning relative to the rear wall. The trick is to keep those taut, precise edges. We notice the Rubicons flex more muscle and sound more robust when you crank up the volume, although they're hardly limp or lacklustre at low levels.

But it's the pace and dexterity of the Dalis that really makes you sit up and take notice. There's real agility and nimbleness to the sound that makes long-standing favourites, such as the £1200 ATC SCM 11s, sound a tad ponderous and wallowing. The Dalis never miss a beat to Lady GaGa's *Starstruck* and they inject so much pace and tension into *Why Do We Fall* from *The Dark Knight* OST you're moved to the edge of your seat despite the fact you can't see

Big brothers take to the floor

The 2s are part of a new Rubicon range which also includes larger floorstanders in the shape of the '5' (£2400), '6' (£3000) and '8' (£4000) as well as the wall-mounted LCR.

Elegant, subtle curves and first-rate build quality - plus the choice of four finishes



the film. There are dynamics, scale and authority in abundance.

The Dali Rubicon 2s are quite the standmounter. They're an expressive and enthusiastic listen with little to fault. If you hadn't guessed, we're big fans.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Superb build quality; wonderfully agile and nimble sound; excellent stereo imaging; expressive midrange

AGAINST Need a little care with positioning

VERDICT Blessed with breathtaking speed and agility, the Rubicon 2s are seriously entertaining

Also consider

ATC SCM 11 £1200 ★★★★★

A beautifully balanced, insightful sound. And part of our reference kit.



System builder total build £3720

CD player

Naim CD5si ★★★★★ £995

Bucketloads of enthusiasm and energy. The level of musicality on offer makes this the perfect starting point for the system.



Stereo amplifier

Naim Nait 5si ★★★★★ £925

A dynamic-sounding amp that's full of character. The obvious partner for its CD stablemate.



Speaker stands

Custom Design FS104 Signature ★★★★★ £200

Load these stands up with inert filler and they'll allow the Rubicons' control and precision to shine.



"THE A100 MAY LOOK LIKE A STYLE
BASED PRODUCT BUT IT'S CAPABLE
OF PROPER HI-FI SOUND."

What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision. August 2014



What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision
August 2014



What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision
Monitor Audio A100



reddot award 2014
winner



airstream A100

2 x 50W • CLASS A/B AMPLIFIERS • HIGH RESOLUTION DAC • AIRPLAY® • AIRSTREAM DIRECT • DLNA®

THE BRIDGE BETWEEN HIFI & WIFI

The AirPlay® enabled A100 is a next generation network-ready amplifier built for the way we play music today. It combines the latest wireless streaming technologies with finest audio system design, to bridge the divide between a world of digital music and your hi-fi speakers.

Roku Streaming Stick | MediaStreamer | £50

TVs walk tall with this Stick

Televisions are getting alarmingly smart these days. Catch-up services, on-demand content and mobile device integration are now all standard features.

But what if you don't have a Smart TV? Should you be left out in the cold if your older set is still working nicely and doesn't yet need replacing? No, says Roku, whose Streaming Stick comes in very handy. It makes your TV a lot smarter by giving it wireless connectivity and a wealth of apps.

Aptly named

So about the name, the Roku Streaming Stick. It's a stick, and it streams. Let's start with the 'stick' part. It's more like a dongle - at about 8cm long and 2cm wide, it's not much bigger than a USB flash drive. The build quality is good: it's small, it's not fragile.

On one end is an HDMI plug for connecting to your TV. The other end features a microUSB port for power. You'll have to connect a USB cable - either into the TV or the bundled mains adaptor - because the HDMI port doesn't provide power.

The Stick's secret weapon is the ability to 'cast'; choose content on a mobile app, tap the cast button and play it on your TV

It's not the neatest of set-ups, but then again it's hidden behind the TV and you're unlikely to see it. One potential issue is the width of the device: it's a little wider than the average HDMI plug, so if your TV is tight for space you might find it a squeeze.

The set-up process is simple. Once it starts up, you're invited to connect to your wi-fi network. As soon as you do this, the Streaming Stick downloads the latest firmware - a process that takes us about three minutes. Then you're invited to go to the Roku website to open a free account. This is a neat way of choosing the apps you want, although you can also do it on the Stick itself using the remote. Whatever you choose on the website will automatically be downloaded onto the stick. That's it.

Essentials and eccentrics

The app offering - 'channels', as Roku insists on calling them - is generous. There are over 1000 in the Channel Store and more are being added all the time. Admittedly, most are very niche (Ringtone Channel, anyone?) but there are also plenty of essentials: YouTube, Spotify, BBC iPlayer, 4oD, Demand 5, Netflix, NowTV and



Minority interest

The Roku's app offering is nothing if not quirky. It includes the wonderful *Stop It Or You'll Go Blind* - a cache of old public information films, since you ask.

Amazon Instant Video. Choose the ones you want and they'll be stored in the 'My Channels' section for easy access.

Operation is about as simple as it gets, with an interface that's intuitive (and purple). Scrolling through menus is a slick experience, and button presses are obeyed instantly. Once you select an app, it takes about 10 seconds to load - about average for a TV app.

The remote control is a joy to use. It's a proper wand rather than the brittle 'card' type we so often see. It's ergonomic, responsive, and easy to navigate. It also pairs wirelessly with the Stick, so you don't need to worry about line of sight.

If you don't want to use that you can use the Roku app, free on Android and iOS. This gives you all the controls of the physical

This is a remote of substance, simple to understand and operate yet solidly made. It also pairs wirelessly with its Stick partner so you don't have to worry about maintaining line of sight

remote, but adds a full QWERTY keyboard - useful for those pesky alphanumeric passwords with capital letters.

The Streaming Stick's secret weapon is the ability to 'cast'. This means choosing content on a mobile app, tapping the cast button and playing it on your TV through the Stick. It doesn't actually play anything from your mobile; it goes off to fetch the content from the internet while your portable device acts as menu and remote control.

This feature is fairly new, and is the party trick of the Google Chromecast. At the moment, the Roku does everything the Chromecast can do, with the exception of desktop mirroring.

Apps that support casting are slowly becoming more prevalent, but at the moment there are only a few major players: BBC iPlayer, Netflix, YouTube, Google Play Movies and Music.

Good picture performance

The Streaming Stick performs very well. The 1080p picture could be a little sharper, but in general we are happy with the texture and colour reproduction. It's certainly as good as some of the built-in apps on smart TVs.

As for audio, the Stick supports Dolby Digital - although if you use it with an AV receiver it can handle up to 7.1 surround sound passthrough. Sound is solid, and there's a good amount of detail.

Much of this depends on your internet connection, but even on a 3mbps connection we find download speeds just fine. Once loaded, content rarely ever stuttered or skipped.

The Roku Streaming Stick does a very specific job and does it very well. If you have a shiny new flagship TV, this isn't for you. But if you have an older set without internet connection, or if you just want more features and viewing options, you will find this an indispensable tool.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Good picture and sound; features are plentiful and versatile

AGAINST Power supply arrangement could be neater; chunky design may not fit smaller spaces

VERDICT If you have an older TV, this streaming stick is an instant hit

Also consider

Apple TV
£79 ★★★★★

It's a bit pricier, but if you've bought into Apple's ecosystem this is a great way of watching your own content on your TV.



QED Reference Optical Quartz

Cables Matter No.8

GLASSCORE TECHNOLOGY™

QED's new Glasscore™ technology uses techniques more usually found in transatlantic data transmission applications. Instead of the large single plastic fibre found in a typical optical cable, it employs 210 individual glass optical fibres (GOF), each thinner than a human hair. Because the fibres are so small, the different paths taken by the light rays are similar in length, virtually eliminating the timing error and introducing less distortion and jitter. This has the effect of increasing the bandwidth and accuracy of the data transmission.



ULTRA LOW JITTER / ULTRA LOW LOSS

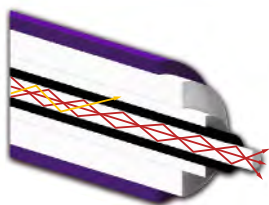


QED have calculated that jitter (distortions caused by timing differences between the different light paths) in conventional optical cables could typically reach up to 145ps. In Reference Optical Quartz, these timing errors are virtually eliminated, introducing less distortion, jitter and ultra low loss (<0.03 dB/m).

12MHz BANDWIDTH

This vastly exceeds the demands for high definition multi-channel HD digital audio and 24/192 files. In contrast to conventional optical cables, the bandwidth is completely unaffected by bending the cable. Reference Optical Quartz gives over double the bandwidth of single acrylic glass fibres, which will reach only 5MHz to 6MHz with ten times the attenuation.

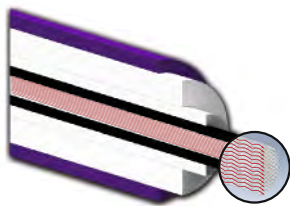
CONVENTIONAL OPTICAL CABLE



A single acrylic fibre allows the light to take many different length paths along it.

Timing differences are introduced – accounting for typically up to 145ps of jitter.

QED REFERENCE OPTICAL QUARTZ



210 Glasscore™ fibres, each thinner than a human hair, guide the light along much tighter paths, making the different modes much more uniform and displaying almost immeasurably low levels of jitter.

The revolutionary QED Reference Optical Quartz digital audio interconnect made with real glass.

The Reference Optical Quartz cable is the first of its kind, consisting 210 separate boro-silicate glass fibres. When connecting DACs, TVs, CD players and Blu-Ray players to amplifiers or receivers, this QED Glasscore™ Technology enables double the bandwidth and only 1/10th of the attenuation of traditional acrylic fibres.

The result is without doubt one of the most innovative digital cable designs in QED's 40 year history.

To find out more about why cables matter, please visit our website.



The Sound of Science

www.qed.co.uk

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HIGH-RES MUSIC MULTI-ROOM WIRELESS



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AVAILABLE EXCLUSIVELY AT SEVENOAKS SOUND & VISION STORES

Samsung UE48HU7500 | 4K Television | £1600

Samsung's little 4K star

4K isn't exactly new anymore, but we've only awarded the full five stars to a 4K telly very recently. That TV? Samsung's awesome UE65HU7500, which delivers on the dream of super-sharp 4K brilliance without sacrificing the quality of HD and SD.

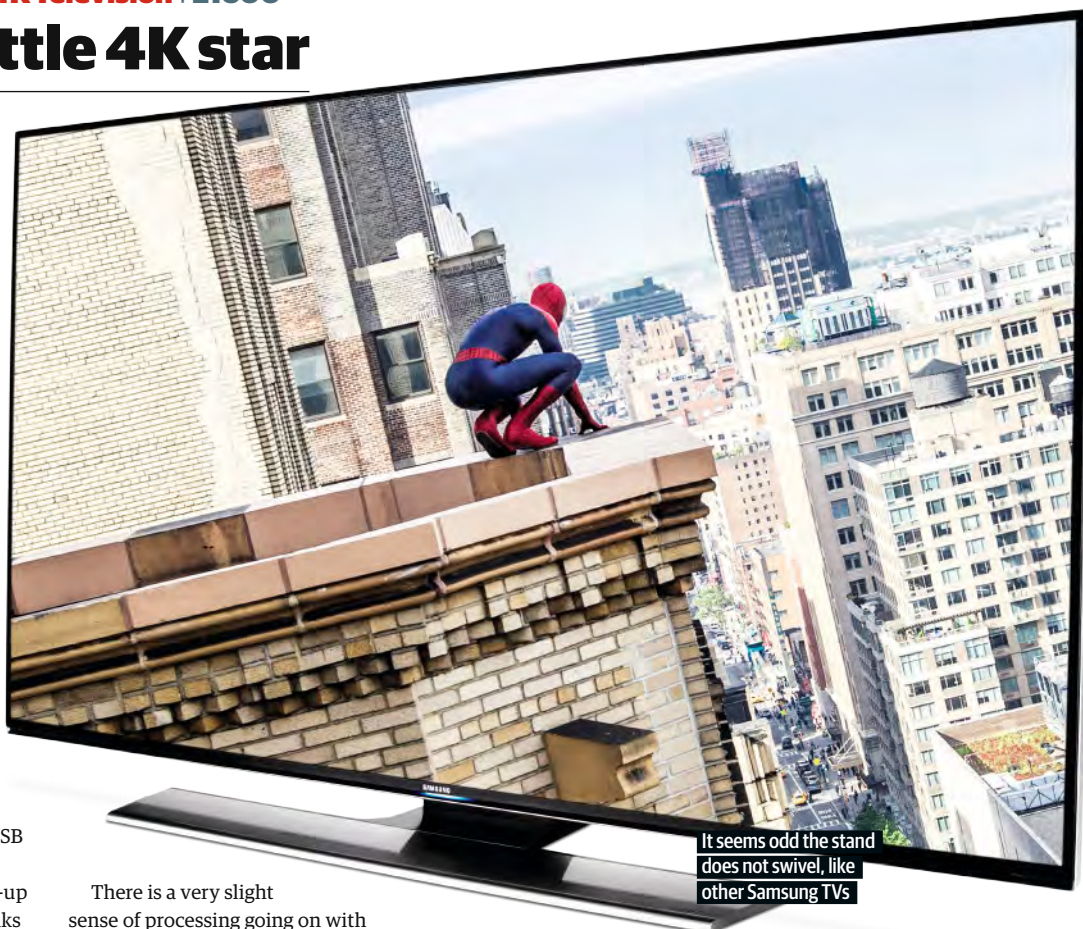
Size matters

But what if 65in is just a bit too big for your room? Well, that's where its 48in brother, the UE48HU7500, comes in. Unsurprisingly, this looks like a slightly miniaturised version of the 65in model. A lovely thin bezel means the front is almost all screen, and the overall design is very smart but uncharacteristically subtle for a Samsung. It seems odd the stand doesn't swivel, especially as others in the Samsung range do, but the footprint is small enough and the overall set light enough to make moving it easy.

As you'd expect from a premium TV, there are plenty of connections: three USB and four HDMI, plus both satellite and aerial connections for broadcast TV. Set-up is easy: THX Optimizer-led picture tweaks aside, you will be watching your new TV in less than 10 minutes. Of course, you're immediately going to log-in to Netflix and hunt *Breaking Bad* or *House of Cards*, two shows currently available for streaming in 4K. Both look superb on the UE48HU7500, with *House of Cards* in particular supremely sharp and detailed.

The Hub of the matter

A press of the Smart Hub button brings up a row of tiles representing a mixture of channels, apps and inputs, where you will find the usual suspects (YouTube, Wuaki, games and on-demand content). It's well thought out and designed, and easy to use. So the UE48HU7500 is plenty smart enough, but actually no more so than Samsung's other 2014 smart TVs, such as the terrific, Full HD UE48H6400 (which is £900 cheaper than this set). That jump may be worth it for 4K content, but only if there aren't any sacrifices elsewhere. And in our opinion, there aren't.



There is a very slight sense of processing going on with its Full HD image - no surprise given how much work the TV's having to do to upscale images to fit its native 3840 x 2160 resolution - but that's only really noticeable under serious scrutiny and side-by-side comparison. To all intents and purposes, what you're getting is a picture that's just as detailed and sharp as the Full HD model.

In some ways it's even better. Activate the 'Smart LED' mode and contrast jumps up considerably, with inky-deep blacks combining with bright, pure whites to produce a picture with more punch.

The UE48HU7500 has a more neutral colour palette by default, too. In essence, then, when watching both standard definition and HD the HU7500 is more or less a match for the best non-4K TV of this size that Samsung has so far offered this year. So you can have your 4K cake without making your existing Blu-rays or DVDs any less tasty. Everything sounds pretty good, too - clear, loud and fairly punchy by flatscreen standards.



The Smart Hub key on the remote takes you straight to the TV's smart features

The ultimate value of 4K is, of course, up to you, the end user - but as to whether 4K resolution is even noticeable at 48in, the answer is a resounding 'yes'. If the size is right for you, we certainly recommend taking the plunge.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Beautiful 4K; no sacrifice at lower resolutions; dynamic, natural pictures

AGAINST Price; no swivel on stand

VERDICT Some very minor flaws, but if you can afford it, this is a fabulous way to go 4K at a smaller screen size

Also consider

Samsung UE48H6400
£700 ★★★★★

If you can live without 4K, this excellent smart Full HD model is also 48in



System builder total build £1796

Streaming service

Netflix ★★★★★ From £5.99 p/m

Even with the £1 increase, this is the best TV and film streaming service out there on the market. Has 4K content like *Breaking Bad* and *House of Cards*, too.

NETFLIX

Blu-ray player

Panasonic DMP BDT700 ★★★★★ £500

A smart-featured, upmarket player that impresses with breathtaking contrast, pin-sharp details and smooth motion.



Smartphone

Samsung Galaxy S5

★★★★☆

Has the smarts to act as a second remote control for compatible Samsung TVs.



Panasonic DMP-BDT700 | Blu-ray player | £500

Panasonic's top player throws its hat in the ring

The Panasonic's brushed-aluminium finish adds class



Why pay £500 for a Blu-ray player when you can pick up a decent one for less than £100? As this flagship Panasonic DMP-BDT700 shows, it's all about performance.

The Panasonic has 4K Ultra HD upscaling alongside its 3D Blu-ray qualities, smart features and extensive file compatibility inside its sleek casing - but its picture quality is what justifies that premium price.

Taking on the champ

Its biggest (only) rival is Marantz's UD7007, which has dominated this category for the past few years. Is the BDT700 up to the task of dethroning this long-standing favourite?

The picture looks fantastic. Play the *Pacific Rim* Blu-ray, and we're immediately captivated by the rich, punchy hues, the intense black levels, the bright whites and incredible level of detail. The DMP-BDT700 is a confident player, juggling high contrast scenes and skin tones easily.

Colours are beautifully balanced and the DMP-BDT700's excellent contrast makes for a bold and riveting picture. Stream the *Sin City 2: A Dame To Kill For* trailer on YouTube and the inky blacks, stark whites and crisply drawn lines of the highly stylised film are faithfully portrayed. Streaming quality is stable and clean, too.

Switch to test favourite *The Adventures of Tintin* and the Panasonic shows off its smooth handling of motion. It doesn't put a foot out of place during that exhilarating chase through the streets of Baghar. We know it's an animated film, but the texture of jumpers, metal pipes, Snowy's fur and the sea are tangible - the subtlety the Panasonic describes is astounding. *Tintin* is a great disc for 3D too, and the Panasonic remains dynamic and lively despite the slightly darkened scene. The sense of depth and motion is also good. It's a crisper, smoother and cleaner picture than any

budget alternatives we've seen. This is most apparent with upscaled DVDs: *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* may be over 25 years old, but the Panasonic delivers such a noise-free picture, with clean lines and bright colours, we almost forget we're not watching it on native 1080p.

Big hitter with a solid build

The 7.1 channel sound is clear and detailed, too. Power, scale and dynamics are all heard in Hans Zimmer's soundtrack for *Rush*. It's perhaps not as robust as the Marantz's sound, and could do with more weight in the midrange, but it's certainly precise and zippy. In the hi-fi and AV world, physical heft often indicates quality, so we're pleased the Panasonic has a solid build.

The unit is sleek, minimal, and the brushed-aluminium finish adds class. Touch controls for power, play, stop and eject/close are placed flush on the top, and are quick to respond. The display and loading tray are hidden underneath a magnetic flap (it closes with a pleasing snap), leaving the fascia clean and uncluttered when not in use. The display is

Play *Pacific Rim* Blu-ray, and we're immediately captivated by the rich, punchy hues, the intense black levels, the bright whites and level of detail. The Panasonic is a confident Blu-ray player

System builder total build £6350

Television

Samsung UE55HU7500
★★★★★ £2200

A fine 4K screen that performs strongly across all other resolutions.



Home cinema amplifier

Pioneer SC-LX57
★★★★★ £800

Our Award-winning AV receiver has had a £400 price-cut, which makes its precise, agile sound and impressive subtlety all the more exciting to hear.



Speaker package

KEF R100 5.1
★★★★★ £2850

With powerful dynamics, pleasing detail and gorgeous looks, this is a talented speaker package.





practical and easy to read, while the disc loading tray works smoothly. Loading times are speedy too.

Nudge nudge, wink wink

Speaking of which, do you, like us, nudge the tray close instead of pressing the appropriate button? The Panasonic stubbornly doesn't allow you to do that. We do like the convenience of just pushing the tray in after loading a disc, but maybe the Panasonic can break the habit of a lifetime.

The remote control is nicely built, with buttons and shortcuts logically laid out. It's backlit too, so easy to use in a dark room.

As expected, the Panasonic throws in all the smart features you'd find on a top-range TV: BBC iPlayer, Netflix and YouTube, as well as a web browser. You can stream internet radio using Aupeol!, while social media is here in Facebook and Twitter.

The player's smart interface is one we recognise from nearly two years ago. It's a shame that it's not the excellent My Home Screen found on new Panasonic TVs. Still, the Blu-ray player's interface and home menus are neatly laid out in large tiles and work without a hitch.

File compatibility for the DMP-BDT700 is respectable: MP3, WAV, WMA, AAC, Apple Lossless, MKV, MP4, Xvid and JPEG files, including high-res FLAC files (24-bit/192kHz in stereo; 24-bit/96kHz in 5.1 channel). Unlike rivals, such as the Marantz UD7007, the Panasonic doesn't play older high-res formats like DVD-A and SACD.

Well connected to say the least

The Panasonic is equipped with two HDMI 2.0 outputs capable of upscaling up to 4K/60p video streams. You will also find single coaxial and optical outputs on the back, while those with older amplifiers can connect using the 7.1 multi-channel audio outputs. A pair of RCA phono outputs are also available.

You can connect to your home network using either ethernet or the built-in wi-fi facility; both methods are stable when streaming content. With DLNA compatibility on board, you can stream media stored on any laptop, smartphone, tablet or NAS device, provided they're all plugged into the same network as the Blu-ray player.

The display and loading tray are hidden under a magnetic flap



USE IT WITH Pacific Rim Blu-ray

Giant robots fight giant monsters in this hugely entertaining film that's a feast for the eyes.

In detail



The touch controls are responsive and easy to operate in a dark room, the icons glowing briefly when you press them.



Thanks to file support, you can play films and high-res audio through the USB port, while the SD card slot supports 4K photos.

Is the Panasonic DMP-BDT700 a potential Award-winner? It certainly proves itself worthy, both in its class-leading technology and picture performance. It delivers such a gorgeous picture with Blu-rays and DVDs that the Marantz UD7007 has plenty to worry about. If you're looking for a premium Blu-ray player to match your premium home cinema system, then this classy Panasonic DMP-BDT700 fits the bill.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Crisp and clear picture; deep, inky blacks and punchy whites; excellent subtlety; smooth and stable motion; great upscaling; sturdy build

AGAINST Sound could be a touch more robust

VERDICT The best premium Blu-ray player we've tested this year

Needs to beat

Marantz UD7007 £500 ★★★★★

Marantz's range-topping Blu-ray player enjoys a £200 price drop. It remains a strong option, with fine picture quality and sound.



Different Class



A lifetime of electronics design expertise has led to Arcam's finest ever amplifier, the new A49 integrated amplifier. Its ultra-refined class G topology represents the pinnacle of Arcam's engineering heritage and sets new standards of performance. An audition will confirm that power is nothing without control.

ARCAM

www.arcam.co.uk

Shure SRH1540 | Headphones | £470

Heads up for a real treat

We've long been acquainted with Shure's great-sounding, comfortable headphones – and it is business as usual with its new closed-back over-ears.

Once their super-soft pads (they're actually covered in Alcantara – suede-like material more commonly used on car seats) bear-hug your ears, it's hard to part with them. Comfortably enveloping and roomy inside, they're the sort you could fall asleep wearing and they make perfect company to carry you through album after album.

Peel off the pads and you'll get a glimpse of the 40mm neodymium drivers buried inside the earcups. The oval cups might be big (not monstrosously so), making them less-than-ideal travel partners, but their aluminium alloy and carbon-fibre construction mean they're surprisingly light at only 286g.

If you think the price looks high, you won't once you've heard (and felt) these Shures perform

There's a seamless fluidity that lesser cans struggle to match, and stark insight into each struck key. Dynamically, they are really telling, and the subtlety they unmask is class-leading

That makes it easy for the headband, which rests lightly on your head thanks to two strips of leather cushioning. Flexible and easily stretchable, they'll comfortably accommodate any head size.

Ample accessories

A dual-exit cable – one wire connected to each earcup – has a 3.5mm end that fits into your portable device, but a 6.5mm gold-plated adapter for use with higher-end systems comes supplied too. Also in the box is a hard-shell travel case, as well as an extra cable and pair of ear pads to swap in when the others eventually wear out.

And you'll want them to last as long as possible – the Shures perform superbly. You

only need a moment with them to appreciate their dynamic and diligently detailed sound. Their broad sonic presentation serves up a nice spread that's easy on the ears, and their balance never leans either side of neutral.

Play something upbeat such as Michael Jackson's *Billie Jean* and the Shures are fanatical: they hit hard on the distinct bassline, and their fast, nimble manner handles the song's subtle rhythmic shifts effortlessly. Bubbly and naturally musical, they are a real treat to listen to.

Bringing them down a notch with the introductory piano sequence in Daft Punk's *Within*, there's a seamless fluidity to notes that lesser cans struggle to match, and stark insight into each struck key. Dynamically, they are really telling, and the subtlety they unmask is truly class-leading.

All kinds of music

The Shures really do lay music bare, regardless of genre. After the energy of Daft Punk, we quieten down with The Sundays' *Wild Horses* and the 1540s hang onto every quiver of Harriett Wheeler's soaring vocals. The acoustic-led instrumental accompaniment is clear and textured, and the intricate strings of notes are tangible.

USE IT WITH

Audiolab M-DAC

This has a top-quality headphone amp, plus 24-bit/192kHz support, and supplies a detailed, agile sound.



Basking in the same five-star success as their big-brothers (the SHR1840s, £600), the SHR1540s amount to another outstanding effort from Shure. Looking for a great sound that you can enjoy in pampering comfort all day long? Give these a go. You know you want to.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Expansive, open, beautifully balanced, detailed, driven sound; cosy, roomy fit; light

AGAINST Nothing

VERDICT Another success story for Shure, the SHR1540s are 100 per cent worthy of their price – and your attention

Also consider

Grado SR325e
£300 ★★★★★

An open design, which limits use, but direct, musical and very exciting



Material benefits



Alcantara The roomy earcups are finished in a supremely comfortable suede-like material



*** Pioneer PLX-1000**

A DJ-quality turntable designed for those who "enjoy the look, feel and performance of vinyl".
<http://whfcm/PioneerTurntable>

**Television**

The TV is dead, long live the TV?

With ever more ways to view video content, should the TV be concerned for its future?

In the battle to deliver the most headline-grabbing TV of the year, LG and Samsung have released 105in curved 5K (yes, 5K!) televisions. And it's not just pie-in-the-sky: these TVs are available to pre-order in South Korea and the US respectively.

With these state-of-the-art sets breaking cover and pushing TV tech yet further, it looks like the trusty TV isn't going anywhere but forward. But just where are these advances taking us? And are there any serious challenges to the TV's future?

Good things come in large packages?

The first thing to note is that our appetite for large screens and higher resolutions seems to be growing. According to Thinkbox, 98.5 per cent of all TV viewing was done through a traditional set last year. The growing trend for bigger screens in our homes saw 16 per cent of sets bought in the UK being over 43in last year - four per cent up on 2012. In total, seven out of every 10 TVs bought in 2013 were classed as big (ie more than 26in).

And those screens are changing. Plasma has fallen by the wayside, and OLED has gone a bit quiet, leaving LCD/LED as the driving technology. There's also the question

of curves - designs of which may not be so living-room friendly but promise to deliver a more immersive experience.

Futuresource Consulting reported a "weak performance" from the global TV market last year, but it's set to bounce back - and 4K has a large role to play. While Ultra HD will make up five per cent of 2014 sales, it will be 42 per cent by 2018.

Content remains an issue, but it's not for the want of trying. The BBC has explored two means of 4K broadcasting - via the digital terrestrial network and internet protocol - and Japan has carried out a trial broadcast via satellite, all to explore how UHD pictures can be distributed. The likes of Netflix and YouTube are of course pushing 4K, too.

In search of another dimension

3D TV was noticeable by its absence at the football World Cup - an event that is no stranger to being a test-bed for TV innovations. 4K stole the limelight, with 3D but a memory of four years previous. With both the BBC and ESPN dropping 3D services, is 3D already on the scrapheap?

"No" is the answer. Futuresource says the UK market for 3D is - at worst - "polarised".

The inexorable rise of TV tech:
 both LG and Samsung are taking
 preorders for their new 105in
 (deep breath) 5K curved sets

**UK TV****FACTS & FIGURES**

98.5% of TV was watched on a TV set during 2013

88.7% of "linear TV" watched live

55% of tablet owners use their device for viewing TV content

34.5 inches - the average TV screen size in UK homes

15% of young adults watch most of their TV on a laptop

3hrs 52 - average daily TV viewing



* Wharfedale DS-1

This new desktop active speaker system comes with aptX Bluetooth connectivity
<http://whfcm/WharfedaleDS1>



Sales of smart TVs are expected to rise to 87 per cent by 2018, and Thinkbox believes this could drive some on-demand viewing from tablets, laptops etc back onto the TV set

Virgin and BSkyB continue to commit to 3D, and with a forecast 166 per cent hike in 3D TV sales by 2017, more enabled sets may well mean more 3D services too. That said, we think 3D TV looks set to remain a niche interest for the foreseeable.

Sweet streams are made by TVs

There's no doubt future TV will be smarter than ever. Sales of smart TVs, 39 per cent of the market in 2013, are set to rise to 87 per cent by 2018 according to Thinkbox. This could mean that much of the on-demand viewing currently taking place on tablets and laptops will move back to TVs.

Services such as Netflix are changing *how* we watch TV, but not necessarily what we use to watch TV. Our appetite for larger screens is a key factor - we can enjoy better clarity, better sound and a more immersive viewing experience than we can on, say, a tablet.

Upwardly mobile?

If mobile devices are to challenge TV's position, 4G might be the way to do it. It has been trialled as a broadcast method by the BBC and Nokia Networks. Instead of streaming content to a device over a mobile network,

Big curves: Samsung and LG have both started to make their room-filling, 105in curved Ultra HD sets available to pre-order this summer

the BBC says it involves connecting to one single broadcast of data, taking the strain off networks. It is, however, still some way off.

The future is bright...

Despite the huge growth in popularity of smartphones and tablets, our love affair with TVs shows no sign of ending. So it's no surprise they remain some of the most forward-thinking slabs of technology in our homes. Bigger, smarter, sporting more pixels, curved, 4K, 5K - the future of TV is going to be interesting.



For more news, reviews and buying advice, visit whatif.com

TV in the 21st Century: Showing Now



Ultra HD 4K

What is it? 4K is the next-generation format, which boasts a resolution four times higher than Full HD.

Any issues? A "lack of public awareness", relatively high prices and a lack of readily available content are the main issues checking 4K's growth for now.



3D TV

What is it? 3D TV is the technology that literally adds an extra dimension to your video content.

Any issues? In the UK, the BBC has pulled the plug on 3D for the time being. But BSkyB and Virgin still have faith - so is it just a temporary blip?



4G/LTE broadcasting

What is it? The broadcast of a single stream via 4G that you can connect to with mobile devices without congesting conventional networks.

Any issues? It's still very much at the trial phase and unlikely to be commercially implemented soon.

* ADL EH-008

These in-ears feature drivers that have been treated by Furutech's Alpha process, involving freezing and demagnetising...
<http://whfcm/ADLEH008>



1 Marantz products from £230

Marantz has unveiled four new products: two AV receivers, a CD player and a stereo amplifier. The SR6009 and SR7009 AV receivers feature Bluetooth wireless streaming and Apple AirPlay; the SR7009 has support for Dolby Atmos too. The CD5005 CD player features an upgraded 24-bit/192kHz DAC and can support a variety of file formats including CD-RW and WMA. Finally the PM5005 stereo amp features 55 Watts per channel into four ohms and the latest Marantz "feedback architecture" - something usually reserved for more expensive models. For more information, head to <http://whfcm/MarantzHomeCinema>



TOP 5 New launches

3 Devialet Ensemble £6290

The Ensemble compact system comprises the Devialet 120 and a pair of special edition GT1 speakers along with a set of 3.5mm speaker cables from French company Atohm. The speakers have been made specifically for Devialet and the 120 offers 120 watts per channel. The 120 is available to purchase on its own for £4490. <http://whfcm/DevialetEnsemble>



2 Magico M Project £130,000

Got a spare £130,000 and fancy a new pair of speakers? The Magico M Projects could be the ones for you. Featuring a three-way, five-driver assembly, these floorstanding speakers have a curved shape to minimise internal resonance. And, standing at 145cm by 57cm deep and 37cm wide, they're not exactly what you'd call small. <http://whfcm/MagicoMProject>



4 Quad Vena £600

The Vena is Quad's first hi-fi separate to feature wireless music streaming support. A wide range of digital and analogue inputs are on offer, along with aptX Bluetooth. The same 24-bit/192kHz DAC found in the Platinum CD player can be found in the Vena, as well as a Class AB power amp and headphone output. Arriving in Lancaster Grey, three premium finishes - including Rosewood - will be unveiled towards the end of the year for a £100 premium <http://whfcm/QuadVena>



5 Paradigm Soundbars from £800

Paradigm has announced two new soundbars - the Soundscape and the Soundtrack 2. The Soundscape features four composite-cone mid/bass drivers and uses proprietary DSP technology to direct sound. The Soundtrack 2 features a wireless sub and Virtual Surround technology. <http://whfcm/ParadigmSoundbars>



Our SuperUniti all-in-one system will unleash your digital music with high-resolution UPnP™ streaming, internet and DAB/FM radio, USB/iPod playback, digital and analogue inputs and iOS app control. Yet behind its digital sophistication lies a startlingly simple idea: that music should be a central part of life. Its analogue heart is an integrated amplifier backed by 40 years of engineering knowledge and passion to breathe new life into your music.



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all-in-one
player.

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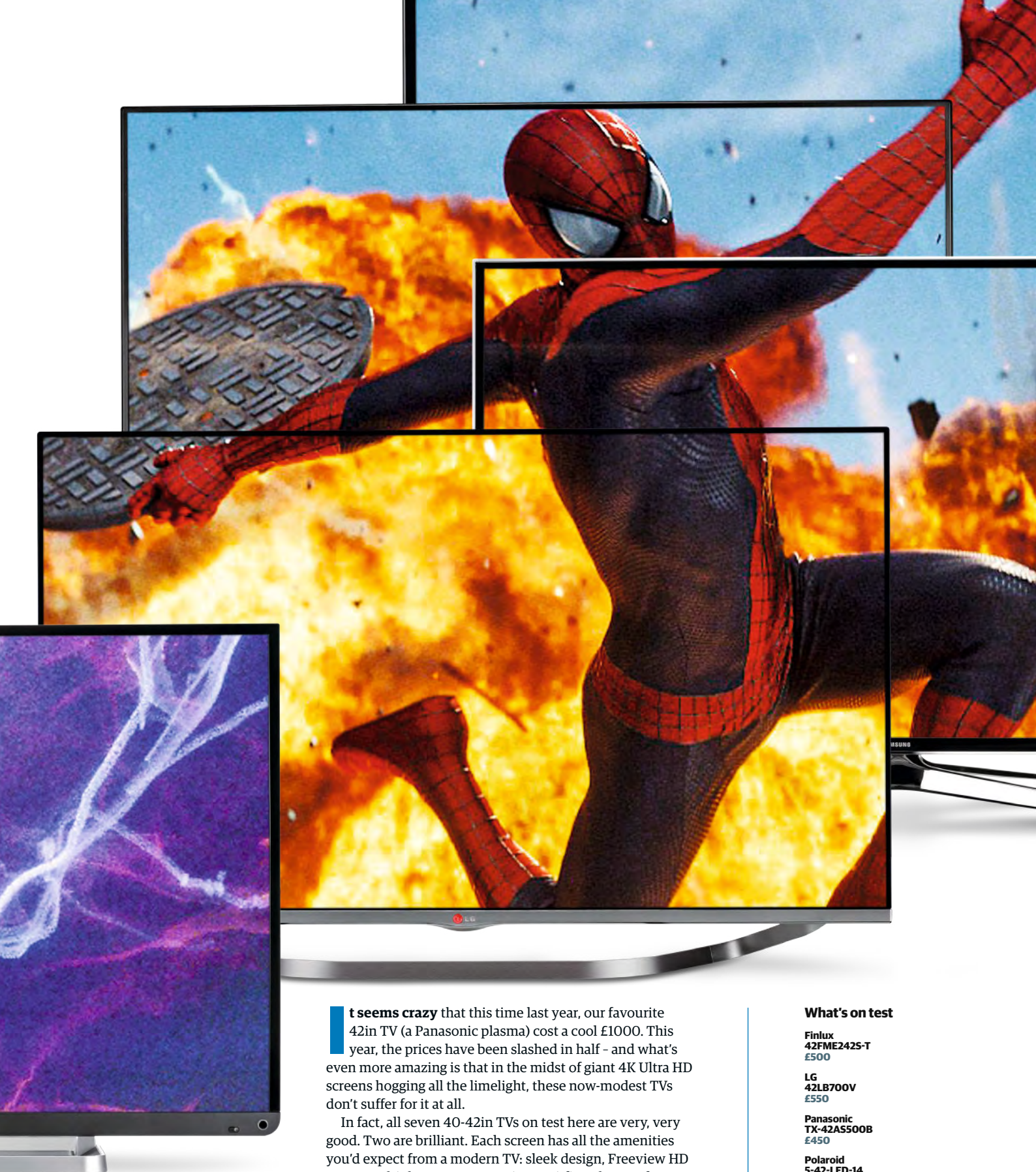
SUPERTEST

MOVING

on UP

TV screen sizes are growing, and 40-42 inches seems to be the new sweet spot. This talented group shows why





It seems crazy that this time last year, our favourite 42in TV (a Panasonic plasma) cost a cool £1000. This year, the prices have been slashed in half - and what's even more amazing is that in the midst of giant 4K Ultra HD screens hogging all the limelight, these now-modest TVs don't suffer for it at all.

In fact, all seven 40-42in TVs on test here are very, very good. Two are brilliant. Each screen has all the amenities you'd expect from a modern TV: sleek design, Freeview HD tuner, multiple HDMI connections, wi-fi, and smart features aplenty. BBC iPlayer and Netflix have become as much a part of the fabric of a smart TV as the electronic programme guide, and a smart portal is present on all TVs. A couple even have 3D.

With prices ranging from £370 to £550, we're in for a treat with these TVs. So without further ado, turn the page to see which one you should spend your hard-earned money on.

What's on test

Finlux
42FME242S-T
£500

LG
42LB700V
£550

Panasonic
TX-42AS500B
£450

Polaroid
5-42-LED-14
£370

Samsung
UE40H6400
£550

Sony
40W605B
£450

Toshiba
42L6453DB
£430



For a full list of specifications and other useful info visit whathifi.com

It's just had an elegant makeover (we mean the Finlux, of course)



Finlux 42FME242S-T

£500 ★★★★★☆

Finlux had a shaky start to this year, but the online-only brand famed for its great-value TVs is back on form with the 42FME242S-T – a Full HD smart TV that's good enough to challenge the big brands.

We switch the screen on and are met with pin-sharp detail and vivid colour delivered with convincing black levels. It's the Finlux picture we know and love.

High-def highlights

Standard-definition material is well treated, but this screen is at its best when fed a high-definition picture. Whether it's the Commonwealth Games on BBC One HD (there's a Freeview HD tuner on board) or *Star Trek: Into Darkness* on Blu-ray, the crisp edges and punchy highlights are easy on the eyes. Gymnasts' routines and galactic action scenes are delivered smoothly. Twinkling stars glow against the deep blacks of space, although finer detail can get swallowed up in shadowy scenes. It's an arresting picture, but we'd like a touch more subtlety with edge definition.

The Finlux's colour balance ever-so-slightly veers into the overexcited, but toning down the colour settings only makes the picture look bleached. We

prefer to live with the punch. There's a hint of a yellow-green tinge to the colour, but setting the colour temperature to 'Cool' evens things out. Skin-tones are decent, even if subtleties in shading aren't quite as proficient as on the Sony or the Samsung screens.

We're less enthused when it comes to the Finlux's sound. It's a little muffled and lacks weight. We'd invest in a soundbar or soundbase if you want to fully enjoy your films and shows.

Finlux has had a design overhaul this year, and the 42FME242S-T looks so nice we put it on the cover of this issue. A thin black bezel surrounds the 42in screen, and the sturdy set is propped upon a shiny metal quad stand à la Samsung. It's well-finished and looks smart.

No-nonsense functionality

Finlux's black-and-gold interface isn't a patch on the slick, ultra-modern design you get with LG's webOS or Samsung's Smart Hub, but it's a simple layout, easy to get around and it works smoothly. This TV isn't wanting on features either: three HDMI inputs, two USB ports (one of which supports HD recording), wired and wireless connectivity, and

Remote



The remote is big and chunky, with a concave dip that makes button-pressing a little awkward. Oft-used buttons are spread out all over the place, so you'll need to employ some hand gymnastics when using it.

full smart functionality. The apps selection isn't as exhaustive as those offered by Samsung, Sony and LG, but you get the essential trio of BBC iPlayer, Netflix and YouTube. Streaming a *Guardians Of The Galaxy* trailer over YouTube is fast and seamless, as is other online content. There's also a web browser, social media apps and DLNA compatibility.

Finlux is back on form. The brand is pricing its products more confidently now, and that means the 42FME242S-T is more expensive than the Sony KDL-40W605B, the Panasonic 42AS500B and the Toshiba 42L6453DB. Nevertheless, the picture quality here is still worth a recommendation.

Rating ★★★★★☆

FOR Sharp picture; vivid colours; good contrast; decent detail; good connectivity; good looks

AGAINST Bulky remote; poor sound; rivals offer greater subtlety at cheaper prices

VERDICT A sharp, punchy picture with essential smart features – Finlux is back on form

We switch the screen on and are met with pin-sharp detail and vivid colour. It's the Finlux picture we know and love

LG 42LB700V

£550 ★★★★★☆

If there's one thing we'll take away from LG TVs this year, it's that WebOS is the future of smart TV. The LG 42LB700V has plenty of things going on - sharp, punchy picture, smart features and connections aplenty, stylish stand - but the standout feature is the beautiful WebOS interface.

Interface integration

We've encountered WebOS before on LG tellies, but it's still impressive on a modest 42in Full HD screen. Instead of a smart portal or 'hub', the smart apps, EPG, inputs and others are integrated into the screen as small, colourful cards arranged across the bottom. It feels organic, and is brilliant to use. What's more, this may be the first time we've preferred the fancy smart remote over the normal button wand, good though that is (see Remotes caption).

WebOS may have won us over, but the LG 42LB700V's picture quality still has to pass the test. It does so with flying colours - colours that are vibrant, punchy and paint a pleasant picture.

Play the *Rush* Blu-ray and the LG bursts to life with luscious reds, grainy black tyres and the shiny metal of the

Formula 1 cars. Even so, a subtler, more balanced approach to the colours would make the LG look more natural, more realistic. We'd also like deeper blacks, to give more picture punch. They're not as washed out as on the Panasonic TX-42AS500B, but they're not as jet-black as on the Samsung UE40H6400 or Sony KDL-40W605B either.

Overall, the 42in screen looks crisp and clean, with plenty of detail. DVDs are upscaled with little picture noise, and standard-def content like *Top Gear* reruns remain bright and watchable.

Time to test the LG's passive 3D, and the *Life of Pi*'s stunning aquatic landscape looks exciting and inviting. There's a lovely sense of depth, and the picture retains its lively characteristic. The 3D glasses are lightweight and comfortable, more so than those you get at the cinema. There's a hint of instability around the edges, but setting the motion to 'Clear' irons this out.

Sound effort

Do our ears deceive us or does this LG sound warm, full-bodied and detailed? It's true: it manages to deliver a strong, weighty sound with no bright edges.

The smart apps, EPG etc are integrated into the screen as small cards arranged across the bottom. It feels organic, and is brilliant to use

Remote



LG's curvy Magic Remote is designed to work in perfect harmony with WebOS, and it does. Pointing and clicking feels natural and speedy, and the animated cursor moves in a steady way. It's wonderfully instinctive to use.

Three inputs apiece for HDMI and USB adorn the back panel, plenty for plugging in disc players, consoles and flash drives filled with media files. A Freeview HD tuner takes care of broadcast TV feeds, and there's also a satellite tuner. You can connect to your home network using LG's built-in wi-fi or the ethernet port.

The 42LB700V has some serious rivals to face in this category, with competitively priced TVs such as the Sony KDL-40W605B delivering a subtler, more enticing performance at £450. But while this LG's lively picture has merits, it's WebOS that's the biggest attraction here. It makes the viewing experience all the more seamless and inviting.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Rich, punchy hues; crisp, detailed picture; WebOS is a delight; great smart features

AGAINST Rivals have subtler detail and deeper blacks; a bit pricey

VERDICT A fine screen, but the stunning WebOS interface is the real star



The WebOS interface is as neat and satisfying to use as the screen itself



Panasonic TX-42AS500B

£450 ★★★★★☆

At just £450, (cheaper if you hunt online), this 42in Full HD smart TV looks like a steal.

One of the biggest perks is Panasonic's excellent, user-friendly My Home Screen interface. You can customise multiple home screens with shortcuts to your favourite apps (BBC iPlayer, Netflix, YouTube, or Wuaki.tv), and you can access the guide in a sidebar instead of in fullscreen mode - it's a nifty feature that makes channel-browsing a dream.

The perks you don't get with this TV, compared to Panasonic's pricier offerings, are Freetime (which lets you catch up with any TV shows you missed in the past few days) and the myStream programme-recommendation feature.

So far so good, but a personalised smart portal alone won't win us over. The Panasonic TX-42AS500B's picture quality is entertaining, though, with a huge helping of detail and a side order of crisply defined edges when watching DVD and Blu-ray films. Standard-def content takes the expected dip in quality, but it's still an engaging, colourful picture even with some noise creeping in. Whites are punchy and shine bright.

Panasonic's naturally rich colour tone gives punch and vitality to the primary-coloured brick-world of *The Lego Movie*. The blocks of colour are bold, and scenes are brightly lit. Much like the Panasonic plasma screens of old, there's a very slight yellow tinge across the colour palette. A 'cool' setting tempers this somewhat, but trying to get rid of it completely bleaches out the rich hues.

A little lacking in inky depth

We can forgive that sunny disposition - but not the greying black levels. Play a more natural-looking film such as *The Monuments Men*, and the dark scenes show up as greyer on the 42AS500B than on some rivals, and it can be hard to make out objects and people in low light. The blacks aren't as inky and deep as we'd like - without darker, more insightful blacks we don't get the dramatic sense of contrast we want.

The TX-42AS500B may not be as slim as a flatscreen TV can be, but the slightly thicker chassis means the sound is weightier than usual. The AS500 is low down in Panasonic's 2014 range, but still we're a little surprised to see a scant offering of digital inputs. There are only

Panasonic TV Remote 2



Android/iOS, free

If the standard remote wand feels old hat, the remote app is a smart alternative. Picture settings can be tweaked from the app, alongside changing channels and launching smart apps. The highlight is the ability to beam photos, music and video stored in your smart device straight to the TV using a simple swipe gesture. It's quick, easy and works smoothly.

two HDMI connections (one supporting ARC) and a single USB port. You do get an optical output and Freeview HD tuner, while analogue connections are covered by composite, component and scart inputs. Connecting to a home network can be done wired or wirelessly, and DLNA compatibility means you can stream media from connected laptops, smartphones or NAS devices.

The lack of inky deep black levels may put some off, but this user-friendly TV with its bright hues is worth a look. We are particularly fond of the customisable interface. Rivals may offer a more natural colour balance, but this richly detailed and colourful screen is still a pleasure.

Rating ★★★★★☆

FOR Bright, detailed picture; punchy whites; good colour balance; customisable interface

AGAINST Black levels need to be deeper; yellow tinge; limited connectivity

VERDICT This user-friendly TV with its rich, bright hues (and good value) is worth a viewing

The picture is entertaining though, with a huge helping of detail and a side order of crisply defined edges when watching Blu-ray

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- Add album artwork
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Polaroid 5-42-LED-14

£370 ★★★★★

A four-star TV from the erstwhile maker of instant cameras? We're surprised with the 5-42-LED-14, too. Sure, the Full HD 42in screen promised us a Freeview HD tuner, passive 3D, smart features and HDMI connections for just £370, but we didn't expect such good performance.

Needs to dig deeper

Turn on the Polaroid TV and the first impression is one of sharpness. Mahogany tables' edges, tailored suits, lamp posts and cobblestone streets are etched with crisp lines in *The Monuments Men* Blu-ray. The razor-sharp quality can look a little too artificial at times and rob the picture of depth, so we turn down the sharpness level until the edges stop looking so pronounced.

It's still a pleasant screen; colours are bright and vivid. We set the backlight to 'medium' for the best balance between dark and light elements. Put the Polaroid against rival screens such as the Sony KDL-40W605B and we can see how the black level on the Polaroid's 42in screen needs to dig deeper and be more subtle with its shades and gradations. They're deep, but could be deeper. A stronger contrast would boost the Polaroid's

picture, and make it a more exciting watch. Against the best (pricier) sets in the test, we also notice a slight loss of the finest of detail, but nothing too serious. The natural palette making up the *Stoker* DVD is admirably delivered, and even with the innate dip in resolution it's an engaging watch. The hues are a touch overcooked, though; a pervading yellow tinge proves hard to get rid of, even with the temperature at 'Cool'. It's not wholly intrusive, although whites aren't truly stark and clean.

Play *The Adventures of Tintin* and the passive 3D has good depth, but it's not as comfortable and smooth as the LG 42LB700V. There's no scope for adjusting motion, which is a shame, though the effect isn't massively disturbing. And you do get a generous eight pairs of passive glasses.

The Polaroid TV has a relatively good sound, with weight and warmth, but no muddled thickness. Voices are easy to hear. You'll need a soundbase, -bar or pair of speakers for a stronger presentation, but there's enough detail here.

The Polaroid has a sturdy, slim build and sensible design. The screen has a slim black bezel, and stands upright on a

Turn on the Polaroid and the first impression is one of sharpness. *The Monuments Men* Blu-ray is etched with crisp, detailed lines

Remote



The large, bulky remote can be awkward to use. While it's responsive and works well with the Polaroid TV, the concave design feels odd, and important buttons are too far apart. Looks the same as the Finlux handset, too.

stable metal stand. The smart interface is the black-and-gold menu that you will find on Finlux TVs. It's basic, but easy to get around. The Polaroid has the usual list of features and specs (BBC iPlayer, Netflix and YouTube etc) and an array of social media apps and internet radio. It's no WebOS, but it's functional.

There are three HDMI inputs, and two USB ports (one for recording); a Freeview HD tuner, ethernet, a wireless dongle and a coaxial digital output are here, too.

We're pleasantly surprised with this Polaroid 42in. Too often we get small or supermarket brands to review that go horribly wrong, but this stands up against established brands. And to offer this quality for just £370? Tempting.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Sharp, vivid screen; decent sound; basic smart features; great value; easy to use

AGAINST Pricier rivals offer finer detail; blacks could be more convincing; bulky remote

VERDICT A fine TV that performs well and offers smart features for a competitive price



The Polaroid has a sturdy, slim build and a sensible design

The Samsung is a smart-looking set, framed by a thin bezel



Samsung UE40H6400

£550 ★★★★★

The Samsung UE40H6400 is yet another five-star screen from the Korean company - following big brother UE48H6400 (£700) - and the 40in Full HD screen easily lives up to expectations, with its wealth of smart features (no other manufacturer offers all the UK catch-up TV services) and a picture that's been tuned to look as naturally subtle and realistic as possible.

The UE40H6400's colour balance is beautifully judged. Skin-tones are convincing. There's enough subtlety in shading and gradation to flesh out the contours in people's faces, whether it's in the *Pacific Rim* Blu-ray or a re-run of *Friends* via standard-def. It's a crisp and clear screen with high- and standard-def content alike, and never looks too sharply etched or noisy even with DVD.

Black levels are blissfully deep and insightful. In the tricky dark scenes in *The Monuments Men* the Samsung easily deciphers objects from the shadows. Whites are clear and punchy, although the Sony KDL-40W605B's whites are slightly cleaner, more stark.

Motion is smooth, too. The chase scene in *The Adventures of Tintin* is exciting, with the TV's active 3D

technology delivering impressive depth. The glasses are lightweight, although the active 3D tires our eyes after a while. Colours stay punchy and the picture doesn't lose its wealth of detail, though.

Smooth and smart

We're happy to find decent sound from the Samsung. Smooth edges mean no brightness or hardness, while voices and special effects have weight. It's easy to listen to, while there's good detail too.

It's a smart-looking set, framed by a thin bezel that shows off the glorious 40in screen. Build quality is sturdy, slim and light, while the shiny-metal quad-stand gives stability. You get two remotes with the UE40H6400, both well-built and responsive. The curved smart remote nestles nicely in our hand and is easy to operate, but we find the small, standard wand more natural and instinctive to use on a daily basis.

There is a generous offering of smart features. Samsung's Smart Hub - music, movies, TV shows, on-demand, streaming and social media services - is great to use. Apps are well organised, but what sets Samsung TVs apart from rivals is the availability of all of the UK's

Samsung Smart View 2.0



Android/iOS, free
Samsung's remote app turns your smartphone or tablet into a second screen. You can also browse

channels in a transparent sidebar that doesn't encroach upon full-screen. Channel-hopping is smooth and moving around the Smart Hub is easy, but the small trackpad is less intuitive. We kept looking down to make sure we didn't press the wrong buttons.

catch-up TV services. Spotify and vTuner are available, too. The voice control tool is improving, but we are still loath to shout commands at the TV.

There are four HDMI inputs, and you can play stored media using any of the three USB ports and also record programmes with PVR functionality. There's wired or wireless networking, too, and a Freeview HD tuner.

The UE40H6400 is an engrossing screen, with smart features that rivals struggle to match. However, the Sony KDL-40W605B is equally subtle and captivating, and costs £100 less. Nonetheless, the Samsung is a stunning TV. Recommended.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Superbly detailed picture; well-judged colour balance; strong contrast and crisp edges; smart features; design and interface

AGAINST Rivals are cheaper

VERDICT Gorgeous screen with a stack of smarts, this TV should be in your shopping cart

Motion is smooth. The chase scene in *The Adventures of Tintin* is exciting, with the TV's active 3D technology delivering depth

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Sony KDL-40W605B

£450 ★★★★★

Is the Sony KDL-40W605B one of the best-value TVs of 2014? With full smart features and a great interface accompanying a stunning screen for just £450, it could well be. We've already given the KDL-40W605B a five-star review, but it's time to see if the 40in TV holds up against its latest class rivals.

Out of this world

Turning on the Sony TV, we are immediately taken by just how subtle and punchy it is. Blu-ray test favourite *Star Trek* (2009) dazzles on the screen, looking fresh and inviting. We marvel at the Sony's ability to deliver such deep, luscious blacks. The space scenes are particularly arresting, where the velvety void of blackness seems to stretch further and deeper than on rival sets. It can decipher varying shades of darkness, too. The Samsung UE40H6400 may dig out a smidge more detail in the shadows, but the Sony's inky blackness gives a breathtaking sense of depth.

The Sony's colour balance is another eye-catching factor: rich, with superb levels of subtlety in shading, and is judged just on the right side of punchy without looking too overdone. Skin-

tones are fleshed out wonderfully, with shadows and contours looking natural and three-dimensional, all complemented by a clean picture with crisp edges. The whites, in particular, are clean and bright.

The Sony also has a very talented upscaler. The screen remains clean, edges are crisply drawn, and the rich detail and colours remain as impressive with DVD as with high-def content.

Sony's sound quality is the standard flatscreen affair: thin and bright, although there's plenty of detail. It's clear and direct with voices, too.

We like the Sony's slimline design. It's well-built and finished: the glossy black bezel surrounding the screen is sliver-thin, while the sturdy metal stand will fit comfortably on most TV racks.

We've always found it easy to get along with Sony's TV remotes and this one is a comfortable weight and size, and all the buttons are arranged logically.

We're also big fans of Sony's smart interface: Sony's Music and Video Unlimited portals have their own pages and are a goldmine of music, film and TV releases. BBC iPlayer, Demand 5, Netflix, YouTube and a web browser are

The Sony's colour balance is an eye-catching factor: rich, with superb levels of subtlety, and judged just on the right side of punchy

TV SideView



Android/iOS, free
Responsive, interactive and informative, Sony's app shows how it's done. The EPG is detailed and laid out neatly (even on a smartphone's small screen). You can browse shows and get live-time tracking of the current programmes on TV. Use it to record, launch smart apps and browse TV highlights for the day. The basic TV controls are easy to use, too.

available too, while there is a live Twitter feed along the bottom of the screen as well. Connections are plentiful: four HDMI connections alongside two USB ports, while a Freeview HD tuner is your access to broadcast TV.

You can connect to your home network using the wired ethernet port or the built-in wi-fi, and DLNA compatibility means you can access media stored on various smart devices.

All in all, the Sony KDL-40W605B shows you can have class-leading picture, in a small frame, at a good price. Add a wonderful user experience and smart features and this TV is a class act.

Rating ★★★★★

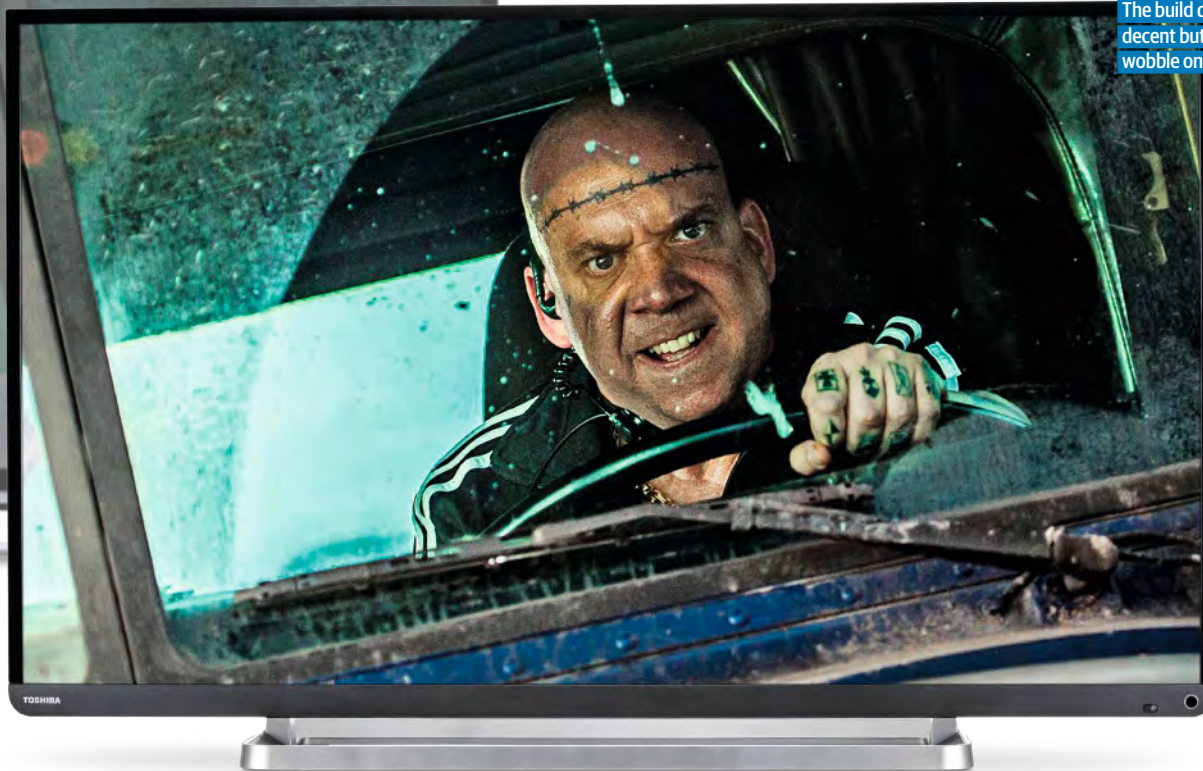
FOR Superb detail; crisp, clean picture; deep blacks and punchy highlights; colour balance is natural; talented upscaler; smart features

AGAINST Thin, bright sound

VERDICT Impresses in almost every way. This screen deserves a place in your home



The glossy black bezel is sliver-thin and the stand will fit most racks



The build quality is decent but for a slight wobble on the stand

Toshiba 42L6453DB

£430 ★★★★★

Toshiba TVs haven't been having the best of times this year. A sluggish interface and so-so picture quality have been pushing them down the wish list.

But then comes along the Toshiba 42L6453DB. It's not slow or lagging. It has a bright and colourful HD picture. It has Netflix. And it's only £430. Get the *Pacific Rim* Blu-ray on the screen and the Toshiba delivers all the hues inside the Shatterdome base station with vivid enthusiasm. The purple, green and orange highlights against the deep blues and greys of the giant Jaegar robots are brightly lit and punchy. The yellow lighting is warm and inviting. It's a colourful, exciting screen.

There's plenty of detail, with crisp edges to objects, but the colour tone could be subtler. The presentation looks overdone at times, with greens looking a bit radioactive and skin-tones lacking naturalness. Black levels, on the other hand, are satisfyingly deep and inky, which helps bright colours pop even more. They're not as insightful as the blacks found on the Sony KDL-40W605B or Samsung UE40H6400, though - the Toshiba can't quite distinguish shadows from objects in

really dark scenes. There's also a slight issue with motion - not enough for us to gripe about too much, but there are hints of instability when a character is walking across the screen.

The Toshiba's upscaling is decent, but there's noise around the edges of figures. The emphasised sharpness makes objects look a little etched, too, robbing scenes of depth. However, standard-def channels and DVDs don't suffer unduly.

Decent sound for a flatscreen

The Toshiba wins points by delivering a loud and expansive sound. The roars of engines on *Top Gear* have muscle, though the presenters' voices can sound hollow.

The build quality is decent, but for a slight wobble on the stand. It's a little chunky, as is the remote control - but it works just fine. Enter Toshiba's Cloud TV platform and you will be bombarded with widgets and information: Twitter feed, TV recommendations, weather and apps crowd the screen.

We've come to expect BBC iPlayer, Netflix and YouTube as standard features of a smart TV, and the Toshiba delivers. There's no ITV Player or 4oD, but the Toshiba offers Blinkbox, Vimeo

Remote control



The large plastic remote is a little ungainly to use, but it's not the sluggish operator we've experienced with previous Toshiba TVs this year. Response times are decent, and using the TV is painless.

and Aupeo! streaming. There's a generous helping of four HDMI inputs (two support ARC and MHL), while twin USB ports are available to play stored media and also record TV programmes to a flash drive. A Freeview HD tuner takes care of your broadcast TV needs.

Network connectivity includes wired ethernet, built-in wi-fi and DLNA support, and component, composite and Scart inputs. There's an optical output, ideal for a soundbar or soundbase.

The Toshiba 42L6453DB fares a lot better than other Toshiba models we have seen this year, with a picture sure to attract many. An outdated interface may put some off, but this 42in has the essentials you'd want from a 2014 TV.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Bright, colourful picture; deep blacks and punchy highlights; good connectivity

AGAINST Motion issues; colours could be more natural and subtle

VERDICT Rivals may be slicker, but Toshiba's picture and spec mean it warrants an audition

Toshiba wins points by delivering a loud and explosive sound. Engines on *Top Gear* have muscle, although presenters can sound hollow



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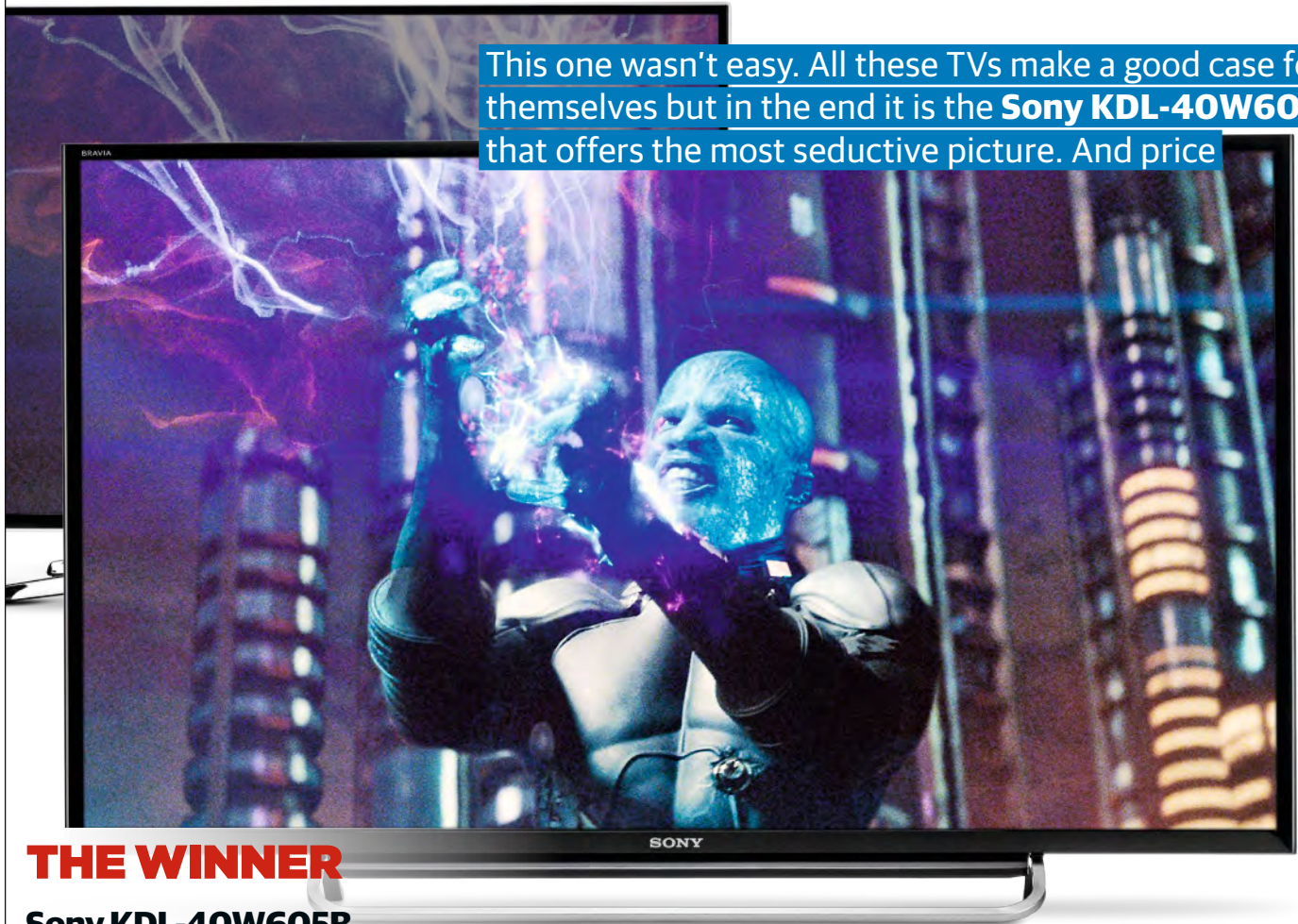
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TEST VERDICT

This one wasn't easy. All these TVs make a good case for themselves but in the end it is the **Sony KDL-40W605B** that offers the most seductive picture. And price



THE WINNER

Sony KDL-40W605B

£450 ★★★★★

There have been TV *Supertests* where one screen stands head and shoulders above the rest while the others have disappointed or even frustrated us. But to have seven 40-42in TVs all deliver great performances, offer plenty of smart features and cost half of what they did a year ago? It's times like these that we really love our job.

Down to business

Of course, it means we have the tricky problem of sorting out the best of the bunch, but it's a good problem to have. Finlux's £500 42in TV starts off the collection of five four-star TVs here. Sharp edges, bright picture, and essential smarts - it's the Finlux performance we've come to know and praise. A slight lack of subtlety and weak sound work against it, but so

does the fact that Finlux's usual ace of being the cheapest set on test isn't applicable here.

That position now goes to the Polaroid TV, which is yours for just £370. It's a bright, crisply detailed screen, easy to use, and boasts a spec-sheet that matches the big brands here. At that price it's a cracking set.

It's fair to say Toshiba hasn't been having a great year with its sluggish interfaces and below-par performances. With the 42L6453DB, though, the company has pulled its socks up and delivered a well-defined, vibrant picture with little fuss. Sure, it's lacking a touch of finesse but it has a good feature set.

Panasonic's 42in screen oozes detail and an enthusiastic colour palette. The warm tones are lovely, if not wholly realistic. We love the customisable home screen, too. Unluckily, it's

black levels that let the Panasonic down, blighting an otherwise tip-top picture.

We admit: we're smitten with LG's new WebOS interface. It's cleverly designed, it looks gorgeous and is a dream to use. We might just enjoy it more than the 42LB700V's delightfully bold and punchy picture, which needs just a smidge more insight in its blackest levels and a slightly lower price to get that elusive fifth star.

A duel to the last

And so we come to the two five-star TVs, where Samsung and Sony's 40in screens are locked in a battle of oneupmanship. The Samsung has all the UK's TV catch-up services; the Sony counters with a well-stocked Entertainment Network. The Samsung's gorgeous picture is naturally toned with heaps of detail; the brilliant Sony has lusher, more textured black levels and a very appealing colour balance.

But we found our eyes drawn to the Sony's screen more, and the £100 difference in price settled it. You won't be disappointed if you go home with the Samsung UE40H6400 but, for just £450, it's the Sony KDL-40W605B that makes the best case. It's a fantastic TV.

And so we come to the two five-star TVs, where Samsung and Sony are locked in battle. The Samsung has all the UK's TV catch-up services; the Sony counters with a well-stocked Entertainment Network

**Finlux 42FME242S-T****£500 ★★★★★☆**

Screen size 42in • Full HD Yes • 3D No
 • Tuners Freeview HD • Smart TV Yes •
 HDMI in 2 • USB in 2 • Dimensions
 (hwd) 56 x 96 x 6cm • Weight 11kg

Picture	★★★★★
Sound	★★★☆☆
Features	★★★★★

**LG 42LB700V****£550 ★★★★★☆**

Screen size 42in • Full HD Yes • 3D
 Passive • Tuners Freeview HD, satellite
 • Smart TV Yes • HDMI in 3 • USB in 3
 • Dimensions (hwd) 56 x 95 x 6cm •
 Weight 10kg

Picture	★★★★★
Sound	★★★☆☆
Features	★★★★★

**Panasonic TX-42AS500B****£450 ★★★★★☆**

Screen size 42in • Full HD Yes • 3D No
 • Tuners Freeview HD • Smart TV Yes •
 HDMI in 2 • USB in 1 • Dimensions
 (hwd) 57 x 96 x 7cm • Weight 9kg

Picture	★★★★★
Sound	★★★☆☆
Features	★★★★★

**Polaroid 5-42-LED-14****£370 ★★★★★☆**

Screen size 42in • Full HD Yes • 3D
 Passive • Tuners Freeview HD • Smart
 TV Yes • HDMI in 3 • USB in 2 •
 Dimensions (hwd) 56 x 96 x 6cm •
 Weight 11kg

Picture	★★★★★
Sound	★★★☆☆
Features	★★★★★

**Samsung UE40H6400****£550 ★★★★★☆**

Screen size 40in • Full HD Yes • 3D
 Active • Tuners Freeview HD • Smart
 TV Yes • HDMI in 4 • USB in 3 •
 Dimensions (hwd) 54 x 92 x 5cm •
 Weight 8kg

Picture	★★★★★
Sound	★★★☆☆
Features	★★★★★

**Sony KDL-40W605B****£450 ★★★★★☆**

Screen size 40in • Full HD Yes • 3D No
 • Tuners Freeview HD, satellite • Smart
 TV Yes • HDMI in 4 • USB in 2 •
 Dimensions (hwd) 56 x 93 x 9cm •
 Weight 7kg

Picture	★★★★★
Sound	★★★☆☆
Features	★★★★★

**Toshiba 42L6453DB****£430 ★★★★★☆**

Screen size 42in • Full HD Yes • 3D No
 • Tuners Freeview HD • Smart TV Yes •
 HDMI in 4 • USB in 2 • Dimensions
 (hwd) 57 x 96 x 9cm • Weight 6kg

Picture	★★★★★
Sound	★★★☆☆
Features	★★★★★

DOES A GOOD SMART TV INTERFACE MATTER?

This one's easy: yes. Yes it does. TVs aren't just TVs anymore. They're a hub of entertainment, where broadcast TV forms just part of a wider landscape that includes on-demand films, catch-up TV apps, music streaming services, social media and internet browsing. It can all get a bit crowded, so a smooth, well-designed smart interface makes all the difference when you're using a TV's many functions. Which is why we're so effusive in our praise of LG's WebOS. There's no separate 'hub' or portal; it's cleverly integrated as part of the main screen, looks gorgeous, and is a dream to use. As we've said before, "all TVs should work like this."

SYSTEM BUILDER**Blu-ray player****Panasonic DMP-BDT460****£190 ★★★★★☆**

A well-featured budget disc-spinner that impresses with its weighty sound as much as its brilliant picture quality

**Wireless speakers****Q Acoustics Q-BT3****£350 ★★★★★☆**

Want a punchier, weightier and more detailed sound to go with Sony's stunning picture? Just add these.

**Smartphone****Sony Xperia Z1 Compact****★★★★★**

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Wireless speakers are getting better, and we've tested five to find you the best out there. So you can take your tunes with you, whatever the venue



TESTED

Cambridge Audio Bluetone 100 **p50**, JBL OnBeat Rumble **p51**, Monitor Audio Airstream S300 **p52**, Nakamichi Dragon Lily **p54**, Samsung M5 **p55**



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buying advice, visit whathifi.com

Cambridge Audio Bluetone 100 £200

★★★★☆



Given the success Cambridge Audio had with its debut range in the wireless speaker market last year, we're not surprised to see it return with a new line-up to take on the 2014 market.

And this year the market is quite different. In 2013, if your speaker wasn't packing AirPlay it was already outdated. Now we're seeing more and more brands (that once embraced it) shirking it in favour of simpler, more inclusive options such as Bluetooth.

New priorities

Cambridge Audio has decided to remove AirPlay and use the money that would have lined Apple's pockets to lower the speaker's price and further invest in its performance. Internet radio has been dropped too, but the two physical connections on the back remain, with RCA ins for attaching the Bluetone 100 to your TV, for example, and a 3.5mm jack for hardwiring something like a smartphone or tablet to the speaker.

Looks-wise it is as uninspiring as its predecessor - a simple black box that's well built and sturdy, but ultimately rather bland. Just a touch more flair wouldn't go amiss.

Like the pricier Monitor Audio, the Bluetone 100 comes as standard with a remote. That's more than can be said for most rivals. A single coloured LED lets you know which source is selected, and will also flash when pairing or changing volume. Once paired, you're ready to start streaming, with high-quality aptX Bluetooth for compatible devices.

It makes a confident start, tackling Kanye West's *Black Skinhead* with an upfront, but well-balanced character, effortlessly handling the aggressive bassline with solidity, punch and attack.

It's weighty, and there's plenty of control and agility here too. There is a bass dial on the back for tweaking how much low-end thud you'd like - we found somewhere around midway was about right for our tastes and placement (a little away from any back wall).

Balance is largely forgiving, thanks in no small measure to a smooth top end that helps make poorer-quality tracks more listenable (although this does rob the Bluetone of a little clarity). We wonder if we'd suffer a few sharper edges for a little more insight.

Speaking of clarity, we're a little disappointed that the muffled midrange

Its sober appearance mirrors the way the 100 eschews features to focus on sound

we heard in the Bluetone's predecessor presents itself here too, robbing vocals of some of their texture and emotion. We much prefer the clearer balance offered by rivals like the Samsung M5.

Muscle enough

For its size, it's a relatively big sound and will go respectably loud, though competitors such as the Monitor Audio Airstream S300 do better it when it comes to filling a reasonably sized room. Tonally, it's easy to listen to, and never becomes tiring or laborious.

We haven't been quite as taken with the Bluetone 100 as we were with its box-of-tricks predecessor, craving more transparency and clarity. Even so, its punchy, agile and well-balanced performance is not to be sniffed at.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Lively and agile; punchy, controlled bass; aptX Bluetooth

AGAINST Just a bit lacking in clarity and transparency

VERDICT A bold, engaging performance, but there are more talented rivals out there

It tackles Kanye West's *Black Skinhead* with an upfront, but well-balanced character, effortlessly handling the aggressive bassline with solidity, punch and attack

JBL OnBeat Rumble £230

★★★★☆



As the only product in this group test we've previously tested, the JBL OnBeat Rumble wears its 2013 spec list proudly on its sleeve in the shape of its physical dock - something we're seeing less and less of as the emphasis continues to shift towards the convenience of streaming.

That's here too, of course, in the shape of Bluetooth, but its Apple Lightning dock connector, which tucks neatly away behind a pop-up panel, is still a sign of its slightly vintage credentials - from when streaming was an option rather than a must-have.

We're not complaining though, and in fact we really like how this speaker sounds through the dock. While Bluetooth is convenient, there's a better sense of sonic space when your device is connected, and we'd recommend every iOS user give it a go if they don't need to have their device in hand.

High fun factor

No matter how we choose to connect, one thing that we still love about this speaker nearly 12 months on is just how much fun we have when we're listening to it. There's a great sense of enthusiasm and excitement behind every track you

throw at it, the JBL sounding powerful, punchy and agile at every turn.

Its bass performance remains something of note, delivering a deep, but controlled, low-end performance that is confident but never overpowering. It punches cleanly through the mix to give a strong backbone to beat-heavy basslines such as Outkast's *B.O.B.*

Right in the middle

The midrange is convincing, delivering vocals with clarity and detail. It sounds big too, easily filling our testing room with an open and clear sound that largely keeps a handle on things even when we push the volume. The treble can verge on the wrong side of bright with some recordings though.

That upfront character can also prove to be a problem. Compared with some of its 2014 competition, like the Monitor Audio AirStream S300, it lacks a level of refinement, and the hardness we picked up last time is even more evident against its newer rivals.

It's definitely a speaker that suits more upbeat music too, lacking the dynamic wherewithal to handle more delicate tracks with the level of subtlety they

The clue's in the name: if you're ready to party then the JBL will serve you well

need. It deals much better, for example, with something like Chase & Status' *Pieces* than Jamie Cullum's cover of *Blame It On My Youth*. There's still a pleasing level of detail on offer, but it can sound fragile, and just falls short when it comes to out-and-out transparency.

We'd steer well clear of the Bass Boost option unless you're one for putting bass above all else - there's plenty here as it is, and adding more does the speaker's well-balanced character an injustice.

The JBL OnBeat Rumble's fun and energetic character is easy to love, particularly when it's combined with this amount of detail, scale and clarity. However, it's starting to sound a tad unrefined against the more recent competition, and that hardness in its character is becoming harder to forgive.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Big, energetic sound; punchy, agile bass; lots of detail; good connectivity; well built

AGAINST Hard edge to sound; can sound unsophisticated; character won't suit all music

VERDICT An energetic, exciting listen, but one that's starting to sound a little unrefined

No matter how you choose to connect, one thing that we still love about this speaker nearly 12 months on, is just how much fun we have when we're listening to it

Monitor Audio Airstream S300

£250



There's a lot to love about the Monitor Audio Airstream S300, but also a big problem - it supports iOS mobile devices only. It's headscratching to understand why a speaker manufacturer would be so selective with its audience, and frustrating when a product is this good.

PCs and Macs are supported via AirPlay, but if you're using any non-iOS phone or tablet you're stuck with 3.5mm playback only - even its proprietary Airstream Direct method is iOS only.

Core of the problem

We'll give Monitor Audio the benefit of the doubt, though. We know that, back when it was designing the A100 stereo amp, Apple did not allow its AirPlay technology to be featured on any device that also featured Bluetooth. Still, if you're one of the many iOS users out there, the S300 is worth considering. Solidly made from a mixture of mineral-filled polymer and reinforced-glass trims, it packs four amplifiers driving its four CCAM drive units, configured into stereo pairs of bass units and tweeters. Altogether the amplification delivers an output of 140W; there's no shortage of room-filling

power here. The S300's curved design gives a wide soundfield too.

When it comes to streaming, there are two ways: via AirPlay or Airstream Direct. The latter connects your service device directly to the S300's own network, which is great for when there's no wi-fi available but restrictive for day-to-day use, as you'll only be able to play songs and playlists stored locally or offline.

We opt for AirPlay, and while it still can't match the simplicity and speed of Bluetooth pairing, there's a picture-led Quick Start guide in the box that has our speaker running within a few minutes.

Restricted Air supply

It's a little restricted on format support, as AirPlay is only capable of AAC, ALAC and MP3 playback, but that will cover all iTunes purchases and streaming from services such as Spotify.

We play Lana Del Rey's *West Coast* and the S300's rich, full-bodied tone jumps to it; Lana's drowsy, breathy vocal is presented with expression and clarity.

The midrange has a wonderfully clean character, and there's stacks of detail, giving a real insight into the track's

The S300 is made from mineral-filled polymer and reinforced-glass trims

subtler moments. Bass could do with a touch more refinement, demonstrating a solid and weighty punch, but one that could be slightly tauter. It's far from heavy-handed though, and integrates well with the midrange for a clear, confident performance.

The midrange stretches up into a smooth, controlled top end that can handle the hand claps on Kingdom's *Bank Head* without ever drifting into sharpness or hard territory.

It's an alluring sound that grabs your attention right away and holds it, indulging you in a detailed and dynamic performance that will entertain time and again. Android users have been rather cruelly left out of the Airstream S300's party, but iOS users should most certainly RSVP.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Big, exciting sound; superb clarity; stacks of detail; dynamic and entertaining

AGAINST Restricted compatibility; bass could be a tad more refined

VERDICT The compatibility issue is annoying, but there's no denying this speaker five stars

We play Lana Del Rey's *West Coast* and the S300's rich, full-bodied tone jumps to it. Del Rey's breathy vocal is presented with plenty of expression and clarity

Nakamichi Dragon Lily £240

★★★★☆



There's something unique about the way the Nakamichi Dragon Lily looks. If you want a speaker to stir some debate on design, you've certainly got a strong contender here.

Our review sample is a striking pink, but it's available in a more muted black or silver. Of course, you should never judge a wireless speaker by its questionable design - and when it comes to sound, the Dragon Lily isn't bad at all.

Stuck in a jam

It's rather large, which allows it to pack some fairly powerful drivers, offering a 2.1 system driven by 75 watts of amplification.

This Nakamichi will go loud, although its design does limit how big or wide it sounds. Even at high volume it sounds narrow and closed in, and doesn't come close to its competitors when it comes to producing a room-filling sound. Sonic presentation is largely well balanced though, and that sub produces a warm, taut rumble in the low-end that keeps a good handle on Chase & Status's bass-tastic *Eastern Jam*. We detect a slight muddiness in the lower mid-range, particularly during more busy

recordings, but it didn't cause much distraction. But you will need to be careful where you place the Dragon Lily - any surface with too much vibration can loosen up that bass response, and make it sound a bit bloated and uncontrolled. Dynamically, we found it lacking the rhythmic ability of something like the Monitor Audio S300. The Dragon Lily is not hugely exciting to listen to, nor the last word in refinement. At £240 we expect more.

Get yourself connected

You do get plenty of connectivity for your money, though. There's the choice of Bluetooth streaming and pairing via one-touch NFC, Nakamichi's proprietary Air Cast wi-fi playback (which can be set up over a home network or via a one-to-one connection with the Dragon Lily) and hard-wiring through the 3.5mm jack or USB port (iOS devices and USB drives only). The USB port is also able to charge your device as well.

You control the source, as well as track and volume, via the included remote or by using the touch-panel on the top of the Dragon Lily, which is responsive and nice to use. How you choose to listen

Our Dragon Lily came in striking pink, but it is available in black or silver, too

will be down to personal preference - we find very little difference in performance between the two streaming methods, so lean towards Bluetooth purely for its set-up convenience. It's worth trying both to see which you prefer though - Android users will experience a little more faff with the wi-fi method as you will need to download a UPnP player app such as BubbleUPnP.

We can't forgive any kit for putting design ahead of performance but that's what Nakamichi has done, creating a narrow and closed-in sound in exchange for a design we can't imagine appealing to all. It underwhelms at its price, particularly when considered against much better - and in some cases, cheaper - competitors that offer a more refined, detailed and full-bodied sound.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Well-balanced sound; taut, controlled bass; decent detail levels

AGAINST Narrow, closed-in character; poor dynamics; needs careful placement

VERDICT A love-it-or-hate-it design with a performance that is just about okay

The Nakamichi Dragon Lily is not hugely exciting to listen to, nor the last word in refinement. With its £240 price tag, we expect a lot more



When it comes to Samsung's M5, there is little more you could ask a wireless speaker to do at this price.

It's one of the cheapest products on test, and has easily the longest features list, covering Bluetooth, built-in wi-fi, DLNA certification, internet radio and NFC connectivity. It's packing multi-room smarts too.

And while we liked its bigger brother, the M7 (*First Tests*, Sept 2014), there's arguably more to love here, with a better balance across the frequency range, and of course a price tag that's £100 cheaper.

We didn't encounter the same issues with set-up as we did with its sibling either, using the free-to-download app to help get it onto our wireless network without much bother. Of course, you can stream using Bluetooth, but then you wouldn't be unlocking the M5's charm.

Once on the network, and used in conjunction with the Samsung Multiroom app, the M5 really comes into its own. Don't be fooled by the app's name - you can still use it to control a single speaker; it offers you easy access to music stored both locally and on DLNA devices on the same network, plus internet radio via the TuneIn Radio

service and a bevy of popular streaming services, all just a few finger taps away.

The speaker is as well-designed as the app: solid and well built. The triangular design is stylish but understated, and allows the M5 to be used flat, or vertically using the stand included.

Standing the M5 up helps improve bass response, perhaps due to less low-end reinforcement from the support surface.

Taking control

Controls are minimal: three touch-sensitive icons for source (internet radio, Bluetooth or TV SoundConnect - the last offering a wireless connection with compatible Samsung TVs). On the left-hand side, there's an NFC point for quick Bluetooth pairing, while the volume dial is also touch-sensitive. It's responsive, and as easy to use as a physical control.

There's no power button, but the M5 goes into sleep mode after around 25 minutes of inactivity. As for file compatibility, it is extensive: MP3, WAV, WMA, AAC, AIFF, ALAC and FLAC (up to 16-bit/44.1kHz) music files. The M5 is instantly enthusiastic in its handling of the soulful intro to Busta Rhymes's *Thank You*, giving a surprisingly big and

The Samsung M5 has a stand included so it can be placed upright or set flat

spacious sound. If you want to nudge up the volume, go right ahead - the M5 will go loud before you notice any distortion, and should fill most reasonably sized rooms.

It's a lively and agile presentation, timing well and bringing superb clarity. There's plenty of detail, and dynamically it's no slouch either. It steers it away from ever sounding hard or harsh too. Some bassy recordings show up occasional tubbiness in the low end, but it's never enough to be a problem.

You will enjoy the clean, open and exciting sound the M5 produces, while its connectivity makes it a one-stop shop for your streaming needs. Its multi-room potential only adds to its charm too. This is a must-try wireless speaker that is fun and packs a performance.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Big and spacious sound for its size; fun, likeable character; clean, cohesive sound; strong midrange; exciting, agile presentation

AGAINST Bass can occasionally be tubby

VERDICT A seriously talented speaker that brings fun and performance in spades

The M5 is instantly enthusiastic in its handling of the soulful intro to Busta Rhymes' *Thank You*, giving a surprisingly big and spacious sound. It will go loud, too

PLAY LINK

BY **Lenco**



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STREAM ALL THE MUSIC YOU LOVE.

WIRELESSLY, THROUGH ONE APP, STREAM ANY SONG, IN ANY ROOM, AT ANY TIME. WITH **PLAYCONNECT**, **PLAYLINK-6** AND **PLAYLINK-4**, ENJOY YOUR MUSIC LIKE NEVER BEFORE, FROM THE GARDEN TO THE BEDROOM, ALL FROM THE PALM OF YOUR HAND.

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TEST VERDICT**THE WINNER****Samsung M5****£200 ★★★★★**

The **Samsung M5** has a right to stand tall – not only does it have the all-round ability to better the old hands in this expanding market, it's kind to your wallet too

Samsung might not be the first brand you think of when it comes to audio products like this but, if the M5 is anything to go by, that could soon change.

Despite coming in at the bottom of the test price bracket, it impresses with its wide range of functionality, multiroom capability and lively, detailed sound, doing enough to hold some of the more experienced brands in this field at arm's length and swiping the test win out from under them.

Monitor Audio's Airstream S300 is the one that came closest. Its sound is arguably richer and fuller-bodied than the Samsung M5, and we love its clarity but, while it gets the full five, it misses out on the win because of its limited compatibility – we're hoping a more inclusive successor is in the pipeline.

At the other end of the scale is the Nakamichi Dragon Lily. An impressive list of

connectivity options is supported by a sound that surprised us – it's well-balanced and listenable – but its rather off-the-wall design does leave it sounding narrow and closed in. There's power here, but it doesn't translate into room-filling sound. It gets a solid three.

Our two four stars go to the Cambridge Audio Bluetone 100 and JBL's OnBeat Rumble. The previously five-star Rumble is still one of the most exciting speakers you can get at this price, injecting everything with life and enthusiasm, but it doesn't always shine with all genres of music, even if it has had a price cut.

The Cambridge Audio Bluetone 100 is a rhythmic, weighty speaker that offers a taut, punchy low-end and an impressively big sound, but it lacks clarity in the midrange. It is this lack of clarity that tips it to a four star, securing a deserved win for the Samsung.

SYSTEM BUILDER

Three varied ways to take advantage of the M5's wide range of functionality

**Smartphone****LG G3 ★★★★★**

One of our favourite phones of 2014 so far, this high-res-capable handset offers plenty of expandable storage for your music.

**Television****Samsung UE48H6400 TV £700 ★★★★★**

The M5's TV SoundConnect function allows you to play the sound from a Samsung TV wirelessly, and this one has a superb picture.

**Smart app****Samsung Multiroom app**

You don't need to use the M5 in a multiroom set-up to get good use out of this control app and stream to the speaker from your network.

Total build from £900

For a full list of specifications and other useful info visit whathifi.com

Facts & figures**C'bridge Audio B'tone 100**
£200 ★★★★★

Claimed power 100W • Radio No • Remote Yes • Bluetooth Yes • AirPlay No • NFC No • 3.5mm input Yes • Charging No • Finishes 1 • Dimensions (hwd) 118 x 35 x 12cm

**JBL OnBeat Rumble**
£230 ★★★★★

Claimed power 50W • Radio No • Remote No • Bluetooth Yes • AirPlay No • NFC No • 3.5mm input Yes • Charging Yes • Finishes 1 • Dimensions (hwd) 17 x 45 x 22cm

**Monitor Audio Airstream S300**
£250 ★★★★★

Claimed power 140W • Radio No • Remote Yes • Bluetooth No • AirPlay Yes • NFC No • 3.5mm input Yes • Charging Yes • Finishes 2 • Dimensions (hwd) 15 x 47 x 15cm

**Nakamichi Dragon Lily**
£240 ★★★★★

Claimed power 100W • Radio No • Remote No • Bluetooth Yes • AirPlay No • NFC Yes • 3.5mm input Yes • Charging Yes • Finishes 3 • Dimensions (hwd) 33 x 26 x 26cm

**Samsung M5**
£200 ★★★★★

Claimed power n/a • Radio Internet • Remote No • Bluetooth Yes • AirPlay No • NFC Yes • 3.5mm input No • Charging Yes • Finishes 2 • Dimensions 11 x 34 x 17cm

STYLUS COUNSEL

That long, hot summer might be drawing to a close but the market for vinyl is still sizzling. So which of these four affordable turntables should you go for? Here's our advice

There's never been a better time to invest in vinyl. Demand is stronger than it has been for years, and those dipping their toes into the medium don't have to spend a fortune to get a good turntable. The notch above the budget end is full of talented record players: just look at the

Pro-Ject Debut Carbon and Rega RP1, the latter of which has been spruced up with upgraded components. These two go up against newcomers from Lenco and Audio Technica, which come packing some fancy features such as USB output and built-in phono stage. Who will come out on top? Let's take them for a spin...

1

What's on test

1. **Rega RP1 Performance Pack**
£300 p55
2. **Lenco L-175**
£400 p51
3. **Pro-ject Debut Carbon**
£325 p52
4. **Audio Technica AT-LP1240USB**
£500 p50



2

3

4

audio-technica

audio-technica
ATLP1240-USB Direct Drive Professional Turntable



AUDIO TECHNICA AT-LP1240USB £500

★★★★☆

1 The AT-LP1240USB is the only deck in this test offering three speeds
2 The cartridge is not included but the headshell is removable

Wow, this is a flashy effort from Audio Technica. While rivals from Pro-Ject and Rega have gone for simplicity, this one goes in all guns blazing.

That's because of all the added DJ features. Indeed, this bears an uncanny resemblance to the legendary Technics SL-1210 turntables. Turn away now if you're after a straight-up audiophile product: this is not it.

Fully featured

There's quite a lot going on here. First, the conventional. It's a direct-drive design with an aluminium platter and electronic speed change (33⅓, 45, 78rpm). The headshell is removable, which is just as well as no cartridge is included. You can get a decent one for about £30: we went for the Audio Technica AT95E/BL.

Now it gets a bit fancier. A stroboscope indicates speed accuracy while also creating a disco vibe. A removable 'stylus target light' lets you put the needle in the groove in the dark. Next to this are dials for start and brake speed adjustments.

For DJs wanting to lay their decks in 'battle' configuration, there are two start/stop buttons. There's a slider to adjust pitch, and a quartz lock button to bypass that slider. Oh, and unless you're a DJ, never hit the 'reverse' button - otherwise you'll ruin both stylus and record.

You can also adjust the height of the tonearm, as well as the turntable's feet, which offer a bit of isolation from

Guitar pluckings are convincing. Dynamically, there's enough to keep your attention, and there's enough texture too. One thing's sure: this flashy thing never sounds boring

external vibration. Build quality is very strong, for the most part, although we note a degree of excess movement in the tonearm bearings.

There's a USB output for recording on your PC/Mac computer (with the bundled Audacity software), plus a built-in phono amp. The latter is fine, but when we plugged in a Rega Phono Mini A2D the sound was a lot more dynamic, punchy, detailed and subtle.

Still, it's better than the phono stage of the Lenco L-175, which takes away some of the excitement in the music. That's not a problem for the Audio Technica.

Clarity and separation

With the Rega phono amp connected, it's time to see how Bad Michael Jackson really is. It's a decent performance, with a nice sense of drive. There's a good deal of clarity too, with various elements nicely separated and clearly identifiable.

Over to Tom Waits, and guitar pluckings are convincing. Dynamically, there's enough to keep your attention, and there's enough texture too. This flashy thing never sounds boring.

Unfortunately, that is not quite enough to beat the Pro-Ject Debut Carbon and Rega RP1 Performance Pack. The Audio Technica could do with more subtlety, and more nuance in the leading and trailing edges of notes.

The deck is very good at taking apart the various elements of a track, but less competent at then presenting them as a cohesive, musical whole. Having said that, we're more than happy with the sense of energy on hand.

Make no mistake, this is a very competent turntable. If you want one with all the trimmings, it could be just the ticket. But if you're after outright sound quality, we'd advise something a little less showy.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Good sense of drive; plenty of features; built-in phono stage

AGAINST Could be more subtle and cohesive; those features add to the price

VERDICT More than capable with sound, but better with features



LENCO L-175 £400

★★★★☆

1 Electronic speed change works with a direct-drive motor **2** The cartridge is included and can be easily changed thanks to the removable headshell

It's been an interesting journey for Lenco. Back in 1946 it was a Swiss brand which developed a strong reputation for turntables. Then in 1997 the brand was taken over by the Dutch STL Group. These days, Lenco makes clock radios and Bluetooth speakers alongside tablets - and turntables, of course.

So, the Lenco L-175. Initial impressions are good - it's a smart-looking deck. The glass-topped plinth helps create a mildly executive vibe, although it will be covered in fingerprints if you so much as breathe near it.

Beneath the skin

Under the glass, the rest of the plinth is made of plastic, which feels a little insubstantial. Nonetheless, it's solidly put together, with low levels of play in the tonearm bearing. Elsewhere you'll find direct-drive and electronic speed change (33⅓ and 45rpm). There's no mat, but you get a layer of rubber on top of the aluminium platter.

Set-up is easy. The moving-magnet cartridge comes factory fitted, which saves a lot of time. And the headshell is removable, so you'll have an easier time installing a replacement. Attaching the counterweight is swift work, as is adjusting the anti-skate.

Peek round the back of the turntable and you'll see a few handy extras. There's a USB output for recording to

Switch to a dedicated phono stage such as the Rega Phono Mini A2D and the results are a clear improvement. There's more detail and a greater sense of attack. Sadly, it's not enough

your PC or Mac, which you can do with the bundled copy of Audacity.

There's also a built-in phono stage. It works, but it's not amazing. The sound is restrained. There's less attack than we'd like and it's not a very exciting listen. Dynamics are definitely lacking. The treble felt a bit fizzy and splashy.

Switch to a dedicated phono stage such as the Rega Phono Mini A2D and the results are a clear improvement. There's more detail, and greater drive and attack. The performance feels a lot less reluctant, and there's a sense of pep. Basically, don't rely on the built-in phono stage.

Everything is relative

Sadly, it's not enough. We switch to the Project Debut Carbon and the Rega RP1 Performance Pack, and it becomes clear the Lenco is in trouble. Compared with the competition, it needs wider dynamics, more insight and a stronger sense of enthusiasm.

It's never quite as driven as it should be: Dukas' *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* just doesn't have the energy and the

emotional connection it should have. At the top end, things are a little bright too. In contrast, the Pro-Ject Debut Carbon is much clearer-sounding.

At your convenience

The Lenco L-175 is a turntable of convenience, rather than quality. The electronic speed change and direct drive design mean no faffing about with belt pulleys. The detachable headshell makes it easy to swap cartridges. Then there's the built-in phono stage and USB output.

If recording to your computer is a must, and you'd rather focus on ease of use, then this may be worth considering. In terms of sound quality, however, we find ourselves disappointed.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Easy and convenient to use; built-in phono stage; USB output

AGAINST Not that dynamic or engaging, even with a dedicated phono stage

VERDICT Good for convenience, but at this price it's outgunned when it comes to sound

PRO-JECT DEBUT CARBON

£325

★★★★★

The thing about being at the top is that everyone wants a piece of you. That's certainly the case when it comes to the Pro-Ject Debut Carbon - Award-winner and our turntable of choice at this price. Now it's being called to battle in order to prove its worth once again - does it still have what it takes?

One thing is for sure. Pro-Ject is adept at making tempting turntables. We've always been big fans of the Debut range, but the Debut Carbon really is unusual because of its super-light, super-strong tonearm. It's made of carbon fibre, a material usually reserved for far more exotic offerings with four-figure price tags. Yet here it is.

Worth the weight

Elsewhere, there's a weighty metal platter, a felt mat, and the Ortofon 2M Red moving-magnet cartridge. It comes factory fitted to the fixed headshell, which makes set-up a lot quicker. You're left with just the counter and bias weights to install, along with speed adjustment.

This is simple enough, if a little fiddly. The counter weight is a standard-looking thing but the bias weight is old school, hanging off the back of the tonearm and looping through a small hook.

It never feels like these parts are going to fall off, but it does feel precarious. Oh, and the tonearm rest doesn't have a proper locking clip, so you really don't want to knock this turntable.

The Debut Carbon really is unusual because of its super-light, super-strong tonearm. It's made of carbon fibre, a material usually reserved for more exotic offerings with four-figure price tags

Speed change is manual: you'll have to take off the platter and move the belt by hand to go from 33⅓ to 45rpm. The whole set-up process takes a matter of minutes, but you'll want to pay extra attention to placement.

Keep the deck perfectly level and well away from the speakers. The Debut doesn't have any isolating suspension (unless you count a set of compliant feet) so make sure its support is as rigid and vibration-free as possible.

The choice is yours

The turntable is well made, and is available in seven high-gloss colours. And - for the Henry Fords of this world - one of them is black.

Time to jam, and it's *Closing Time* for Tom Waits. The Pro-Ject is a fine-sounding package for the money. There's a pleasing level of clarity. It's a clean, insightful sound that digs deep to reveal all manner of texture and nuance in the mournful guitar fiddling.

All the while, the deck keeps a firm grip on the musical structure, with a good level of rhythmic precision. That's

not to say the Pro-Ject's performance is clinical: it's expressive, clearly displaying a good deal of subtlety and fairly wide dynamics.

Swings and roundabouts

If we had to nitpick about something, we'd say the Rega RP1 Performance Pack offers more power, and a greater sense of authority in the low end - but then again it doesn't have the impressive clarity of the Pro-Ject, nor it's amount of detail.

Really, you can't go wrong with the Pro-Ject Debut Carbon. It's not the newest turntable around, and the competition may be tough, but even after a few years it has proved that it's still among the class leaders at this price.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Remarkable clarity and detail; good build; wide range of finishes

AGAINST Manual speed change; price is creeping up a bit

VERDICT This Debut remains a seriously tempting proposition

1 Carbon-fibre tonearms are usually found only on decks far pricier than this
2 The anti-skate weight is simple enough, but a little fiddly to assemble

Aria 900

Innovation Extraordinaire.

Focal research has led to
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Flax Technology

Aria's unique speaker diaphragms consist of a layer of Flax encased in an ultra-thin fiberglass skin. This hybrid material is as rigid as Kevlar and twice as light as traditional polyglass, making it an excellent choice for sound quality.



Performance

Aria drivers feature a new Zamak (zinc/aluminum/magnesium/copper) basket and tweeters are suspended using Poron, a 'memory foam' material developed for the reference Utopia range which reduces distortion three-fold in critical areas of the audio spectrum.



Choice

Suitable for all, the full range comprises 5 equally stunning size formats. All are available in Walnut or Black High Gloss finishes with real leather front panels. Designed and manufactured in the heart of France.



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REGA RP1 PERFORMANCE PACK £300

★★★★★

We've always been fans of the Rega RP1. It's a brilliant entry-level turntable. We liked it enough to give it five stars and, eventually, an Award. But that was a few years ago. Today we're dealing with an enhanced version: the Rega RP1 Performance Pack.

Mostly, this is the same turntable we know and love, but with a few key tweaks. For starters, there's a new, thicker drive belt. You also get a new mat: it's thicker too, and made of natural wool, as opposed to the synthetic material of the original (for better damping and reduced resonance).

The moving-magnet cartridge is new, too. The standard Ortofon OMB5 has been replaced by Rega's own Bias 2. We're told it's hand-assembled, with an elliptical stylus and parallel wound coils, and quality-tested for two days.

You can get the Rega RP1 Performance Pack factory fitted, as we did. But if you already have the turntable, you can buy the parts separately as an upgrade. That will set you back about £85.

Simply made...

Elsewhere, it's a standard RP1. You get a simple rectangular plinth with three rubber feet. The plinth carries a superbly-made main bearing and the RB 101 tonearm - a simplified version of Rega's highly regarded RB 300. The platter is made of phenolic resin (read: fancy plastic). Speed change is manual:

We put on Nirvana's *Nevermind* and the opening drum whacks of *In Bloom* are properly thrashy. It's a detailed sound: plenty of texture, as well as a pleasing degree of transparency

you have to take the platter off and move the drive belt by hand. This really is a basic turntable - which is fine if it means more attention is paid to its engineering.

You can get the turntable in matte black, white or grey. There's also a version pimped out with the Union Jack.

...and simple to use

Setting up is about as simple as it gets. The cartridge comes pre-fitted. The ideal counterweight position is marked on the arm, so it's merely a matter of attaching the weight itself. Just set the bias - a slider under the tonearm - and you're off. As always, careful placement is key. Be sure to use a flat, stable surface, preferably far from your speakers (or any other source of vibration).

The original RP1 was a terrific performer for the money, but the Performance Pack bumps up the quality further. It's a surefooted, confident sound whether you spin an older, scratchier record or a fresh pressing.

There's a good sense of rhythmic drive, while the dynamics are strong and wide. We put on Nirvana's *Nevermind*

and the opening drum whacks of *In Bloom* are properly thrashy.

It's a detailed sound: there's plenty of texture, as well as a pleasing degree of transparency, which was never the greatest strength of the standard RP1. The Pro-Ject Debut Carbon does have a slight edge when it comes to absolute insight. Then again, the Rega counters with a weightier, more exciting sound.

Terrific value

We really like the Rega RP1 Performance Pack. It's a blindingly good turntable for the money, and a great entry point into the world of vinyl. And if you're already the proud owner of a standard RP1, this is an upgrade you should consider.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Good sense of drive; pleasing transparency; easy to set up

AGAINST Manual speed change

VERDICT The unadorned RP1 is an impressive turntable in its own right, but the upgraded version puts in one hell of a performance

1 Under the platter, the belt is made of a new, grippier material
2 The anti-skate device is calibrated by means of an easy-to-use slider

TEST VERDICT

THE WINNER

Rega RP1 Performance Pack

£300 ★★★★★

Sometimes, it's really not about the features. Here we have two traditional turntables and two shinier ones with more bits and pieces – and the winner is really rather basic.

That's the Rega RP1 Performance Pack. We've always liked the 'basic' Rega RP1, but this upgrade has elevated it to superstar status, supplying increased musicality and improved precision. And all that's down to a new mat, a new belt and a new cartridge. It's a real temptation for vinyl newcomers and existing owners of the RP1.

Next up is the Pro-Ject Debut Carbon, our favourite sub-£500 turntable of 2012. Two years on it's still a stonkingly good turntable for the money. We particularly like the remarkable level of clarity and insight offered. But it loses out to the Rega when it comes to precision and overall cohesion. As good

as the Pro-Ject's performance is, it has now been bettered. Just.

Audio Technica's AT-LP1240USB comes third. It looks impressive (if a bit on the flashy side), and we're pleased with the number of features and settings offered. It's not surprising, really, that a deck aimed at DJs will be a lot fancier. Sadly, the features outshout the sound. While the performance is good, it's not as subtle or insightful as the Pro-Ject or the Rega.

Short on drive

Finally we get to the Lenco, which is in an awkward place. Its sonic performance lacks drive and dynamism, and isn't anywhere near as engaging as any of the others. It has a USB output for computer recording purposes, but that's not enough to save it from a middling verdict.

SYSTEM BUILDER

Perfect partners for the
Rega RP1 Performance Pack



Stereo amplifier
Marantz PM6005

£300 ★★★★★

The Marantz's spacious sound and fine detail will nicely complement the precision of the Rega's analogue signal.



Speakers
Q Acoustics Concept 20

£350 ★★★★★

Impressive clarity, heaps of refinement and excellent build – although they do need their £200 stands. Our 2013 Product of the Year



Equipment rack
Atacama Evoque Eco 60-40

£450 ★★★★★

Not just gorgeous to look at and highly customisable, this rack also lets the system's components really shine

Total build £1400



For a full list of specifications and other useful info visit whathifi.com

Facts & figures



Audio Technica AT-LP1240USB
£500 ★★★★★☆

Speeds 33⅓/45/78 • Phono amp Yes
• Cartridge included No • Drive type
Direct • Electric speed change Yes •
USB output Yes



Lenco L-175
£400 ★★★★★☆

Speeds 33⅓/45 • Phono amp Yes •
Cartridge included Yes • Drive type
Direct • Electric speed change Yes •
USB output Yes



Pro-ject Debut Carbon
£325 ★★★★★★

Speeds 33⅓/45 • Phono amp No •
Cartridge included Yes • Drive type
Belt • Electric speed change No • USB
output No



Rega RP1 Performance Pack
£300 ★★★★★★

Speeds 33⅓/45 • Phono amp No •
Cartridge included Yes • Drive type
Belt • Electric speed change No • USB
output No



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The best stereo hi-fi system you can buy

Building the perfect team can be a tricky task when it comes to combining kit. It isn't just about packaging five-star names together and hoping to find a winning formation. A little experimentation, instead, can go a long way to getting the balance right and we've dusted off our clipboard to give you the greatest combinations... whatever your budget

WHAT'S ON TEST

SYSTEM 1 £1000 P70

Google Nexus 7 £200; NAD D 3020 £400; Dali Zensor 3 £300

SYSTEM 2 £2000 P72

Rega RP/Elys 2 £550; Arcam FMJ A19 £650; Bowers & Wilkins 685 S2 £500

SYSTEM 3 £3000 P74

Naim CD5S1 £995; Naim NAIT £925; Bowers & Wilkins 683S2 £1150



For a full list of specifications and other useful info visit whathifi.com





ALSO CONSIDER

Speakers

Dali Zensor 1 ★★★★★ £200

A suitable alternative to save space or money, or if you need to have your speakers relatively close to a back wall.



CD player

Marantz CD6005 ★★★★★ £350

If you still have discs kicking about, this Award-winning budget player has an open, detailed and peppy sound that fits this system well.



Headphones

AKG Y50 ★★★★★ £80

If you don't mind some wires, these colourful on-ears burst into life when plugged into the NAD's headphone output.



Perfect system: £1000

TABLET

GOOGLE NEXUS 7

£200

★★★★★

STEREO AMPLIFIER

NAD D 3020

£400

★★★★★

SPEAKERS

DALI ZENSOR 3

£300

★★★★★

This first system is a fine example of the importance of system synergy. We start with the Q Acoustics 2020i standmounts (£170), a Monitor Audio Airstream A100 amp (£400) and an Apple iPad Mini 2 (£320). Award-winning and with five-star plaudits, they are obvious choices for a £1000 budget.

The A100's big, clear and hugely-detailed sound make it one of the best amps below £500 we've ever heard, and in a standalone test it steals the show through our reference ATC SCM 12s. The 2020i's refined, insightful nature has won Awards and Group Tests before, but as brilliant as they are for budget speakers, they don't quite gel with the A100. The combination isn't as dynamic or engaging as we'd hope for, lacking bite and rhythmic drive.

Bitter Sweet and sour

Play The Verve's *Bitter Sweet Symphony* and it sounds big and open in our test room, but not particularly exciting. We've learned to limit our expectations when streaming music over Airplay, and switching to the USB input inevitably improves clarity. Still, the song's catchy violin sequence feels mashed in with the drums and guitars. The system mumbles along, lacking energy to hook you.

Swapping in the 2013 Award-winning **NAD D 3020** amp (£400) - in turn replacing Airplay with Bluetooth - brings an improvement to system performance.

The NAD is a well-equipped and discreet, versatile design (its integrated DAC supports up to 24-bit/96Khz files), and has an enthusiastic and lively delivery, too. You will have to sacrifice a little detail compared with the A100, but its upbeat delivery, precision and rhythmic skill compensate for that.

The 2020i's smooth, rounded character still curbs the amp's enthusiasm, though. We try some other beloved budget speakers, Dali Zensor 1s (£200), and they seem much more in sync with the boppy and lively NAD. Fast and agile, the Zensor 1s kick out the opening guitar riff in Lynyrd Skynyrd's *Sweet Home Alabama* with zeal.

Instruments are well placed across a wide, open soundstage, and there's a good degree of tonal balance when the speakers sit 15cm or so from a back wall. Detail is good, too. The sound of Eddie Vedder drawing breath in *Guaranteed* is discernible, as is the scraping when his fingers slide along guitar strings.

We're impressed by the true hi-fi sound the trio delivers, although could the £80 left over improve it? Yes! Give or take £20, the budget allows us to go one better with the **Dali Zensor 3** standmounts (£300). It's a natural upgrade: the Zensor 3s' zest for life is much the same as their little brothers', but not only do you get more cabinet -

swapping the iPad Mini 2 for the much cheaper, Award-winning **Google Nexus 7** 32GB (£200). Sound doesn't suffer much and it completes proceedings at £900 - leaving £100 for cables or for you to spend on a digital music download spree. Or, better yet, a pair of speaker stands for your new set-up (Soundstyle Z2s at £70, perhaps).

Storage problems

The Nexus 7's 4.0 Bluetooth doesn't quite make the most of the NAD's aptX spec, but detail and clarity is more than satisfactory, and pairing with any portable device is a breeze. A word of warning, though: the Nexus 7's 32GB

Unlike their little siblings, which work best with a back wall nearby, the Zensor 3s don't mind being a little further away, or firing straight ahead, giving an airy spread of sound

and a smart, glossy-fronted one at that - the scale and dynamics are improved, too. Play Hans Zimmer's *Harvey Two-Face* and the sense of scale and power the system gives is staggering for a sub-£1000 effort - and at considerable odds with the NAD's 30W output.

Bigger, better brother

Dynamically it's superb, too, revealing the highs and lows of the piece with ease, from rapturous orchestration to quiet piano solos.

The system lends a bigger hand in revealing Vedder's deep, growling vocals, and there's coherent, timely flow to the agile acoustic guitar notes.

Unlike their little siblings (which work best with a back wall nearby) the Zensor 3s don't mind being a little further away - 30cm, say - from a wall, preferring to fire straight ahead for an airy spread of sound.

It's a worthy step up for £100, and means our system comes in just over budget: £1020. We could easily stop here, but better value is found by

internal storage can't be externally extended, so storing CD-quality WAV files is limited to around eighty albums. This might not be a problem depending on the size of your music collection.

It was an interesting journey for us to end up at our destination of the final trio. Although it's not entirely surprising that two Award-winners are in our selection, it shows that compatibility isn't just in the star-rating. The inclusion of a tablet makes it a digital streaming system first, but for those with CDs still kicking about, the Marantz CD6005 CD player (£350) also works well in the set-up. For £900, this system has you rocking the sound as well as the budget.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Exciting, authoritative listen; skilful dynamics; impressive sense of power and scale; NAD's adventurous design

AGAINST 32GB storage is limiting on Google Nexus 7

VERDICT A great example of budget hi-fi



ALSO CONSIDER

CD player

Audiolab 8200CD ★★★★★ £800

Hooks up to a computer via its digital inputs, and this sharp CD player also gives the Arcam amp energy.



Phono stage

Rega Fono MM MK2 ★★★★★ £200

Our Award-winning phono stage produces a big, punchy and dynamic sound. It's a natural upgrade to the Arcam's integrated stage.



Bluetooth receiver

Arcam MiniBlink ★★★★★ £90

Plugging this Bluetooth receiver into the FMJ A19 is a gateway to streaming your digital music. Cheap, versatile wireless tech.



Perfect system: £2000

TURNTABLE
REGA RP3/ELYS 2
£550
★★★★★

STEREO AMPLIFIER
ARCAM FMJ A19
£650
★★★★★

SPEAKERS
B&W 685 S2
£500
★★★★★

System two brings us a more traditional set-up, partnering two 2013 Products of the Year – the **Rega RP3/Elys 2** turntable (£550) and **Arcam FMJ A19** amp (£650) – with some of the most thrilling speakers we've heard all year: **Bowers & Wilkins 685 S2** standmounts (£500). If you're a vinyl head, then this one's for you.

The turntable and amp is a natural pairing – the Arcam's input for a moving magnet phono stage is a good one, and provides a quick and easy hook-up to the latest version of Rega's Planar 3 deck (which comes with the £115 Elys 2 cartridge as part of the package). As with its predecessors, the Rega's bearing, arm and motor sits on a light, rigid plinth, resulting in a rather functional look.

Solidly built equipment

The Arcam is equally modest by design, though solidly built: 'FMJ' actually stands for 'Full Metal Jacket' and is suitably representative of its hardy steel and aluminium casework.

The chunky 683 S2s (available in a white or black ash finish) are certainly made distinctive by their yellow Kevlar cones, and sit comfortably on the (also black or white) Q Acoustic Concept 20 stands (£200) for our test. You will want them as far away from the turntable as possible, though, to reduce any unwanted influence on the Rega.

On paper it's a winning combination, and a real treat in performance. Insightful, rhythmic and dynamically sound, this trio delivers everything.

We dust off our Dmitri Shostakovich *Symphony No.1 in F Major, Op.10* LP and the system easily carries the epic composition, treating delicate violin solos with as much care and precision as dense, boisterous orchestral pieces. Soft woodwinds have an accurately breathy texture, while trombones make their mark with deep, thundering bass.

Like being in the front row of the theatre, it's hard to withdraw yourself from the action when there's so much excellent detail on offer.

Initially, a Rega duo was on the cards for this system, in the form of the long-serving Brio-R amp (£480). However, though thoroughly detailed through the midrange and displaying class-leading agility, it fails to exert enough control over the B&W speakers. As a result, the system falls short of the punch and rhythmic fidelity needed for us to revel in Michael Jackson's *Bad* LP.

The Arcam FMJ A19, on the other hand, produces a much more solid, robust and convincing sound with the Rega turntable. As stylus meets record, there's plenty of kick to *Another Part of Me* as it bops along happily to its spirited keyboard melody. The Rega's deep-

in our system? Well, they simply lack a little drive and pizzazz alongside the Arcam and Rega. Those forceful drum beats on the *Bad* LP feel softer and less definite than through the B&Ws, which spring into life from the word "go".

Sole wax

Too much music on other formats? If a turntable as a sole source is too limiting – and we imagine this to be the case for many of us – then how about a CD player? We've always thought the Audiolab 8200CD (£800) a good match for the Arcam, and the B&Ws' presence does nothing to discourage that.

As stylus meets record, there's lots of kick to Another Part of Me as it bops along happily. The Rega's deep-rooted musicality compels the Arcam into complying with its wishes

rooted musicality compels the Arcam into complying with its wishes.

Meaty and authoritative, it delivers plenty of heft to the electric guitar riffs in *Dirty Diana*. Hitting hard with drum beats, too, the sound effortlessly conveys the dramatic intensity of the song's charged narrative.

Gritty shaker

Even-handed in its presentation, cymbals, shakers and bass guitar are well-integrated with a solid, well-focused midrange. And as *Smooth Criminal* spins in our test room, this system delivers everything to you; the eerie breathing in the song's opening section is so clear, it gives us shivers down our spines.

Mixing in current Award-winning KEF LS50 standmounts (£800) feels like a natural move, despite pushing the budget to its maximum. Clinically articulate and unearthing lashings of detail from the get-go, the KEFs trump the B&Ws in terms of detail. Why, then, do the KEF LS50s not make the final cut

Plug the player into any of the Arcam's six line-level inputs (the phono stage can be turned into a seventh) and the system goes to town with the fast tempo of Red Hot Chili Peppers' *By The Way*. It charges through the thrashing guitars and pounding bass with clarity and openness, and remains unfazed by the track's aggressive, heavy structure.

For the money, this system is a sure bet. Transparent, balanced and musical, it keeps you interested and entertained, whatever the genre of music you are spinning. It really is lots of fun and, for considerably less than the £2000 budget, that's a job very well done in our opinion.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Strong dynamics; rhythmic and authoritative; energetic presentation; insightful; distinctive looks

AGAINST Speakers' finish is functional at best

VERDICT This classy system is a powerful and insightful performer for the money



ALSO CONSIDER

Turntable

Rega RP6/Exact ★★★★★ £1000

Place this turntable away from the speakers on a flat, rigid surface and your favourite records will come alive.



Headphones

Grado SR235e ★★★★★ £300

Plug Grado's new home on-ears straight into the Naim Nait 5s's 6.3mm headphone input for a clear, dynamic and foot-tapping sound.



Rack

Atacama EVOQUE ECO 60-40 ★★★★★ £450

Bamboo shelves and glossy black legs are attractive and help to produce an insightful sound.



Perfect system: £3000

CD PLAYER

NAIM CD5si

£995

★★★★★

STEREO AMPLIFIER

NAIM NAIT 5si

£925

★★★★★

SPEAKERS

B&W 683 S2

£1150

★★★★★

Okay, so it's £70 over budget. Sometimes, though, it pays to spend a bit more. Hear us out...

We didn't try to blow the budget from the off (promise!), initially putting our favourite £1000-ish CD player, the Cyrus CDi (£1050), next to our Award-winning **Naim Nait 5si** amp (£925) and Q Acoustics Concept 40 floorstanders (£1000) for a system under £3000.

Credentials point to this being a dream team but - mirroring our experiences in the £1000 system - the whole isn't always greater than the sum of its parts. Though offering a truly revealing and open sound, it only takes the forward-natured Cyrus to push the enthusiastic Naim into sounding a bit top-heavy and fragile. From the off, there's an obvious lack of weight to the piano in Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*.

Heavyweight tag-team

We hanker after some heft and warmth by mixing in the tonally rich **Naim CD5si**, and get just that. The difference the Naim 'si Series' tag-team makes is staggering: the CD player's smoothness balances out the Nait 5si perfectly - you can tell they were made for each other. Without losing the spacious, well-imaged soundstage, piano keys have weight and body, rolling into one another with better timing. Subtle and dynamic, it reveals more tonal variations and fluctuations, too.

Hear this combination and there's no denying there's a lot to enjoy. But though the Concept 40s are insightful and well-integrated, the combination feels as if it's holding back. We know there are speakers that can deliver more punch and pizzazz without losing the system's good bits... for a price.

Enter the huge - and hugely impressive - **B&W 683 S2** floorstanders (yes, B&W's newly revamped 600 Series makes its second appearance in this test). They need to justify the £150 price jump, and do - the B&Ws with two Naims take things to another level. In fact, any previous improvements pale into insignificance in comparison.

And that's not just down to their immense scale together. Newfound richness and bass weight make the piano sound, for the first time in our test, as though it could be in the room. Harmonics are fuller, and the passage's profound dynamic build-up - not glaringly obvious through the Concept 40s - is now unmistakable. The system's faithful reproduction makes the classical piece truly compelling, despite its 15-minute duration.

Playing Macklemore & Lewis's *Bombom* is concrete evidence of the system's musicality as it bounces along with frenzied momentum, not putting a step wrong with the quick-fire

The bulky B&W towers require some room, though - not least because of their generous size and preferred placement out in the open. Having them slightly toed-in produces a cleaner stereo image, and, though the supplied plinths add physical stability, they sound better without.

It's a compatible match in looks too: the 683 S2's black ash veneered cabinets look striking alongside the black Naim boxes (though a white finish is also available for the B&Ws, too).

The Naims's casework follows the less-is-more approach. The amplifier is a plain design, though, unlike many faceless components,

Put the system through its paces with The White Stripes's *You Don't Know What Love Is* and it tears powerfully through riffs, cymbals and drums with punch and panache

instruments. It has what it takes to inject energy and drive into its spirited melody, too.

Earning their Stripes

Put the combination through its paces with The White Stripes's *You Don't Know What Love Is* (*You Just Do As You're Told*) and it tears powerfully through riffs, crashing cymbals and rigorous drums with all the punch and panache needed to encourage a four-minute head-bop. The 683 S2s never feel wanting in terms of power, the 60W-per-channel amp a capable driving force.

Midrange is solid and fast through the 683 S2's drivers, and delivers the right focus on Jack White's vocals - albeit they are a touch sweeter-sounding through the Concept 40s. It's the speakers' deep, authoritative low-end that deserves special mention, though: pronounced but never distractingly so, it kicks up its heels with bassy tracks.

Up top we're satisfied too. That trebly guitar riffs can be earsplitting on lesser set-ups; here it's precise and controlled.

requires no guesswork: like the CD player, which has a small digit-only display (highlighting green lights around buttons are effective, and responsive to the system remote). The two look classy side-by-side and will perform best when sat on a decent rack like the Atacama Evoque Eco 60-40 (£450).

Good for many years' enjoyment

This is a top system for the money. If you've got the budget and space and want a CD player as your central source, give this a whirl. Take care to get the set-up right and this system is good enough to reward for years to come.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Huge scale and sense of power; revealing dynamics; weighty, rich delivery; authoritative bass; easy to use; smart, classy-looking system

AGAINST Speakers demand a big living space

VERDICT It's remarkable what this money will buy: a sound that will blow you away

TEST VERDICT



A test filled with talented performers, yet what it makes clear is that picking five-star kit and bundling it together will not always give the best results – experiment if you can

So, three great systems, all producing superb sound quality at their respective prices. Given the talented group of products we started with, we wouldn't have necessarily expected to end up with the system combinations we did. That journey is all part of the fun in a feature such as this.

While we've highlighted particular source components for each set-up, there's nothing to stop you from swapping out the one we've suggested for whatever alternative suits you best. We've highlighted what we consider to be the most suitable options in dedicated panels with each system. Our £1000 combination would shine with a great £300 CD player like the Marantz CD6005, while our priciest trio sounds great with Rega's talented RP6. So don't worry about mixing things up a little.

We're particularly happy that our entry-level system takes the humble Nexus 7 tablet and shows it to be a decent source for a proper hi-fi system. Swap the Nexus for a good smart phone or a laptop and the overall result would

still be pleasing. Purists will point to the fact that a dedicated hi-fi source such as a CD player, streamer or turntable would sound even better and we wouldn't disagree. But what this system does is allow people with large music file collections (and let's face it, it's the way many people get their musical fix) to have a really great sound from them.

Moving on up

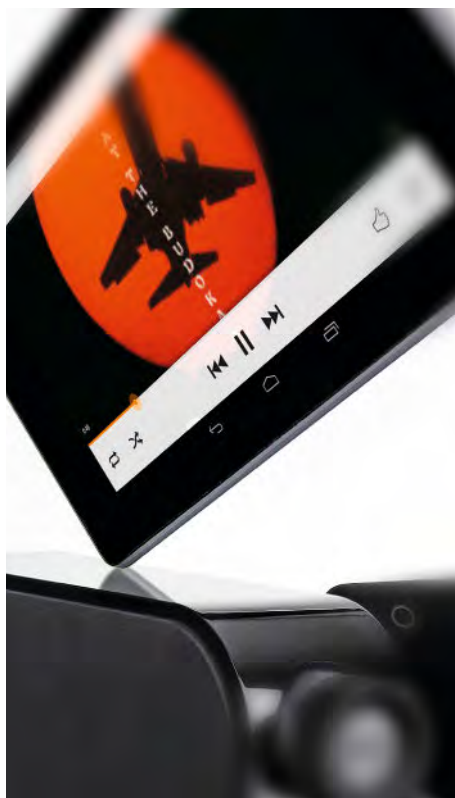
The other systems are more traditional, yet we're pleased to find signs of rising standards. The performance of the priciest system here is staggering for the money, and well beyond what we'd have expected even a few years ago.

What this test makes patently clear is that merely picking five-star components and bundling them in a system doesn't guarantee the best results. Yes, what you end up with will probably be pretty decent, but if you really want a system that shines there's no substitute for going to a dealer and taking a listen for yourself.

While it may be fashionable to place a low priority on cables and equipment supports, such things help the main system components work at their best, so it's worth putting at least 10 per cent of your budget towards such items.

To sum up: trust your ears when choosing products and you'll get the set-up right.

We're very happy that our entry-level system takes the humble Nexus 7 tablet and shows it to be a decent source for a proper hi-fi system. Swap it for a good phone or laptop and the result would still be pleasing



SYSTEM 1

£1000

Google Nexus 7

£200 ★★★★★

Integrated yes • Power output (watts) 30 •
Web browsing – yes • OS – Android • 3G – no •
Storage 32GB • Screen size (in) 7 •
Resolution 1920 x 1200 • Web browsing yes •
Dimensions 20 x 11 x 9cm

NAD D 3020

£400 ★★★★★

Integrated yes • Power output (watts) 30 •
Line level in 2 • MM phono in 0 • MC phono in 0 •
USB in yes • Tape loops 0 • Preamp out no •
Speaker outputs 1 • Tone controls no •
Headphone out yes • Remote control yes •
Finishes 1 • Dimensions (hwd) 19 x 6 x 22cm

Dali Zensor 3

£300 ★★★★★

Powered no • Standmount yes •
Floorstander no • Sensitivity 88dB/W/m •
Impedance (ohms) 6 • Max power handling 125W •
Biwireable no • Finishes 3 • Dimensions 35 x 21 x 29cm



SYSTEM 2

£2000

Rega RP3/Elys 2

£550 ★★★★★

Powered no • Standmount yes •
Floorstander no • Sensitivity (db/w/m) 88 •
Impedance (ohms) 6 • Max power handling 125W •
Biwireable no • Finishes 3 • Dimensions 35 x 21 x 29cm

Arcam FMJ A19

£650 ★★★★★

DAC no • Power outputs 50W • DAC no •
Line level in 6 • MM phono in 1 • MC phono in 0 •
USB in no • Tape loops 1 • Preamp out yes •
Speaker outputs 2 • Tone controls •
Headphone out yes • Remote control yes •
Finishes 1 • Dimensions (hwd) 9 x 43 x 28cm

B&W 685 S2

£500 ★★★★★

Powered no • Standmount yes • Floorstander no •
Sensitivity 87dB/W/m • Impedance (ohms) 8 •
Max power handling 100W • Biwireable yes •
Finishes 2 • Dimensions 35 x 19 x 32cm



SYSTEM 3

£3000

Naim CD5si

£995 ★★★★★

Integrated yes • Transport no • Coaxial digital
out 0 • Optical digital out 0 • XLR out 0 •
RCA out 1 • Headphone out 0 • Coaxial digital in
0 • Optical digital 0 • USB in 0 • Finishes 1 •
Dimensions (hwd) 7 x 43 x 30cm

Naim Nait 5si

£925 ★★★★★

DAC no • Power outputs 60W • Line level in 4
• MM phono in 0 • MC phono in 0 • USB in no •
Tape loops 1 • Preamp out no • Speaker outputs 1
• Tone controls yes • Headphone out yes
• Remote control yes • Finishes 1 •
Dimensions (hwd) 4 x 43 x 30cm

B&W 683 S2

£1150 ★★★★★

Powered no • Standmount no • Floorstander yes
• Sensitivity 89dB/W/m • Impedance (ohms) 8 •
Max power handling 200W • Biwireable yes
Finishes 2 • Dimensions 99 x 19 x 36cm



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TEMPTATIONS

“Pathos filled with majestic grandeur”

■ **Pathos Lògos Mk II** Amplifier (with DAC module)

■ **£3950** ★★★★★

We can't think of another manufacturer that balances the conflicting demands of aesthetics and performance better than Pathos. This Italian electronics specialist regularly delivers on both counts.

We're already big fans of the original Lògos. It was first released 12 years ago and has enjoyed a steady stream of upgrades throughout its life.

This Mk II version doesn't change in appearance at all - why would you, when the outlandish mix of wood, metal and left-field design still looks so stunning? But the engineers have taken the opportunity to revise its valve-powered preamp stage in a bid to improve its performance.

Its heart remains a pair of ECC83 valves, but the circuit is modified for greater stability and transparency. The power amplifier section is unchanged; it's a Class A/B MOSFET design with an output of 110 watts per channel into 8ohms, and double that as impedance halves.

As far as amplifiers are concerned, that doubling of output into 4 ohms is ideal behaviour, and at the very least suggests the Lògos will be happy driving a wide range of speakers. That certainly proves to be the case. It produces good volume levels with our reference ATC SCM50s and a pair of Monitor Audio PL100s. This integrated is certainly less fussy than just about any all-valve alternative we've tried.

Hot but not dangerous

Those Pathos-script heat-sinks along each side aren't just for show. Given a couple hours of hard use they heat up notably. It's not dangerous of course, but

The Pathos Lògos MK II version doesn't change its appearance at all, but why would you when the outlandish mix of wood, metal and left-field design remains so stunning?

does mean that you need to ensure there's plenty of room for ventilation to prevent heat build-up being an issue.

The other major change in the transformation to Mk II status is the option of having on-board digital-to-analogue conversion circuitry. You can save £450 off the price we've quoted if you leave the digital module out, but we wouldn't. If, like us, you have a fair few digital sources you will find the DAC is a good one. Certainly, it's good enough to justify that outlay.

A minor complaint

Our only complaint is that there isn't an optical option alongside the USB and pair of coax - it would be handy to have one. The amp will accept 24-bit/192kHz music streams through all its digital inputs, though you need to install dedicated Pathos software drivers to get the USB to work. It's a simple enough process that only takes a few minutes to complete.

Away from the digital inputs the Lògos conforms to the high-end integrated amp norm. There's a decent supply of line level inputs, including two sets of balanced inputs. You also get a preamp output - for those who feel the need to bolster the amp's power - and a set of high-quality speaker terminals.

We're impressed by Pathos's build quality - the Lògos is solid and well

finished. We really like the attention given to small details such as the carved 'Mk II' on the wooden front section of the amplifier and the rather lovely circular grille holes on the top panel. While some may feel the overall effect is too showy, we doubt whether anyone could criticise the way it's made.

Unwanted homework

Just as the looks are a little divisive, we think it will take a while before some people feel totally at home operating the Lògos. On the surface it's a simple device, with a couple of front panel



'Listening to a range of Motown,
we are struck by the combination
of insight, refinement and subtlety'
See overleaf for more detail...



TECH SPECS

Power output 110 watts Integrated Yes DAC Yes
Line level in 5 USB in 1 Tape loops 1 Preamp out Yes
Speaker outputs 1 Remote control Yes
Dimensions (hwd) 17 x 42 x 43cm Finishes 1



1 Evidence of high
quality is everywhere,
including the finish
on this wooden
front panel
2 A pair of ECC83
valves perform pre-
amplification duties
3 The only obvious
change from the
original version is the
MKII logo

The amplifier's stereo imaging is good too. Instruments are placed with skill and the soundstage is wide and relatively deep

In detail

1 Pre-amp output While not the obvious partner for an external power amplifier, the Lògos can be connected to one. This could be useful if you need a bit more grunt for especially difficult-to-drive speakers.

2 Digital inputs This is one of the major differences between this amplifier and the original. The DAC module is a good one and doesn't let down

the talented analogue circuit. You can save £450 without it, but we wouldn't.

3 Balanced inputs Alongside the standard single-ended option, the Pathos also has two pairs of balanced inputs. It's worth trying these out if your source is suitably equipped. Such a connection is ideal for very long cable runs (say, 5m and above).



buttons, a large volume control and minimalist remote. But the focus on aesthetics has affected usability. Neither of the front panel buttons - power and input selector - are labelled, which in itself isn't a huge problem, but couple that with a frustratingly vague action and things become too hit-and-miss for our tastes.

The Lògos's lovely looking wooden remote isn't perfect either. It may be well-built and neatly arranged with just

six buttons all in a line, but these aren't marked, so you have to learn their functions. Given a couple of days this is easily done - but once again we find ourselves annoyed by a lack of precision in use.

A sonic cocktail well mixed

Start listening and any misgivings about ergonomics fade quickly. Previously, we haven't always been great fans of hybrid amplifier designs that mix valve and transistor technologies. The idea behind such products has always been to combine the fluidity of valves with the grip and power of solid state. In our experience it rarely works out that way.

Usually these designs compromise the innate strengths of both core technologies, resulting in a rather unsatisfying sonic cocktail. Pathos, in our experience, is one of the few companies to get hybrid designs right on a regular basis, and the Lògos Mk II continues that trend.

Some soul shows its heart

You can't go wrong with classic Motown tunes so that's where we start. Listening to a range of tracks from The Temptations, Stevie Wonder and Smokey Robinson, we're struck by the amplifier's combination of insight, refinement and subtlety. It really gets to the heart of a track, revealing the emotions involved with ease.

It doesn't forget to have fun either. There's plenty of get-up-and-go, and a surprising degree of rhythmic precision. It has us bopping along in quite an undignified manner to songs like *Superstition* and *Papa Was A Rolling Stone* - not a pretty sight, admittedly.

Moving onto something grander such as Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* reveals

the Lògos's muscular side. Such music highlights the amplifier's scale and authority, and its composure when pushed hard during the piece's savage crescendos. We're equally impressed by the Pathos's dynamic punch and its forceful yet textured bass.

The amplifier's stereo imaging is good too. Instruments are placed with skill and the soundstage is wide and relatively deep. The staging is nicely layered too and stays stable even when things become busy.

Sweet but fortunately not sour

Tonally things are a little on the sweet side of neutral, but not enough to skew the overall balance too much. The sweetening is just enough to soften hard-edged treble a touch, making the Lògos less fussy about playing poor recordings than most alternatives.

It's easy for audiophiles to underestimate the likes of the Lògos Mk II. At the higher end of the market, products that place a priority on appearance normally struggle with sound quality. This Lògos Mk II is an exception. Looks, fine sound and excellent build - it has it all.

Consider if You value aesthetics as much as sound quality

Highlight Has got to be the amplifier's stunning appearance

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Stunning appearance; sweet, balanced sound; fine dynamics coupled with insight

AGAINST Controls buttons on the front panel and remote handset lack precision

VERDICT This is a case of having your cake and eating it. Combines aesthetics and great sound

The remote is well-built and arranged but we are annoyed by a lack of precision in the button action



WHOSE SIDE ARE YOU ON?

Around the world, the illegal wildlife trade is responsible for the slaughter of thousands of animals each year, pushing some of our most loved species to the brink of extinction. We are not asking for your money. We are asking you to simply choose a side: the world's critically endangered species, or the criminals who kill them for money. Add your voice to the cause and help put the killing to an end.



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unitedforwildlife.org

TEMPTATIONS

AKG K812

Philipp Schuster **AKG** Product Line Manager, Headphones & Headsets




"The K812 is made for professionals, by professionals. Focusing on the musician, engineer and music

producer, we've brought a product to life that lets them experience the smallest sonic details with the most accurate balance for mixing, mastering and any music production. These headphones are not based on pomp, but on love and dedication for music."

Serial No. 001068

AKG

Made in Austria



Reliability, toughness
and consistency, not
looks, take priority
with the AKG K812s

“Outright insight proves an absolute revelation”

■ **AKG K812** Headphones

■ **£1100** ★★★★★

Why spend **£1000** on a pair of headphones like the K812s? There are great performers available for a fraction of the price (step forward AKG's own Award-winning £200 K550s). So why spend more?

Physically, there's little to help the K812's case against such talented in-house rivals. These headphones may be very nicely engineered, comfortable and made with high-quality materials, but they don't ooze luxury. The K812s look to be in a spot of bother - until you start listening. Then it becomes obvious where the money has been spent: inside.

Leave it to the Professionals

The clue to the K812's priorities is that they are marketed and distributed by the AKG's Professional wing, which deals with recording studios and the music-making side of things in general.

Exotic finishes and conventional judgements of luxury count for very little. Instead, reliability, toughness and consistency take priority, and the sound quality of a pair of headphones can be judged against the live event. If you're going to charge £1000 for a pair of headphones in such an environment they had better be good, really good. Fortunately the K812s certainly are.

It takes time to appreciate just how talented these headphones are. They take ages to run-in. Straight out of the box they sound bright, edgy and quite coarse. Sure, there are hints of the good things to come - even at this stage these headphones resolve a lot of detail and show a great deal of agility - but the overall balance just isn't right. Give them time, plenty of it, and things get considerably better. Our review pair only

started to sound truly special when they had played music for nearly 100 hours.

These headphones need more than just time to sound good, though. A high-quality partnering system is a must. We use our resident Apple MacBook (loaded with Pure Music replay software) feeding the hugely talented Chord Hugo for much of the test. Our reference Naim NDS/555PS music streamer proves a valuable back-up source too. We use a range of recordings, from a low bit-rate 192kbps of Eminem's *Curtain Call*, through to Stevie Wonder's *Innervisions* on DSD, to 24-bit/192kHz files of Hans Zimmer's *The Dark Knight Rises*.

What makes these headphones so good? It's their transparency; that ability to reveal the recording for what it is without overlaying a distinctive sonic signature on top. Play Eminem's *Stan* and these AKGs don't hesitate to reveal the relatively crude nature of the 192kbps file. There's a lack of subtlety and a shortfall in spaciousness. The rhythmic structure isn't too secure and the track has reduced momentum.

Refined character

Switch to a CD-quality rip of the same track and the improvement is immediately clear - the sound gains refinement and has more energy. Eminem's beautifully judged vocal flow comes through with more passion and precision. It's far more enjoyable.

Move to something grander in the form of *The Dark Knight Returns* OST and the K812s respond with an impressive sense of power, particularly when it comes to bass punch and reach. Dynamic extremes are delivered with class-leading authority and composure.

TECH SPECS

Open Yes
Over-ear Yes
Wireless No
Weight 390g
3.5mm Yes
6.3mm Yes
Cable length 3m

These headphones never sound stretched, even when music as demanding as this is replayed at high volumes. The treble, which sounds a touch hard and monotone when the headphones are fresh, is now wonderfully insightful and refined.

Give them a great recording such as Stevie Wonder's *Innervisions* and these AKGs are happy to shine. There's a mass of detail here, as much as we've heard from any headphone at this price, and it is convincingly organised into a wonderfully entertaining whole.

Top-end headphones invariably appear poor value next to other similarly priced hi-fi components. But for outright insight you'd have to spend thousands more on speakers before you get remotely close to the resolution and agility on offer here. That's before you factor in matching power amplifiers and the kind of room (and acoustic) that can do such speakers justice. In this context, we recommend the K812s highly.

Consider if You have a top quality source and headphone amplifier and put insight above everything else
Highlight Very impressive resolution

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Impressive detail resolution and transparency; well-built and beautifully engineered; comfortable

AGAINST Need a top-class system to shine

VERDICT Pamper the K812s and you get a wonderfully faithful sound that's as insightful as we've heard from headphones at this price

“Muscle to deliver a kick, but finesse too”

■ **Yamaha CD-S3000** CD player

■ **£3500** ★★★★★☆

It's the little things that make a difference. In the case of Yamaha's CD-S3000 it's the disc drawer. Most rivals are happy using off-the-shelf rickety plastic drawers; the aluminium unit on the Yamaha glides out with grace.

This classy player is heavy, weighing in at 19.2kg – as much as some pretty chunky integrated amps. Its casework is made up of thick aluminium plates and houses a generous power supply. The supply is configured with separate feeds for the analogue and digital sections of the circuitry, right down to dedicated mains transformers. This separation minimises any unwanted effects caused by the sections interacting. The result should be greater sonic transparency.

Everywhere we look there are signs of attention to detail – from the carefully laid-out circuit boards to the neat arrangement for levelling the transport's position inside the casing. Yamaha has even engineered the player's feet so they can be used spiked or unspiked.

This thoroughness continues to the casework, where fit and finish are absolutely top class. Every surface is finished immaculately and all the panels line up just so. The supplied remote control is suitably classy too, being nice to hold and easy to use.

It's becoming increasingly common for CD players to come with digital inputs. It makes sense: if your player has a high-quality DAC, why not make the most of it by routing other digital sources through the circuitry. The CD-S3000 comes with the usual trio of USB, optical and coax (all capable of accepting a 24-bit/192kHz music streams, with USB adding DSD capability to that).

It will get there in the end

When we start using the CD-S3000 we realise it's not a player for the impatient. Responses are a little dim witted, particularly when loading a disc or switching inputs. Given a few seconds it always does what you want though.

TECH SPECS

Integrated Yes
DAC Yes
Multidisc No
Coaxial digital Yes
Optical digital Yes
XLR Yes
RCA Yes
Display off Yes
Finishes 2
Dimensions (hwd)
 14 x 44 x 44cm



The digital inputs at the back mean you can use the impressive DAC in the CD-S3000 with other digital sources

We start with CD – an old favourite in the form of *Rounds* from Four Tet – and this Yamaha does well. It's agile, detailed and delivers a decent dose of punch. Like its partnering A-S3000 amplifier (Sept 2014 issue), this player sounds really well balanced. There's a hint of excess warmth, but all it does is to give the player's sound a likeable solidity.

Rounds is full of complex rhythms, and we're pleased to report the CD-S3000 does a good job with them. It doesn't quite have the hard-charging attitude of a Naim CDX2 or the leading-edge precision of Cyrus's transport and DAC combination, but it remains composed, precise and delivers enough energy to keep us hooked.



This music requires subtlety, resolution and fluidity to shine, and the Yamaha obliges, putting in a spellbinding performance that has us gripped from beginning to end

The smooth, solid disc drawer shows just how beautifully this player is put together

There's a good degree of insight and an admirable level of composure when the music becomes complicated. We like the Yamaha's punch too, and its way with dynamic shifts. There's enough muscle here to deliver a sizable kick when necessary but plenty of finesse when the music requires.

That finesse comes in handy when we listen to Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*. This beautiful piece of music requires subtlety, resolution and fluidity to really shine, and the Yamaha obliges, putting in a spellbinding performance that has us gripped from beginning to end.

The good news continues with SACD replay. Eric Bibb's *Good Stuff* sounds

luscious. The sound is smooth and richly detailed, delivering the heart-felt vocals with passion and forcefulness.

We switch to the digital inputs and are happy with what we find. The on-board DAC reflects the surefooted presentation we hear with disc replay. Listening to a range of music, it strikes us that we've stopped thinking about the Yamaha and have started focusing on the music alone.

This is an understated player that just gets out of the way of the music. While it may not be the last word in any one respect, bar possibly build quality, it has enough talent to let the music shine. And, when you think about it, that's what good hi-fi is all about.



Consider if - You want a high quality SACD/CD player with the additional flexibility of digital inputs
Highlight - Build quality

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Superb build and finish; well-judged tonality; insightful and well-balanced presentation; digital inputs; nice remote

AGAINST Slow-witted responses to commands; more excitement is available for similar money

VERDICT A beautifully engineered player - and a refined and insightful performer too

PLAY LIST

The movies, music and games to test your system

Out this month...



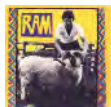
Paul McCartney
McCartney

★★★★☆



Paul McCartney
McCartney II

★★★★☆



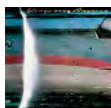
Paul & Linda McCartney
Ram

★★★★☆



Paul McCartney & Wings
Band On The Run

★★★★☆



Wings
Wings Over America

★★★★☆

Extra Features

- Promotional videos
- Films and photographs
- Interviews
- Press releases
- Album artwork
- Lyrics
- Documentaries
- Tour itineraries
- Sketchbooks
- Concert programmes
- Publicity material



Apple Corps to App store

The 'deluxe' reissue is a common marketing tool - but, as a vehicle for adding value to re-releases, the app looks, in some ways, even better value. Certainly Paul McCartney thinks so.

The first five McCartney albums to get the iPad app treatment are among the biggest sellers of his productive 1970s. Each remastered album is embedded in an extensive app, with a wealth of photographs and video content. Even listeners familiar with these recordings will find fresh perspective offered by the accompanying material.

In musical terms, all five albums intermittently demonstrate McCartney's otherworldly melodic gifts and instinctive songwriting talents. Both *McCartney* and *Ram* (1971) are the homespun, pastoral sound of a man doing as he pleases - songs like *Maybe I'm Amazed* and *Too Many People* sound relaxed and (in the best way) effortless.

The home-made vibe is equally strong on *McCartney II*, but the sound is influenced by the appearance of one of the UK's very first sequencers. *Temporary Secretary*, for example, is a weirdly contemporary listen.

Action-packed - and strange

It's the two Wings albums, though, that top and tail these reissues. They were never the most credible 'band', and the reputation of *Band on the Run* barely survived Alan Partridge's endorsement. But taken objectively (and even without the fascinating context the app content presents) *Band on the Run* is an ambitious, action-packed and, above all, strange album.

Only *Wings Over America*, the 1976 triple-album document of Wings' only US tour, sounds a particularly false note. There's too much of it, for a start, and the band is too big, too busy and altogether

too anxious to make its presence felt. The light and shade that's at the heart of many of McCartney's best songs is buried beneath the need to project into the Dallas Enormodome or wherever, and at this remove it's hard to imagine *Wings Over America* being of interest to anyone who wasn't actually at one of these shows.

At £5.49 a pop these apps look like overt value for money - there's no arguing with the sheer amount of material each one includes. It's true that a 256kbps file of *Band on the Run* from the iTunes store has more dynamism, space and detail than the version in the app - but then *Band on the Run (Remastered)* costs £10.99 from iTunes.

We're confident, then, that these apps are not the last word in fidelity. But maybe that's to miss the point. If you consider the music as simply one element, each app is fascinating to a lesser or greater extent.

Spotify highlights [Join us on Spotify whf.cm/playlist2014](https://whf.cm/playlist2014)



Amen Dunes: Lonely Richard ...drone, warble, rumble, mutter, loiter, creak... but with panache, and with some pretty melodic hooks.

The Raspberries: Go All The Way It's possible this is where 'power pop' stopped being a notion and became an authentic Thing. It's *definitely* where Eric Carmen started.

Dilated Peoples: Worst Comes To Worst Somehow the fully engaged, cutting-edge sound of LA hip-hop circa 2001 has become the music one hears at wedding receptions.

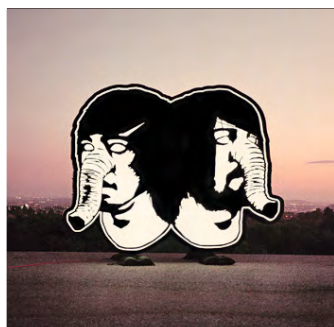
The Naked and Famous: Young Blood "Everybody wants to be naked and famous" croaked Tricky back in the day. In Auckland's Mainz Music College, notes were duly taken.

Music

GAMES, MOVIES
& FORTHCOMING
RELEASES
p88



Download, CD, vinyl



DEATH FROM ABOVE 1979 *The Physical World* Out 9th September

★★★★☆

Although Death From Above 1979's second album has arrived almost exactly a decade after debut *You're a Woman, I'm a Machine*, little of *The Physical World* speaks of evolution.

That's not automatically a bad thing – DFA1979 are still good at that thing they do and, like the man said, people who like this sort of thing will find this the sort of thing they like. Tempos that scarcely dip below 'mid-', filthy bass-guitar sounds the like of which Jean-Jacques Burnel would be proud, tireless attack and an overall stance perched halfway

between 'noise' and 'noise-pop' are the headlines here. If you want it fierce, confident and eminently pogo-worthy, look no further.

A sporadically thrilling album

The demands *The Physical World* places on your system aren't the most extensive, but they are severe. From the opening salvo of *Cheap Talk*, through *Right On*, *Frankenstein!* to *Trainwreck* 1979 and the title track that closes the album, any set-up without the necessary dynamic headroom, enthusiasm/powers of endurance, stereo separation and transient-detail retrieval is going to struggle to prevent this sounding a bit cloudy and cluttered.

Competently handled, though, *The Physical World* is a sporadically thrilling album with some unlikely subtleties buried beneath the wilful distortion and punishing rhythms. There's nothing wrong with being a one-trick pony as long as your trick's good enough.

Specifications

Duration 35m 50s

Standout track *White Is Red* Allows you to get your breath back ready for the second-half assault.

Download, CD, vinyl



IMOGEN HEAP *Sparks* Out now

★★★★☆

Indefatigable in the face of incompetent music teachers, clueless management or record-company upheaval, Imogen Heap (part musician, part tech-geek) is back with her fourth album. *Sparks* is her first release since 2009's *Ellipse* and displays all the bloody-mindedness, restless inventiveness and clarity of purpose Heap has displayed since she signed her first recording contract at the age of 18.

Sparks began with Heap being sent the sound of a striking match – it became the song *Lifeline*. Having

resolved to record one track, over a two-week period, every three months, Heap has released seven 'singles' from *Sparks*, as they were completed, between March 2011 and February 2013.

And, as befits a woman who won the 2010 Grammy Award for 'Best Engineered Album, Non-Classical' (hands up who knew such an award even existed), the sound of *Sparks* is rich and varied. From *Telecommunications* (a glitchy collaboration with deadmau5) to *Xizi She Knows* (layering hectic electronics with Heap's crystalline, close-mic'd voice), *Sparks* is seldom less than fascinating.

A serious system tester

Warm and organic, but busily electronic and with ample variation in tempo, *Sparks* asks a lot of your system. Delivered sympathetically by a set-up with the wherewithal, though, it's unlike any other release you've heard this year.

Specifications

Duration 59m 07s

Standout track *Propeller Seeds* Recorded in 3D, apparently. Headphones, then, are essential.

Listen to it this way

The system

NAD D 3020 £400 ★★★★★

Quirky looker with the sort of feature-count any self-respecting 21st century amp needs

Dali Zensor 3 £300 ★★★★★

Biggish, but smart and (partially) glossy – and an effortless match for the NAD

Google Nexus 7 £200 ★★★★★

As long as 32GB of memory is enough for you, you won't hear a better-sounding Android tablet



An enthusiastic, 21st century system to do DFA1979 proud

Listen to it this way

The system

Marantz PM6005 £300 ★★★★★

Performs with authority way beyond its modest price

Q Acoustics Concept 20 £350 ★★★★★

Little short of a triumph at the price, these are a classic-in-waiting

Marantz CD6005 £300 ★★★★★

Great sound, a lovely match for the Marantz amp (and able to handle the 12-disc *Sparks* 'deluxe box')



A subtle, talented set up that will get Imogen Heap's *Sparks* really flying



Movie shorts

Killing Season

John Travolta and Robert De Niro contrive reasons to kill each other in the mountains, and then fail to do so. It's a new low for both parties.

Transcendence

Johnny Depp's brain is uploaded into a computer. It's a fresh take on the whole Evil Science thing, until things get unbelievably daft.

The Raid 2

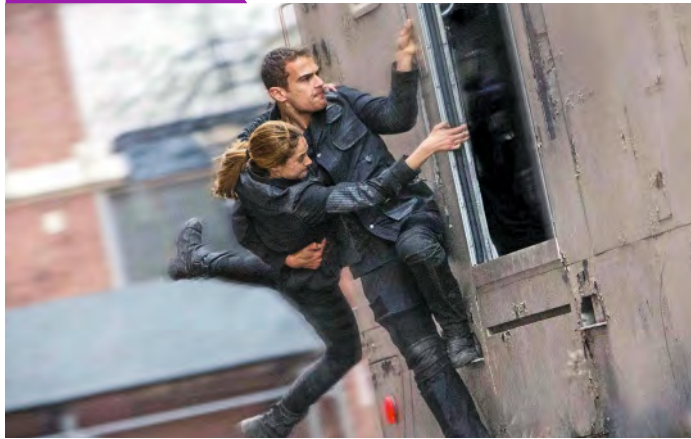
There's less raiding this time, but you get a deeper, more personal storyline, involving more characters. Which means more people to punch.

Chinese Zodiac

Jackie Chan shows he can still pack a punch in what is supposedly his last big action movie. Sadly he doesn't do it enough and the rest is quite awful.

On-screen

System tester



Divergent Blu-ray Out now

★★★★☆

Ah, we love a good dystopia story. This one is set in a world where things are made all fine and dandy by overly simplified categorisation.

Society, made up of fit and attractive people, is divided into groups: Nice Guys, Smart Guys, Brutally Honest Guys, Hippies, and Running Jumping Climbing Gits.

It's not long before somebody realises it's a really bad idea.

The more doomed the set-up, the more entertaining the consequences – so it's a strong enough premise.

But there's no escaping the echoes of the *Hunger Games* series, which is a lot darker, ballsier and more intelligent.

Everything here feels rather sanitised: without any real crisis until the final act, you're mostly treated to a teenage identity crisis.

When it all kicks off it's quite fun (and plenty colourful), but you'll never quite forget this is clearly aimed at adolescent girls.



Watch it this way

The system

Epson EH-TW5910

£900 ★★★★★

Still available, still superb

Sony BDP-S7200

£220 ★★★★★

Make your projector a Smart projector

Sony STR-DN1050

£500 ★★★★★

Is going to take some catching...

Q Acoustics Q7000i

£900 ★★★★★

Gets pretty much everything right

Games

Abyss Odyssey

PC, PS3, Xbox 360 Out now

★★★★☆



One of the craziest games this year, Abyss Odyssey is largely a side-scrolling platformer that sees you travelling deep underground to find a warlock. But when you meet the mad-looking enemy creatures it turns more into a one-on-one fighting game. An interesting mash-up, it's also buggy.

Oddworld: New 'n' Tasty

PS4 Out now

★★★★★



Another remake of a classic, but this one is from 1997. All new assets mean Oddworld looks amazing on current gen, and the story of an enslaved food-processing plant worker escaping to become something more is as relevant as ever. It's far less forgiving than modern games, but otherwise brilliant.

The Last of Us Remastered

PS4 Out now

★★★★★

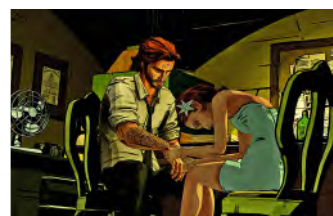


Perhaps the finest game of the last generation, *The Last Of Us* has been given the PS4 treatment, with 1080p graphics and 60fps refresh rate. And you get a bunch of extra content, including the awesome *Left Behind* DLC. Whether replaying or discovering for the first time, this is essential.

The Wolf Among Us

iOS, OSX, PC, PS3, Xbox 360 Out now

★★★★★



Telltale's five-part adventure game that isn't *The Walking Dead* isn't actually as good as *The Walking Dead*, but then what is? Based on the *Fables* comic series that sees characters from fairy tales appear in our world, you play the Big Bad Wolf, now a detective. A great premise that makes for a great story.

What we are waiting for...

Movies (Cinema) *A Most Wanted Man* (12th September) Philip Seymour Hoffman's last leading role is a disgruntled intelligence chief in a John le Carré adaptation. Riveting.

Movies (Blu-ray) *Only Lovers Left Alive* (15th September) Jim Jarmusch treats you to a vampire movie as it should be done. None of this angsty teenage nonsense, thank you.

Music (Download, CD, vinyl) *SBTRKT - Wonder Where We Land* (22nd September) Fingers crossed SBTRKT's second album doesn't fall victim to 'famous guest' syndrome.

Music (Download, CD, vinyl) *Joe Bonamassa - Different Shades of Blue* (22nd September) The sound of every hi-fi show in 2015, everywhere, is nearly upon us.

September in Hi-Def

The best on the box



We've been promised a darker, ruder Doctor, someone less tolerant of humans, and more alien than ever

Drama

Defiance

Syfy UK HD - 18th September/Thursdays, 9pm

Earth, 2046. The world as we know it has undergone a radical change, with alien technology transforming the biosphere, complete with mutated flora and fauna and even new species. After years of war between aliens (who were looking for a new home after their star system collapsed) and humans (who don't really like sharing Earth-space), the two races are attempting to cohabit peacefully on this brand new Earth-scape.

It's a great premise, supported by stunning visuals and mesmerising CGI characters that keep this show, now in its second series, firmly grounded in its science-fiction roots. The small independent town of Defiance has been taken over by the greater

Earth Republic government, ousting the mayor (*Dexter's* Julie Benz). Elsewhere, alien Irisa (Stephanie Leonidas) is reunited with her adoptive father - but won't mention her visions.

Doctor Who

BBC One HD - Saturdays, 7pm

"What does The Doctor do when there's nothing going on? Does he go and find something to poke a stick at?" So ponders writer Steven Moffat in a small-scale, CGI-free episode about what the Time Lord gets up to in his downtime.

As the eighth series gets into its stride, there's a Robin Hood-themed episode, and one where the Doctor is basically in a heist film. We've been promised a darker, ruder Doctor, someone less tolerant of humans, and more alien than ever. We've only seen teasers of Peter Capaldi in his new guise as the 12th Doctor, but what we've seen has already given us goosebumps.

The Great British Bake Off

BBC One HD - Wednesdays, 8pm

Cakes! Pastries! Pies! Petit fours! You'd think this genteel baking competition would run out of different types of cakes and bakes to feature by series five, but happily that's not the case. We're in for a glorious two months of scrumptious signature bakes, fiendish technical challenges and mouth-watering showstoppers. Remember to keep the biscuit tin by your side when watching.

Tyrant

Fox HD - 12th September - Fridays, 9pm

From the creators of *Homeland* comes another gripping, politically charged drama. Adam Rayner stars as Bassam "Barry" Al Fayed, the younger son of a dictator, who absconded to LA 20 years ago. His self-imposed exile comes to an end when his nephew's wedding forces him and his all-American

family to go back to his war-torn home country in the Middle East. Clash of cultures, family tragedies and political upheavals ensue as he gets thrown back into a life he thought he left behind.

Sport

2014 Formula 1 Championship
BBC One HD & Sky Sports F1 HD - 7th & 12th September, 12pm

The Italian Grand Prix is steeped in history, glory and heartbreak. It's not only the home race of Ferrari (who have won there 19 times), it's also the site of Michael Schumacher's retirement in 2006, and where Sebastian Vettel became the youngest driver to win a GP. We then move on to the shiny new Marina Bay Street Circuit, home to the night-time racing of the Singapore GP. We've given up trying to guess who's going to win. Mercedes may be on top, but the drivers are all over the place.

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The No.1 source of clear, expert and independent advice

BUYER'S GUIDE

NEW

It's no good having a brand new **AV receiver** if you don't set it up properly. So we give you some tips on calibrating your amplifier.

Running out of juice on your **Smartphone battery** can be a frustrating experience - so here's how to preserve that power



QR (quick response) codes

For full reviews, get a barcode scanner app on your smartphone. Scan these little squares and they'll take you to the relevant section on whatifi.com

All the latest kit, all the latest ratings...

Welcome to the **UK's best guide** to TVs, hi-fi, home cinema and mobile, with star ratings for more than **1500 products**. Where other magazines rely on isolated

writers reviewing in a range of locations, our star ratings are decided by an **expert team** of reviewers working together, in a **state-of-the-art testing facility**.

Within this guide you'll find all our favourite **four- and five-star** products - including **Award-winners** - to help you pick the best kit for your budget.



Kobina Monney, Buyer's Guide Editor

Exciting new additions...



AKG Y50

"The Y50s don't put a foot wrong as a pair of portable cans"

p133



Revo SuperConnect

"Design, ease of use, and sound quality - the Revo has it all"

p117

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Your essential system set-ups

BEST BUYS

GET THE
BEST KIT
FOR YOUR
BUDGET

Home Cinema Systems

BLU-RAY PLAYERS



SONY BDP-S4100
★★★★★
£95

Simply astonishing performance and pictures for less than £100. Smart functionality too: you can't go wrong...

RECEIVERS



YAMAHA RX-V377
★★★★★
£260

This is the perfect entry-level option for those upgrading to five-channel sound on a budget. It's a brilliant buy.

SPEAKERS



Q ACOUSTICS 2000i 5.1 PACK
★★★★★
£625

Our 2013 Award winner produces sound with impressive scale for movies and music.

DISPLAYS



SONY KDL-40W605
★★★★★
£450

If you're after a great all-rounder in both picture quality and smart features, this TV is it. Splendid.

Hi-Fi Systems

CD PLAYERS



MARANTZ CD6005
★★★★★
£350

This incredibly musical player offers detail in spades, not to mention a great way with dynamics.

AMPLIFIERS



MARANTZ PM6005
★★★★★
£300

A return to form by Marantz in this market, and a fine match for its CD-player sibling.

SPEAKERS



DALI ZENSOR 3
★★★★★
£300

An entertaining and easy listen - an airy, spacious sound with lots of detail, punch and tonal balance.



SONY BDP-S7200
★★★★★
£250

Sony's new Blu-ray offering is a really remarkable achievement. It has huge ability with images and sound.



SONY STR-DN1050
★★★★★
£500

Incredible value, this home-cinema powerhouse has pretty much all the features and ability you could hope for.



DALI ZENSOR 15.1
★★★★★
£980

This package is as entertaining as it is insightful, delivering all the drama and punch we could hope for. Superb.



SAMSUNG UE48H64800
★★★★★
£700

A whole lot of screen for your money - and this is a superb performer as well. A bargain.



NAIM CD5si
★★★★★
£1000

Exceptional player, combining superb sound with great value for money. An Award winner.



NAIM NAIT 5si
★★★★★
£925

The perfect partner for its matching CD player, this amp just as good value. And great sounding.



NEAT SX2
★★★★★
£1395

A nicely refined, dynamically strong, beautifully musical presentation from diminutive, well-made floorstanders.



PANASONIC DMP-BDT700
★★★★★
£500

A superb Blu-ray player with 4K/60fps capability and 4K Chroma upscaling. A star.



YAMAHA RX-A3030
★★★★★
£2000

As muscular as it is detailed, this amp will make you feel as if you're sitting in a large cinema hall.



KEF R100 5.1
★★★★★
£2850

Best Buy for 2013, the R100 5.1 is simply superb with demanding film soundtracks - and is great in stereo too.



SONY VPL-HW55ES
★★★★★
£2800

Superb in 2D, this projector also excels at 3D. Edges are sharp, pictures have depth and stability.



ROKSAN CASPIAN M2 CD PLAYER
★★★★★
£1800

Combines bite, refinement and rhythm better than anything else we've heard at this price.



ROKSAN CASPIAN M2 AMPLIFIER
★★★★★
£1800

The great partner for the M2 CD player. This amp is dynamic, detailed and entertaining.



SPENDORA6R
★★★★★
£2500

Attacking, detailed and balanced, these floorstanders demonstrate a winning way with dynamics.

Complete your home cinema system

SET-TOP BOXES

Sky+HD 2TB
£250

Humax HDR-1000S (500GB) £220

Humax DTR-T1010
£230

PROJECTORS

Epson EH-TW5910
£900

Epson EH-TW4400 £2000

Sony VPL-HW55ES
£2800

COMPACT SPKRS

Tannoy HTS101
£400

Q Acoustics Q7000i
£900

B&W MT60D
£1950

SUBWOOFERS

B&W ASW610
£700

B&W ASW610XP
£700

Velodyne SPL-1000 Ultra
£1400

FULL-SIZE SPKRS

Q Acoustics 2000i 5.1 Pack £625

Dali Zensor 15.1
£980

B&W CM9 Theatre
£4200

SOUNDBARS

Philips HTL5120
£250

Philips HTL9100
£600

Monitor Audio ASB-2 £1000

SUPPORTS

Target CL430
£190

Atacama Evoque Eco 60-40 £460

Atacama Moseco 6
£200

REMOTE CONTROLS

One For All Zapper
£10

Logitech Harmony One £125

Logitech Harmony 1000 £280

Grow your hi-fi system

TURNTABLES

Pro-Ject Essential II
£200

Rega RP3/Elys2
£550

Rega RP6/Exact
£1000

TABLETS

Google Nexus 7
£200 (16GB)

Google Nexus 10
£390 (32GB)

Apple iPad Air
£480 (32GB)

RADIOS

Pure Evoke F4
£170

Geneva WorldRadio DAB+ £270

Arcam T32
£480

HEADPHONES

AKG K451
£50

Grado SR80i £135

Beyerdynamic MMX101i £100

MICRO SYSTEMS

Denon D-M39DAB
£310

Marantz M-CR610
£500

Naim UnitiQute 2
£1150

AUDIO CABLES

Audioquest FLX-SLiP 14/4 £5.80/m

Atlas Elements Integra £45

Supra USB 2.0
£30

**NEW
BRIGHTON STORE
NOW OPEN**

HIGH RES AUDIO



BLUESOUND

HiFi for a wireless generation



BLUESOUND IS A 24-BIT NATIVE, PURE DIGITAL WIRELESS STREAMING MUSIC SYSTEM.

Even 16-bit CDs have only about half of the audio spectrum that the master recording holds and that's a whole lot more than MP3s have left in them. With more than a decade of compressed audio piping through earbud headphones and cheap dock players, the time has come. The portable players we all love have created a new way of listening to music, but there hasn't really been much there to hear. Until now. Enter true 24-bit HD digital audio.

FOR THE LATEST PRICES AND OFFERS VISIT WWW.SSAV.COM OR CONTACT YOUR LOCAL STORE



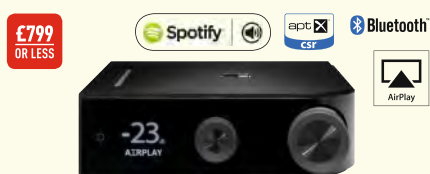
PIONEER • FREEme XW-LF1 • BLUETOOTH SPEAKER
No more docks, no more wires just sit back, relax and enjoy your Bluetooth wireless music in style. The rechargeable lithium-ion battery gives 7 hours of uninterrupted enjoyment.



NAIM • MU-S0 • WIRELESS MUSIC SYSTEM
Combines Naim's expertise in streaming, amplification and loudspeaker technology. Mu-so is the stage your music deserves, bringing you closer to the songs that inspire your life.



B&W • Z2 • WIRELESS MUSIC SYSTEM WITH DOCK
The best of all worlds - amazing sound, wireless streaming with AirPlay, a Lightning connector for docking the latest generation of iPhones and iPods and a design that fits almost anywhere.



NAD • D 7050 • NETWORK AMPLIFIER / DAC
Combines NAD's most advanced digital platform, Direct Digital technology with Apple AirPlay® Wi-Fi streaming to create the ultimate plug 'n play solution for wireless music.



**NAIM • UNITI 2
ALL-IN-ONE NETWORK SYSTEM**
Combines an integrated amplifier, CD player, DAB/FM tuner, internet radio, iPod dock, digital-to-analogue converter and high-resolution 24bit/192kHz capable network stream player.



**NAIM • UNITIQUITE 2
ALL-IN-ONE STREAMING SYSTEM**
All-in-one system featuring a 30W amplifier, FM/DAB/Internet radio and wired and wireless connections to play network digital audio. UnitiQute 2 can play USB-stored music files of up to 32bit/192kHz resolution.



**MONITOR AUDIO • AIRSTREAM A100
NETWORK AMPLIFIER / DAC**
The AirStream A100 blends true audiophile sound quality with 21st century technology and style. Whatever source you choose, it will render the sound with astonishing scale, detail and drama.



PIONEER • N-50 • MUSIC STREAMER
Award-winning audiophile Network player supporting AirPlay® and DLNA wireless technologies, allowing you to stream music wirelessly from your iTunes libraries or iOS devices. When connected to your home network, you can also enjoy a wide variety of online music services remotely.



**SONY • HAP-S1
HI-RES AUDIO PLAYER SYSTEM**
Take your music enjoyment to new heights with Sony's new HAP-S1 500GB Hi-Res audio system with 2x40W analogue amplifier, easy music file transfer and smartphone browsing.

PLEASE NOTE: SOME BRANDS/PRODUCTS ARE NOT AVAILABLE AT ALL STORES. SPECIAL/ADDED VALUE OFFERS ARE NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER (NICWAOO). ADVERT VALID UNTIL 24/09/2014. E&OE

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WHAT Hi-Fi? AWARDS 2013
BEST TURNTABLE
PROJECT ESSENTIAL II

£209
OR LESS

PRO-JECT • ESSENTIAL II • TURNTABLE

Entry-level "plug'n'play" two speed turntable with single piece aluminium tonearm and pre-fitted Ortofon OM5e cartridge.



£299
OR LESS

NAD • C 556 • TURNTABLE

Time to enjoy vinyl collections with extraordinary quality! With a minimalist design, the C 556 turntable offers accurate reproduction by using performance-focused parts and components that put music first.



NEW

£575
OR LESS

PRO-JECT • 1 XPRESSION CARBON • TURNTABLE

With its Carbon armtube and supplied Ortofon 2m Silver cartridge, the 1 Xpression Carbon sets new standards in its price range.



£649
OR LESS

WHAT Hi-Fi? AWARDS 2013
BEST INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER
ARCAM FMJ A19

ARCAM • FMJ A19 • AMPLIFIER

Arcam's award-winning A19 integrated amplifier delivers 50W per channel and includes seven analogue inputs along with a MM phono input.



£399
OR LESS

aptX CSF Bluetooth

WHAT Hi-Fi? AWARDS 2013
BEST AMPLIFIER
NAD D 3020

NAD • D 3020 AMPLIFIER / DAC

Features digital and analogue inputs plus the convenience of wireless streaming with its Bluetooth capability.



£399
OR LESS

WHAT Hi-Fi? AWARDS 2013
BEST DIGITAL TO ANALOGUE CONVERTER
ARCAM irDAC

ARCAM • irDAC • DAC

Designed to be the heart of a digital system. Includes asynchronous USB and a direct iPod input to optimise sound quality. All inputs can be controlled through an IR remote that will also control iPods, iPhones, PC and Mac computers.



£799
OR LESS

£749
OR LESS

AUDIOLAB • 8200CD / 8200A • CD / AMPLIFIER

The award-winning 8200CD features a wealth of digital inputs that will keep it playing all your music regardless of how it may be stored.



£249
OR LESS

£249
OR LESS

NAD • C 516BEE / C 316BEE • CD / AMPLIFIER

Received an outstanding product award from Hi-Fi News magazine who described the C 316BEE is an "absolute barn-stormer of an amplifier". The C 516BEE is the perfect partner.



£599
OR LESS

WHAT Hi-Fi? AWARDS 2013
BEST DIGITAL TO ANALOGUE CONVERTER
AUDIOLAB M-DAC

AUDIOLAB • M-DAC • DAC / PREAMP

Award-winning DAC featuring a USB input with asynchronous data processing along with two coaxial and optical digital inputs. High-res 24-bit/192kHz music files can be played via its coaxial input.



ESSAV .COM

ESSAV .COM

WHAT Hi-Fi? AWARDS 2013
BEST CD PLAYER
MARANTZ CD6005

MARANTZ • CD6005 / PM6005 • CD / AMPLIFIER

Replacing the 6004 models, the 6005 amp gains digital inputs using the same 24-bit/192kHz DAC as the CD player which now features enhanced USB playback and improved performance.



£1040

£950

NAIM • CD5si / NAIT 5si • CD PLAYER / AMPLIFIER

Enjoy outstanding performance from your CDs with this highly acclaimed Naim CD/Amplifier combination. Available from the Holborn, Sevenoaks & Tunbridge Wells stores only.



£1899
OR LESS

£1899
OR LESS

WHAT Hi-Fi? AWARDS 2013
BEST CD PLAYER
ROKSAN CASPIAN M2

WHAT Hi-Fi? AWARDS 2013
BEST CD PLAYER
ROKSAN CASPIAN M2

ROKSAN • CASPIAN M2 • CD / AMPLIFIER

The M2 amp boasts 85wpc and five line inputs while the matching CD features a 24-bit DAC plus dedicated power supplies for the outputs.



£599
OR LESS

£499
OR LESS

ROTEL • RA-12 / RCD-12 • AMPLIFIER / DAC / CD

Amplifier with DAC that supports iPod USB and Bluetooth audio streaming. Includes four analogue line-level inputs and a phono input. The RCD-12 CD player is an ideal partner.



£399
OR LESS

NAD • D 1050 DAC / HEADPHONE AMP

The best way to add Computer Audio and HD Digital to your hi-fi system. In fact, all digital sources will get a boost when the D 1050 takes over for the inferior digital circuitry found in everything from Blu-ray, DVD and CD players, to music streamers and set-top boxes.



£1499
OR LESS

NEW BLACK FINISH

NAD • M51 • DAC

This award-winning DAC / pre-amp features optical, coaxial, USB and HDMI inputs, all of which can handle files up to 24-bit/192kHz. The M51 will truly transform any system.



NEW

£699
OR LESS

Hi-Res AUDIO

aptX CSF Bluetooth

SONY • MAP-S1 • MULTI AUDIO PLAYER SYSTEM

It's all right here - a powerful 2x50W amplifier, tuner and CD player integrated in an elegant compact unit. Just add speakers and you are ready for an incredible Hi-Resolution Audio experience.



ESSAV .COM

WHAT Hi-Fi? AWARDS 2013
BEST DAB SYSTEM
DENON D-M39DAB

DENON • D-M39DAB • CD / DAB SYSTEM

This micro component system gives you clean dramatic sound, and more life to iPod and iPhone music libraries via its digital USB input. Includes DAB/DAB+/FM tuner.



ESSAV .COM

WHAT Hi-Fi? AWARDS 2013
BEST DAB SYSTEM
MARANTZ M-CR610

MARANTZ • M-CR610 • CD / DAB / NETWORK SYSTEM

Enjoy great sounding music from diverse sources, including Internet radio, music-streaming services, mobile devices, TV and other digital audio sources.



BOWERS & WILKINS • CM9

This top-of-the-range floor-standing speaker will fill even the largest domestic spaces with music so richly detailed, and so startlingly lifelike, that it will leave you speechless.

£1349
OR LESS

SAVE
£450

LIMITED STOCK



BOWERS & WILKINS • 683 S2

The versatile 683 S2 is ideal for stereo and home theatre use. Its performance is enhanced with the addition of a Decoupled Double Dome tweeter along with new bass driver construction techniques and an FST Kevlar midrange driver.

NEW

£1149
OR LESS



Q ACOUSTICS • 2020i

This award-winning bookshelf speaker exudes quality, delivering extended bass, an open mid-range, astonishing transient response and exceptional high frequency clarity.

£169.95
OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2013
BEST BOOKSPEAKER

STANDARD FINISHES: £219.95
GLOSS FINISHES: £219.95



PMC • TWENTY-23

The first and overwhelming impression of the Twenty-23 is an open, engaging and communicative speaker. Its size defies both the depth of bass and scale of presentation by taking any music or film material in its stride. The sound is vivid and dynamic and delivered with authoritative bass.

£2300
OR LESS



MONITOR AUDIO • SILVER 6

2.5 way speaker system combining excellent dynamics with a naturally rhythmic sonic character and tight, controlled bass. The Silver 6 is an outstanding communicator of music and film audio.

£999
OR LESS



PSB • IMAGINE MINI (WALNUT)

Meet the newest and smallest member of the ultra-stylish Imagine Series. The deceptively small Imagine Mini makes a big impact on an already impressive range of award-winning speakers.

£399
OR LESS

SAVE
£200

LIMITED STOCK

CLAIM FREE
PSB PFS-27
SPEAKER STANDS
WORTH £199



KEF • R500

The smallest of the floorstanders in the R Series. Uses the latest generation Uni-Q driver array and two 5.25-inch aluminium bass drivers. Its slim proportions and sleek contemporary looks make it perfectly suited for any interior.

£1499
OR LESS

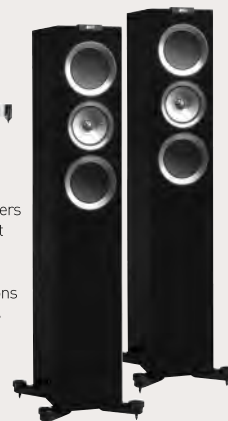


Q ACOUSTICS • CONCEPT 40

The Q Acoustic Concept 40 floorstanding speakers are the latest addition to the award-winning Concept range and deliver unparalleled sonic performance at its price.

NEW

£999.95
OR LESS



KEF • LS50

An innovative concept derived from the legendary LS3/5a. Rarely the case in such a compact design, the LS50 monitor delivers a rich, multi-dimensional 'soundstage experience' that is out of all proportion to its size.

£799
OR LESS

SONOS THE WIRELESS Hi-Fi SYSTEM

The Sonos Wireless HiFi System delivers all the music on earth, in every room, with deep, richly textured sound. Sonos is the only system that combines Hi-Fi sound with high-performance wireless. Plus it's simple to set-up, control and expand so you can easily fill your home with music.



ESSAV
.COM

BOWERS & WILKINS P7 HEADPHONES

With P7, everything is designed to allow you to lose yourself in music. Bass is tight, vocals are precisely defined, and there's a wonderful sense of space, balance and clarity across the whole frequency range. P7's cable comes with a remote/microphone attachment, so it works seamlessly with your iPhone.



£329
OR LESS

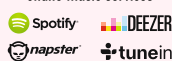
WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2013
BEST HEADPHONE

DENON • HEOS WIRELESS MULTI-ROOM MUSIC SYSTEM

HEOS by Denon is a Wireless Multi-Room Sound System comprising a family of great-sounding music players for your whole home. There is a free app to control them from your iOS or Android phone or tablet. You can enjoy your favourite streaming music services, internet radio or your own music collection and set-up is a breeze.



Stream from your favourite
online music services



NEW

ESSAV
.COM



NAD VISO HP50 HEADPHONES

Designed for long-wearing comfort and listening with ultra-soft noise-isolating earpads. The convenient three-button Apple remote offers full control of all Apple music and call functionality right at your fingertips, plus voice control with Siri-compatible devices.



£229
OR LESS

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Real Stores

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision have 27 stores nationwide with plans to open more during 2014. Each carries the best in home cinema and Hi-Fi equipment on display, ready for you to watch, listen to and compare in our dedicated demonstration rooms.

Real Products

A wide selection of products from the world's leading manufacturers is in stock and available for you to take home. We also offer a delivery and installation service as well as a convenient on-line click and reserve option for many of our products.

Real People

Our staff are friendly, knowledgeable and passionate about music and film and the equipment needed to get the most out of your collection. They will be delighted to assist you in making the right selection to ensure you enjoy your system for years to come.

Real Value

Fantastic value for money is our aim. Although we remain independent, you will be pleasantly surprised just how competitive we can be - with the added benefit of seeing, hearing and touching the product before you buy, and someone to help if things go wrong.

Please Note: Some brands/products are not available at all stores. Special/added value offers are not in conjunction with any other offer (NICWAOO).

ADVERT VALID UNTIL 24/09/2014. E&OE

SEVENOAKS
SOUND & VISION



£2199
OR LESS

ARCAM • FMJ AVR450 • AV RECEIVER

7.1-channel AV receiver combines 4K "Ultra HD" upscaling and 3D video capability with Arcam's legendary sound quality. Also Available: ARCAM FMJ AVR380 & AVR750



NEW

£999
OR LESS

ONKYO • TX-NR838 • AV RECEIVER

New 7.2-channel Network receiver supporting Dolby Atmos® multidimensional sound plus Ultra HD streaming and 4K gaming. Also Available: ONKYO TX-NR636



NEW

£999
OR LESS

NAD • T 758 • AV RECEIVER

AV receiver featuring NAD's Modular Design Construction for future upgrades along with exceptional sound quality. Also Available: NAD T 748 & T 787



NEW

£499
OR LESS

PIONEER • VSX-924 • AV RECEIVER

Offering up to 150 Watts across all of its 7 channels, the VSX-924 supports AirPlay, DLNA audio networking and Spotify Connect. Also Available: PIONEER VSX-529



NEW

£479
OR LESS

SONY • STR-DN1050 • AV RECEIVER

7.1-channel AV receiver with Bluetooth and NFC compatibility, for instant wireless playback from any compatible device. Also Available: DENON AVR-X2100



NEW

£559
OR LESS

YAMAHA • RX-V677 • AV RECEIVER

New highly capable and versatile 7.2-channel Network AV receiver with AirPlay and Spotify Connect. Also Available: YAMAHA RX-V377 & RX-V477

CANTON • DM 50 • SOUNDBASE

The Canton DM 50 sets a new standard for TV sound. Intended to be positioned under a TV's pedestal stand, the DM 50 creates a convincing, room filling sound.



NEW

£399
OR LESS



£799
OR LESS



MONITOR AUDIO • ASB-2 • SOUNDBAR

The miraculously compact ASB-2 soundbar combines a high performance active audio system with the very latest wireless streaming technologies.



Q ACOUSTICS • MEDIA 4 • SOUNDBAR

The new Q Acoustics Media 4 is a high performance Soundbar designed to deliver high fidelity reproduction of music, and high quality audio from a TV or set top box, tablets and smartphones.



NEW

£399.95
OR LESS



£599
OR LESS

SONOS • PLAYBAR SOUNDBAR & WIRELESS SPEAKER

This plug-and-play unit incorporates 9 integrated amplified speakers. Simply connect it to your TV with the supplied optical cable to deliver an epic home cinema sound in your own living room. PLAYBAR can also expand your existing Sonos system.



NEW

£499
OR LESS



YAMAHA • SRT-1000 • SOUNDBASE

Enjoy richly realistic and powerful sound just by placing it under your TV! Surround sound system featuring Digital Sound Projector technology. Supports Bluetooth® and a dedicated app for smartphone control.



YAMAHA • YSP-2500 DIGITAL SOUND PROJECTOR

Reproduces overwhelmingly real presence and impact-filled bass sound. Two-unit YSP with ultra-refined design and high-grade aluminium chassis. Bluetooth® equipped, capable of wireless music play and App control.



NEW

£799
OR LESS



£899.95
OR LESS

Q ACOUSTICS • Q7000i • SPEAKER PACKAGE

Stylish 5.1 package that delivers dynamic sound for movies, but with the ability to play music. Classic black or white matt finishes.



£2849
OR LESS

KEF • R100 5.1 • SPEAKER PACKAGE

Comprises four R100 speakers, an R200C centre speaker and R400B active subwoofer. Great for both home cinema and music.



£1499
OR LESS

MONITOR AUDIO • RADIUS R90HT1 • SPEAKER PACKAGE

Award-winning speaker package comprising four Radius 90 satellites, Radius 200 centre speaker and Radius 390 subwoofer.



£1939
OR LESS

B&W • MT-60D • SPEAKER PACKAGE

Speaker package combining M-1 speakers with the stunning power and control of a PV1D subwoofer. Available in a matt black or white.



REL • S2 SUBWOOFER

Fast, tuneful, fun and exceptionally dynamic, the REL S2 permits those with limited space or compact speakers to enjoy the benefits of Serie S performance.

NEW

£999
OR LESS



NEW

£2799
OR LESS

SONY • VPL-HW55ES • SXRD PROJECTOR

A fantastic option for movie lovers who want an incredible cinematic experience at home, far beyond the reach of TV.

Samsung UHD TV Curved

Ultra High Definition 4K



SAMSUNG

HU8500 SERIES • CURVED 4K UHD TV

Introducing a breakthrough in TV viewing that will change the way you watch TV forever – the Samsung HU8500 Curved UHD. Wider viewing angles, pure and accurate colour reproduction and a sense of depth never experienced before are only possible on a curved Samsung screen, specifically shaped for UHD viewing at its very best.

55 65 78 FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY



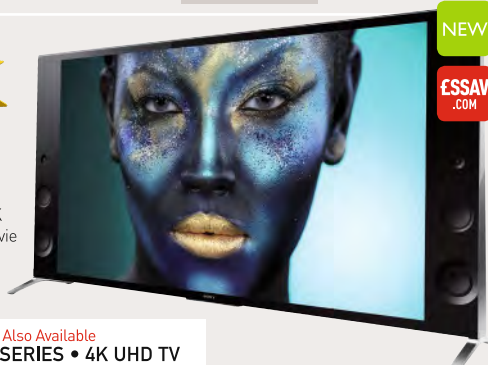
SONY 4K

X9 SERIES • 4K UHD TV

Picture quality that must be seen to be believed. With a screen resolution of 3840 x 2160 – that's 8 million pixels – 4K technology offers four times the detail of Full HD. Take a movie you've seen hundreds of times and you'll see things that you couldn't before, from an individual leaf on a distant tree to a tear drop in the heroine's eye.

55 65 79 FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY

Also Available
SONY X8 SERIES • 4K UHD TV



Panasonic

AX802 SERIES • 4K UHD TV

A high-end model that combines 4K picture quality with high-level innovative functions in a stylish design.

The use of the 3840 x 2160 4K panel produces high-definition picture quality. The newly developed high-brightness, high-color-space panel and 4K Remaster Engine provides a higher dimension of 4K picture quality.

As with the other models in the new VIERA range, you get Freetime built in. This allows you to get the advantages of roll back TV (for the past seven days) and easy access to all major catch up services directly from the Freetime programme guide including BBC iPlayer, ITV Player, 4oD and Demand 5.

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SONY • W8 SERIES • FULL HD TV

42 50 55 FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY



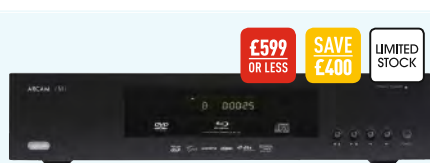
PANASONIC • AS802 SERIES • FULL HD TV

47 55 60 FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY



SAMSUNG • HU7500 SERIES • 4K UHD TV

48 55 65 75 FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY



ARCAM • FMJ BDP300 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

Arcam's BDP300 Blu-ray player delivers outstanding sound quality with audio CDs along with excellent movie performance from either 2D or 3D films.

Also Available: MARANTZ UD7007



PANASONIC • DMP-BDT700 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

New top of the range model boasting up to 4K 60p output, HDMI 2.0 support, 7.1-channel analogue audio output, along with ground-breaking 4K Direct Chroma up-scaling. Also Available: PANASONIC DMP-BDT260 & DMP-BDT460



SONY • BDP-S7200 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

The new Sony BDP-S7200 3D Blu-ray Player with 4K upscaling and powerful smart features – it will be the centre piece of your home entertainment system. Also Available: SONY BDP-S5200 & BDP-S6200

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LCD, LED & plasma TVs

LCD	Once only in smaller screens; now the most common type of panel
LED	This refers to the kind of backlighting used on an LCD panel
Plasma	The rival to LCD, now usually only seen on larger screens

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Hannspree SL22DMBB

"It may be light on features, but it excels in performance. If you want a small, no-frills TV, this Hannspree is an excellent choice."



NEW ENTRY

Samsung UE48H6400

"It's a subtler, more controlled and balanced picture, and we think that the TV giant has got its approach just right this year."



NEW ENTRY

Samsung UE65HU7500

"We're impressed by the Samsung. It's got plenty of nice features, including a neat new interface. It's an attractive looking set."

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	Active 3D	Passive 3D	Freeview	FreeSat	HDMI	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500														
Alba AMKDVD22W	130	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A capable set but there are better options for broadcast TV	LED	22	1920x1080						1	38x52x17
Celcus LCD40S913FHD	250	02.13/ST	★★★★★	Big screen on a budget: a real supermarket special	LED	40	1920x1080						3	97x22x66
Finlux 32F8030-T	280	02.13/ST	★★★★★	Great picture and the latest online features: bargain	LED	32	1920x1080						4	49x78x4
Finlux 32F7020-T	280	09.13/ST	★★★★★	Patchy 3D but still worth a look for budget buyers	LED	32	1920x1080						4	48x77x4
Finlux 40F8073-T	330	03.14/GT	★★★★★	ATV with a sharp, exciting picture at a terrific price	LED	40	1920x1080						3	55x93x4
Hannspree SL22DMBB	135	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best 22in TV, Awards 2013	LCD	22	1920x1080						1	53x39x17
Hannspree AD32UMMB	220	02.13/ST	★★★★★	A solid option set for mainly watching TV	LED	32	1366x768						3	44x73x7
Kogan LULED24DVDYA	134	02.13/ST	★★★★★	This versatile little set is fine value for money	LED	24	1920x1080						2	38x58x5
Kogan KULED22XXXYA	110	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Cheap and cheerful and all the better for it	LCD	22	1920x1080						2	39x54x17
Linsar 22LED906T	230	12.12/GT	★★★★★	A great 22in set with a DVD player and Freeview HD	LED	22	1920x1080						2	38x53x4
LG 32LS5600	299	02.13/ST	★★★★★	This budget TV gets the basics right	LED	32	1920x1080						3	46x75x36
LG 50PA650T	499	01.13/GT	★★★★★	Good picture and price, but we'd like more detail	Plasma	50	1920x1080						3	70x117x5
LG 32LN575V	400	09.13/ST	★★★★★	A decent looking TV with credible smart and streaming features	LED	32	1920x1080						3	45x74x8
Panasonic TX-L24X6B	300	11.13/GT	★★★★★	If you can stretch your budget then this TV offers great value for money	LED	24	1366x768						2	42x58x17
Panasonic TX-L32E6B	380	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best 32in TV, Awards 2013	LED	32	1920x1080						3	43x72x5
Panasonic TX-P50X50B	453	01.13/GT	★★★★★	Hard to beat on performance per pound	Plasma	50	1024x768						2	72x118x8
Panasonic TX-P50X60B	430	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Compromised, but this Plasma is an admirable effort nonetheless	Plasma	50	1024x768						2	72x118x8
Philips 22PFL3517T/12	270	12.12/GT	★★★★★	An accomplished set with Freeview HD and YouTube	LED	22	1920x1080						3	32x51x5
Philips 32PFL4258T	480	09.13/ST	★★★★★	A talented TV with excellent picture quality	LED	32	1920x1080						3	45x74x2
Samsung UE40F6400	480	03.14/GT	★★★★★	A stunning, feature-laden TV from Samsung. Recommended	LED	40	1920x1080						4	54x93x5
Sony KDL-26EX553	400	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Capable enough for a kitchen or child's bedroom	LED	26	1366x768						2	41x64x6
Sony KDL-32W653A	430	09.13/ST	★★★★★	Its picture lacks subtlety but this Sony is still a worthwhile option	LED	32	1920x1080						2	44x73x7
Sony KDL-40W605B	450	09.14/FT	★★★★★	A great set that's easy on the eye and the wallet	LED	40	1920x1080						4	55x93x9
Technika 22-212i	168	02.13/ST	★★★★★	Great value, with plenty of features	LED	22	1366x768						2	37x54x1
Toshiba 32L6353	450	09.13/FT	★★★★★	A decent TV for the money but response times can be sluggish	LED	32	1920x1080						4	44x76x7
Toshiba 40L6353	400	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Clunky interface aside, this is a decent TV with a great HD picture	LED	40	1920x1080						4	54x92x27
£500-£2000														
Finlux 47S9100-T	800	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Good picture, decent 3D and a low price. Worth a look	LED	47	1920x1080						4	67x112x4
LG 47LB730V	1000	08.14/ST	★★★★★	Solid sound, premium build and a good picture. A fine effort from LG	LED	47	1920x1080						3	62x106x5.5
Panasonic TX-L32ET5B	530	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Price drop pushes this firmly into five-star territory	LED	32	1920x1080						4	47x76x5
Panasonic TX-L42ET50B	900	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Good effort, great images, beaten by direct rivals	LED	42	1920x1080						4	60x99x4
Panasonic TX-L42FT60B	1100	08.13/ST	★★★★★	Likeable TV with a fine picture and great features	LED	42	1920x1080						3	56x96x4
Panasonic TX-P42GT60B	1000	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best 40-46in TV, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	Plasma	42	1920x1080						3	60x99x5
Panasonic TX-P42GT50B	1200	10.12/GT	★★★★★	This sensational all-rounder remains a favourite	Plasma	42	1920x1080						4	60x99x5
Panasonic TX-L47AS650B	800	08.14/ST	★★★★★	A talented set, but other TVs have the edge in terms of value	LED	47	1920x1080						3	63x107x5
Panasonic TX-L47ET50B	1300	08.12/ST	★★★★★	This set gets plenty more right than it gets wrong	LED	47	1920x1080						4	66x110x4
Panasonic TX-L47DT65B	1600	06.13/GT	★★★★★	User-friendly set with clean, detailed images. A stunner	LED	47	1920x1080						3	63x107x4

TELEVISIONS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	Active 3D	Passive 3D	Freeview	HDMI	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Panasonic TX-L50ET60B	1300	05.13/FT	★★★★★	Solid telly but could perform better	LCD	50	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	66x112x4
Panasonic TX-L50E6B	850	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Fine picture quality but there are TVs that give more for less	LCD	50	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	71x112x27
Panasonic TX-P50GT60B	1200	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best premium 47-52in TV, Awards 2013	Plasma	50	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	70x117x5
Philips 42PFL6008	1000	08.13/ST	★★★★★	Impressive picture with comfortable 3D – a strong contender	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	56x95x3
Philips 46PFL8007	1700	12.12/FT	★★★★★	A strong start for Philips' new range	LED	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	5	67x104x21
Philips 47PFL6008	1200	06.13/GT	★★★★★	A few niggles but forgivable thanks to its brilliant picture quality	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	63x106x3
Philips 55PFL6007T	1500	01.13/FT	★★★★★	This should be on anyone's big-screen shortlist	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	74x124x3
Philips 55PFS6609	1200	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Dazzling with HD content, but rivals offer better overall performance	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	72x123x4
Philips 48PFS57093	750	08.14/ST	★★★★★	Excels in many areas but its SD performance is an area of concern	LED	48	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	62x108x6
Samsung PS51E550	850	09.12/GT	★★★★★	A pedigree 50in plasma at a steal of a price	Plasma	51	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	72x120x6
Samsung PS51E8000	1700	06.12/FT	★★★★★	A big-screen plasma that should be tried out	Plasma	51	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	71x119x5
Samsung PS51F5500	680	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best budget 47-52in TV, Awards 2013	Plasma	51	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	71x112x27
Samsung PS51F8500	1900	07.13/FT	★★★★★	A top-class plasma screen	Plasma	51	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	74x119x6
Samsung UE40ES6800	950	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Good spec and looks, but the backlight isn't great	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	67x92x33
Samsung UE32F6400	500	09.13/ST	★★★★★	Some niggles but a desirable set with excellent catch-up TV features	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	44x74x5
Samsung UE40F6500	900	08.13/ST	★★★★★	Not a class leader but offers a lot for your money	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	91x60x27
Samsung UE40F7000	1200	08.13/ST	★★★★★	A lovely TV with a great picture and a wealth of smart features	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	90x58x24
Samsung UE46F7000	1600	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Great picture coupled with smart features make it one to watch	LED	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	59x104x3
Samsung UE48H6400	700	08.14/ST	★★★★★	For £700 this is one of the best TV deals of the year so far	LED	48	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	63x109x5
Sony KDL-40HX853	1000	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Best 40-42in TV, Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	57x94x4
Sony KDL-46HX753	1150	08.12/ST	★★★★★	A must-see TV: superb performer for the price	LED	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	65x108x5
Sony KDL-42W705B	530	08.14/FT	★★★★★	A promising start for Sony's Full HD range. A consistent performer	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	56x96x6
Sony KDL-42W805A	1000	08.13/ST	★★★★★	A great-looking TV with many strengths	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	58x97x6
Sony KDL-46W905	1550	09.13/FT	★★★★★	A very capable TV with stunning detail but the picture lacks vibrancy	LCD	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	65x105x30
Sony KDL-48W605B	700	08.14/ST	★★★★★	A competitive performer with good picture quality	LCD	48	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	68x108x9
Sony KDL-50W829B	900	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Loses a star but this TV is still worth an audition	LED	50	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	66x112x6
Sony KDL-55W955B	1600	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A good TV but we expect more from a flagship set	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	79x124x9
£2000 and above													
Bang & Olufsen BeoVision 11	5250	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A truly luxurious TV that delivers a great performance too	LCD	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	6	89x96x6
LG 55LA860W	2300	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Close but no cigar. A good TV but the competition is strong	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	72x123x4
LG 55EA980W	8000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	A great first OLED effort from LG	OLED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	80x123x19
LG 55UB950V	2300	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Not without its flaws, but this TV is good to look at, great to use	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	123x78x24
LG 65LA970W	5500	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Fantastic to look at, but lacks the detail of depth of rivals	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	3	84x143x41
LG 84LM960V	22500	02.13/FT	★★★★★	Stunning with Ultra High Def, but ordinary elsewhere	LED	84	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	102x190x4
Panasonic TX-L47WT50B	2000	08.12/ST	★★★★★	Stylish, with real areas of expertise	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	63x107x3
Panasonic TX-P55VT65B	2000	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best 55in+ TV, Awards 2013	Plasma	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	77x132x5
Panasonic TX-L55WT65B	2470	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A good performer but there are more capable sets	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	72x123x3
Panasonic TX-P60ZT65B	3850	08.13/GT	★★★★★	An accomplished set, but not the best TV pound-for-pound	Plasma	60	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	83x140x5
Panasonic TX-P65WT600	5500	12.13/GT	★★★★★	A capable set that handles 4K footage very well	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	86x147x6
Philips 46PFL9706	2300	05.12/GT	★★★★★	A great flatscreen from Philips	LED	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	66x108x4
Philips 50PFL7956T	2000	09.12/GT	★★★★★	The best 21:9 set we've seen: brilliant for films	LED	50	2560x1080	●	●	●	●	4	58x124x3
Philips 55PFL8008	2500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A great TV from Philips	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	72x124x3
Philips 65PFL9708	4500	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Smart features aren't as good we'd like but this is still a strong 4K set	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	5	84x146x4
Samsung KE55S9C	7000	01.14/GT	★★★★★	An excellent first step for large screen OLED TVs	OLED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	78x142x14
Samsung UE55F8000	2500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Can't keep up with the very best. Still a smart, user-friendly set	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	71x122x4
Samsung UE55HU7500	2300	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Impressive. Another outstanding all-rounder from Samsung	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	75x123x27
Samsung UE65F9000	5000	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented set with few weaknesses to speak of	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	84x146x4
Samsung UE65H8000	3300	07.14/FT	★★★★★	A fine set, but high price and lack of 4K knock it down a star	LED	65	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	89x145x31
Samsung UE65HU7500	3600	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Whether it's 4K, HD or SD, this TV will gobble it up	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	88x145x30
Sony KD-55X8505B	2100	09.14/GT	★★★★★	An attractive TV with a good set of features	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	79x123x29
Sony KDL-55W905A	2400	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A great-looking TV but a few issues knock it down a star	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	72x124x6
Sony KD-65X9005A	5000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Good looks and great sound but needs 4K material to shine	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	90x168x10
Sony KD-65X9005B	3600	07.14/FT	★★★★★	This Sony set has issues with upscale content but it looks great with 4K	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	88x172x10

"Samsung's UE40F6400 has an attention-grabbing picture. There's a stunning level of detail that gives a sense of depth to the picture on screen, and subtleties in shading leaves objects looking tangible and realistic"

March 2014



Blu-ray players

Smart ability Extends the viewing choice beyond discs with apps like BBC iPlayer
Multichannel out Analogue outputs that feed high quality sound to a non-HDMI receiver
Twin HDMI outputs These are used if you have two displays, say a projector and a TV

The shortlist



Panasonic DMP-BDT460

"The 460 really excels where it matters: it's equally talented with picture and sound."



AWARD WINNER

Marantz UD7007

"This is a solidly made machine that performs to a very high standard. If you have the right system, it's a terrific buy."



AWARD WINNER

Sony BDP-S4100

"A Blu-ray player that does more (and does it better) than we'd expect given its low price."

Also consider

Also consider				system, it's a terrific buy."				HDMI out	Optical out	Co-axial out	Multichannel out	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict									
Up to £500												
LG BP740	200	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Much improved, but needs to better its sound and video performance to match the best			1	1	0	No		4x43x21
Panasonic DMP-BDT230	160	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Great picture and fine sound			1	1	0	No		4x43x18
Panasonic DMP-BDT260	120	07.14/FT	★★★★★	An impressive new entry with great picture quality			1	0	0	No		4x31x18
Panasonic DMP-BDT330	200	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Lacks in the smart app area but performance elsewhere is terrific			2	1	0	No		4x43x18
Panasonic DMP-BDT320	220	05.12/FT	★★★★★	A superb Blu-ray spinner from Panasonic			1	1	0	No		3x43x18
Panasonic DMP-BDT460	190	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Talented with sound as it is with picture, this is a Blu-ray player to be reckoned with			2	1	0	No		4x42x18
Philips BDP3380	80	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Avery good performer that lacks some smart features			1	0	1	No		4x41x21
Pioneer BDP-160	120	01.14/GT	★★★★★	This entry-level unit is pretty spartan, but it delivers an impressive performance			2	0	1	No		6x44x25
Pioneer BDP-450	225	01.12/FT	★★★★★	This budget deck is a real rival for the top performers			1	0	1	No		9x44x25
Pioneer BDP-LX55	350	03.12/ST	★★★★★	Essentially, you can't go wrong with this disc spinner			2	1	0	8ch		9x43x25
Samsung BD-F6500	130	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Competitive but not the best in class			1	0	1	7ch		4x43x18
Sony BDP-S4100	80	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player up to £100, Awards 2013			1	0	1	No		4x36x20
Sony BDP-S5100	140	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player £100-£150, Awards 2013			1	0	1	No		4x36x20
Sony BDP-S490	110	12.12/FT	★★★★★	An excellent budget Blu-ray player that also does 3D			1	0	1	No		4x43x20
Sony BDP-S6200	180	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Plenty of smart features, sharp images and well-rendered 3D. A talented disc spinner			1	0	1	No		4x36x20
Sony BDP-S7200	220	09.14/FT	★★★★★	A classy performer that serves up great picture in either 2D or 3D			1	0	1	No		5x43x21
Sony BDP-S790	200	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player £150-£300, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR			2	1	1	No		4x43x19
Sony PlayStation 3 (2012)	250	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Superslim PS3 feels less special, but it's still multi-talented			1	1	0	No		6x29x23
Sony PlayStation 4	349	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A great gaming machine that's less spectacular when it comes to home entertainment			1	1	0	No		19x3x3
Xbox One	430	01.14/FT	★★★★★	As ambitious a game console as there has ever been, but yet to fulfil its potential			1	1	0	No		8x33x27

What to consider: 3D

3D may be on the wane but the format is still around. Here's our mini-guide on the format and some of the best titles to watch in 3D

What's best? Active vs Passive

There are two types of 3D available: active and passive. Samsung and Sony have opted for active while Finlux, LG, Panasonic and Philips have chosen passive for their sets.

Active works by delivering a Full HD image to one eye while blocking the other. It then replicates the image for the other eye, repeating this process rapidly to create a 3D effect.

In theory, active offers better performance, but a pair of active glasses cost more than a pair of passive ones. Since they're battery powered they will need replacing after extended use, and

some viewers have found active 3D more tiring over a long viewing session too.

Passive is inexpensive and works by halving the resolution of the image sent to each eye, reducing the eye strain and flickering that affects active, although it lacks the depth and detail of its rival.

3D broadcasts

Right now Sky are the only major broadcaster that has a channel in 3D. Virgin Media offer on-demand content in 3D and irrespective of whether your TV is active or passive, you'll be able to view any content you buy...

Devices

...Which means you're going to have to rely on buying 3D Blu-rays if you want to get the most out of your TV. In our recent Blu-ray *Group Test* the LG BP740, Panasonic DMP BDT-460 and Sony BDP-S6200 all offered very good to excellent performance in 3D with good levels of detail and depth.

And by the time you read this both the Xbox One and PlayStation 4 will have 3D Blu-ray playback capability, adding to the list of devices you can watch a 3D film on. For a good sample of 3D Blu-rays, take a look at the selection of titles across the page...

BLU-RAY PLAYERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	HDMI out	Optical out	Co-axial out	Multichannel out	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
£500 and above								
Cambridge Audio Azur 752BD	800	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Features and functions combine in fine style, but audio performance could be a little better				2 1 1 8ch 9x43x31
Marantz UD7007	700	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player £300+, Awards 2013				1 1 1 No 11x44x31
Onkyo BD-SP809	500	04.12/GT	★★★★★	A fine choice, but not an all-rounder				2 1 1 No 10x43x31



Projectors

Screens _____ Buy one of these. A painted white wall is simply not good enough
Noise _____ Fan noise can be a major issue if you sit close to your projector
Lamp life _____ Projector bulbs have limited lifespans and need to be changed regularly

Our recommendations

Our recommendations													
Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Type	ThrowRatio	Resolution	Rated Brightness (Lumens)	HDMI in	DVI in	Component in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Weight (kg)
Up to £1000													
BenQ W1060	700	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Solid effort for a budget projector	DLP	1.59-1.9	1920x1080	2000	2	1	1	15x33x25	3.6
BenQ W1080ST	850	12.13/GT	★★★★★	A good fit for small-scale home cinema entertainment	DLP	0.69-0.83	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	10x31x24	2.85
Epson EH-TW5900	950	04.12/GT	★★★★★	Sturdy and impressively spec'd	LCD	1.32-2.15:1	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	14x42x37	6
Epson EH-TW5910	900	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Best projector up to £1000, Awards 2013. Product of the Year	LCD	1.32-2.15	1920x1080	2100	2	0	1	14x42x37	6
InFocus IN3118HD	990	05.13/GT	★★★★★	A few niggles but a bright and capable projector	DLP	1.6-1.92	1920x1080	3600	2	0	1	10x34x25	3.7
Optoma HD23	800	04.12/GT	★★★★★	Affordable, but not the last word in performance	DLP	1.5-1.8:1	1920x1080	2500	2	0	1	10x32x33	2.9
Optoma HD25	800	05.13/GT	★★★★★	Plenty of features for a budget level projector	DLP	1.5-1.8	1920x1080	2000	2	0	2	12x38x31	4.5
£1000-£3000													
BenQ W1200	1100	04.12/ST	★★★★★	Best projector up to £1500, Awards 2012	DLP	1.44-2.1:1	1920x1080	1800	2	0	1	14x34x26	3.6
Epson EH-TW6100W	1600	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best projector £1000-£2000, Awards 2013	LCD	1.32-2.15:1	1920x1080	2300	2	0	1	14x42x37	6
Optoma HD83	2400	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Healthily priced,with a solid performance	DLP	1.45x2.28	1920x1080	1600	2	0	0	19x49x37	8.4
Philips Screeneo HDP1590TV	1500	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A great idea that's executed well, but not perfectly	DLP	0.321	1280x800	500	3	0	1	15x34x29	5
Sony VPL-HW55ES	2800	04.14/GT	★★★★★	An impressively capable projector	SXRD	n/a	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	18x41x46	9.6
£3000 and above													
Epson EH-TW9000W	3200	06.12/FT	★★★★★	If you need wireless HDMI, buy this Epson	LCD	1.34-2.87	1920x1080	2400	2	0	1	16x47x40	8.5
Epson EH-TW9200W	3000	04.14/GT	★★★★★	A fine projector, but not the showstopper we expected	LCD	1.34-2.87:1	1920x1080	2400	6	0	0	14x47x40	9
JVC DLA-X35BE	3000	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Good but not great, this JVC appeals if you like bright pictures	D-ILA	n/a	1920x1080	1300	2	0	1	18x46x47	15
Panasonic PT-AT6000E	3000	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Best projector £2000+, Awards 2013	LCD	1.18-2.36	1920x1080	2400	3	0	1	15x47x36	8.7
SIM2 C3X Lumis 3D-S	30000	11.11/FT	★★★★★	The best 3D projector we've ever seen	DLP	1.82-2.48:1	1920x1080	3000	2	0	0	46x21x46	11
Sony VPL-HW30ES	3000	02.12/GT	★★★★★	Very capable, but there's better for the money	SXRD	1.47-2.18	1920x1080	1300	2	0	1	18x41x46	10
Sony VPL-HW50ES	3000	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Shows why home cinema can't be beaten	SXRD	1.64-2.37	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	18x41x46	9.6
Sony VPL-VW500ES	8500	04.14/FT	★★★★★	Stunningly good with 4K content but pricey nonetheless	SXRD	1.64-2.37	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	18x41x46	9.6
Sony VPL-VW95ES	5000	01.12/FT	★★★★★	By class standards, it's one of the best projectors around	SXRD	1.38-2.83	4096x2160	1700	2	0	0	20x50x46	14

System killers... 3D blu-ray

If you're looking to dazzle your friends and family with 3D movies, then this trio are a good bet for a fun time...



Hugo 3D

The story of Hugo Cabret is brought to life by Martin Scorsese in this adaptation of Brian Selznick's novel. While the level of 3D employed is more subtle than in your face, the smooth camera work and use of depth adds to the mood of a film that's both real and fantastical.



Life of Pi 3D

Ang Lee's Oscar-winning adaptation of a book that's tricky to pin down is a vivid film that takes advantage of what 3D has to offer. Whether it's going for depth or having objects bound out of the screen, it's helped by the image being very bright, even with 3D glasses on.



TT3D: Closer to the Edge

This fast-paced documentary isn't afraid of using 3D in a gimmicky way, but it's the sense of speed that sets this doc apart from others. Although the racing footage lacks the depth you'd associate with the format, it's constantly devising of new ways of thrilling you with clever camera angles.



AV receivers & amplifiers

Up to £500	Well-equipped and delivers convincing surround sound
£500-£1000	There are gains in features, build quality and sonic performance
£1000+	Real powerhouses that pack loads of features and cinema-style sound

The shortlist



Yamaha RX-V377

"If this is your first step towards a home cinema system, then the Yamaha RX-V377 is a great place to start."



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR Sony STR-DN1040

"Insightful and dynamic, exciting and punchy, this talented AV receiver will charm its way into your home cinema room."



AWARD WINNER

Pioneer SC-LX57

"Outshining its predecessor in every way, the impressive SC-LX57 once again sets the bar for home cinema amplifiers at this price."

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Channels /power (w)	HDMI in	HDMI out	Networking	3D passthrough	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £300									
Pioneer VSX-528	285	02.14/GT	★★★★★	A well-equipped budget amp with good surround sound capabilities	5x130	6	1	●	17x44x33
Sony STR-DH820	230	04.13/GT	★★★★★	A capable, if not faultless, option for those looking for a sub-£250 7.1 channel amp	7x115	4	1	●	16x43x32
Yamaha RX-V375	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier up to £350, Awards 2013	5x100	4	1	●	15x44x32
Yamaha RX-V377	260	07.14/FT	★★★★★	Superb surround sound on a budget	5x70	4	1	●	15x44x32
£300-£500									
Harman Kardon AVR-171	450	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Could be subtler but delivers a powerhouse performance	7x100	6	2	●	12x44x30
Onkyo TX-NR515	450	11.12/GT	★★★★★	The amplifier to beat in 2012, now beaten	7x130	8	2	●	17x44x33
Pioneer VSX-923	450	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Needs more heft but it's still a confident and compelling amp	7x150	8	2	●	17x44x36
Sony STR-DN840	350	02.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented, energetic amp that delivers plenty of precision and attack	7x150	6	1	●	16x43x33
Sony STR-DN850	400	08.14/FT	★★★★★	An impressive all-rounder at a great price	7x150	5	1	●	16x43x33
Sony STR-DN1030	470	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Gives the best (at this price) a run for their money	7x120	5	1	●	17x43x33
Sony STR-DN1040	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £350-£700, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	7x100	8	2	●	16x43x32
Yamaha RX-V675	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	A powerful and thrilling amplifier for the money	7x150	6	1	●	17x44x36
£500-£1000									
Denon AVR-2113	550	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Solid, likeable option for both novices and enthusiasts	7x125	6	1	●	17x44x33
Denon AVR-X2000	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Marks a fine return to form for Denon	7x150	7	1	●	17x43x33
Denon AVR-X2100W	500	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A strong contender but competition at this price is fierce	7x150	8	2	●	17x43x33
Denon AVR-X4000	900	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Decent if you're looking for a sub-£1000 AV receiver	7x125	7	3	●	17x43x38
Harman-Kardon AVR-365	800	03.12/ST	★★★★★	Great looks, but lacks some precision	7x110	6	1	●	17x44x39
Onkyo TX-NR626	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Well-featured but not as compelling or as immersive as rival products	7x160	6	2	●	17x44x33
Pioneer VSX-924	500	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Another good effort but rivals offer more excitement	7x150	7	2	●	17x44x36
Sony STR-DN1050	500	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Stacks of features and an excellent performance at a great price	7x165	6	3	●	17x43x33
Yamaha RX-S600	500	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A small, excellent amp that delivers great sound and good features	5x90	5	1	●	17x43x33
Yamaha RX-V673	500	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £350-£700, Awards 2012.	7x150	6	1	●	17x44x36
Yamaha RX-V677	560	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A fun receiver that's not the most balanced, but is endlessly entertaining	7x150	6	1	●	17x43x36
£1000-£2000									
Denon AVR-4520	1970	03.13/ST	★★★★★	An enjoyable, easygoing sound, pipped only in terms of absolute excitement	9x150	7	2	●	20x43x42
Onkyo TX-NR818	1000	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Impressive AV amp with features aplenty	7x180	8	2	●	34x59x55
Pioneer SC-LX56	1300	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £700-£1500, Awards 2012	9x170	8	2	●	19x44x44
Pioneer SC-LX57	1200	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £700-£1500, Awards 2013	9x170	9	3	●	19x44x44
Pioneer SC-LX86	1800	03.13/ST	★★★★★	Best Home Cinema amplifier £1500+, Awards 2012	9x190	8	3	●	19x44x414
Yamaha RX-A1020	1000	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Delivering excitement, detail and precision, this is a brilliantly capable all-rounder	7x110	8	2	●	18x43x43
Yamaha RX-A1030	1000	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Not without some niggles, this receiver delivers big-time power and muscle	7x110	8	2	●	18x43x43

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AV RECEIVERS & AMPLIFIERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Channels / power (w)	HDMI in	HDMI out	Networking	3D passthrough	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
£2000 and above									
Anthem MRX 700	2100	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Fantastic-sounding and worthy of a serious audition	7x90	4	1		17x44x39
Arcam FMJ AVR450	2200	03.14/GT	★★★★★	There's plenty to like with this receiver, but its rivals better it	7x110	7	2	●	17x43x42
Arcam AVR750	4000	12.13/FT	★★★★★	It's not flawless, but this AV receiver is very good	7x100	7	2	●	17x43x43
Pioneer SC-LX87	2000	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Pioneer strikes gold again with this feature-laden powerhouse	9x220	9	3	●	19x44x44
Onkyo TX-NR1010	2000	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Power-packed heavyweight needs a touch more precision	7x200	9	2	●	20x44x59
Onkyo TX-NR3009	2000	04.12/GT	★★★★★	Produces seriously rewarding surround sound	9x200	8	2	●	34x61x60
Onkyo TX-NR3010	2000	03.13/ST	★★★★★	A solid performance but lacks the subtlety to cut it as a complete all-rounder	9x160	9	2	●	20x44x60
Yamaha RX-A3020	2000	03.13/ST	★★★★★	A shot across the bows of the class leaders	9x230	8	2	●	19x44x47
Yamaha RX-A3030	2000	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £1500+, Awards 2013	9x150	8	1	●	19x44x47



Subwoofers

Sealed cabinet _____ Tends to produce the tightest bass but limits outright quantity
 Reflex port _____ A more common design that tends to deliver more bass
 Room equalisation _____ Evens out the subwoofer's response to produce a more balanced sound

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
Bowers & Wilkins ASW610



Bowers & Wilkins ASW610XP



AWARD WINNER
Velodyne SPL-1000 Ultra

Also consider

Also consider					Power (w)	Driver (cm)	Passive radiator	Sealed	Ported	Drive unit orientation	Line inputs	Speaker ins	Line outputs	Speaker outs	Phase invert	Remote control	EQ	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict																
Up to £500																			
B&W ASW610	450	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Best subwoofer up to £700, Awards 2011	200	25		●		Forward	1	1			●		●	4	31x31x38
Klipsch SW-450	330	02.11/GT	★★★★★	Weighty and tight, but loses its way at times	200	25.4			●	Downward	2	2		●	●			1	43x36x50
Monitor Audio Vector VW-8	225	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Capable little sub for an entry-level system	100	20			●	Forward	2	0			●			2	32x28x28
REL Acoustics T-Zero	350	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Small and discreet, but limited by size	100	16.5		●		Downward	2	1			●			2	24x22x26
Tannoy TS2.10	430	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Small, but packs a ferocious punch	300	25		●		Forward	1	0		●				3	39x38x33
Velodyne EQ-Max 8	495	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Small, but punches well above its weight	180	20			●	Forward	2	2		●	●	●	●	1	37x33x38
Velodyne Impact-10	295	07.09/GT	★★★★★	This sizeable subwoofer needs to be more controlled	150	25			●	Forward	2	2		●	●	●		4	35x32x37
Velodyne Impact-12	365	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Fine sub, more of a movie than a music classic	165	30			●	Forward	2	1			●	●		1	39x66x45
Velodyne Impact-Mini	435	10.09/FT	★★★★★	Amazingly small sub with fine movie performance	180	16.5		●		Forward	2	2			●	●		1	25x25x30
W'fedale Powercube SPC-10	300	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Nearly a terrific subwoofer - but there are issues	215	25		●		Downward	1	1		●				8	38x35x31
£500-£1000																			
B&W ASW610XP	700	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for big bass from a small box	500	25		●		Forward	2	1			●		●	4	32x32x37
Monitor Audio Apex AW-12	950	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Beautiful to look at, and punchy too	500	30.5		●		Forward	1	0		●		●		2	34x34x41
REL Acoustics T-7	650	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A compact sub with authority	200	20		●		Downward	2	1			●			2	30x35x33
Sonos Sub	600	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Sounds great. Makes sense with Sonos Play speakers	n/a	n/a		●		Inward	0	0			●	●	●	1	40x38x16
Tannoy TS2.12	549	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Attractively priced with decent sonics too	500	30.5		●		Forward	1	0		●		●		2	44x43x38
Velodyne EQ-Max 12	825	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Powerful and agile and supremely enjoyable	225	30.5			●	Forward	1	2		●	●	●	●	1	45x42x46
Yamaha NS-SW700	500	03.10/FT	★★★★★	Not the most accomplished, but very competent	300	25			●	Downward	4	2			●			2	45x41x41
£1000 and above																			
B&W PV1D	1200	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Delivers precision and agility in spades	400	20		●		Forward	1	0			●	●	●	2	34x27x36
Jamo D600	1300	05.12/GT	★★★★★	A brilliant sub that's worth the price	400	38		●		Forward	n/a	0			●			1	56x59x50
Paradigm Seismic 110	1250	10.10/FT	★★★★★	A subwoofer that's deeply impressive in every sense	850	25		●		Forward	2	0			●		●	1	34x30x32
Sunfire Subr. SRA2700EQ	2350	03.12/FT	★★★★★	It's not cheap, but it is impressive	2700	25x2		●		Forward	2	0		●		●		1	36x113x9
Velodyne SPL-1000 Ultra	1400	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Best subwoofer £700+, Awards 2011	1200	25		●		Forward	1	1		●		●	●	3	34x33x34
Wilson Benesch Torus	3000	02.07/GT	★★★★★	The most musical and insightful deep bass ever	200	36		●		Upward	4	1		●		●	●	2	45x90x30



Surround speakers

Full size _____ Traditional cabinet design that's big but can deliver a great sound
 Style _____ Compact speakers that make a lot of sense in smaller living spaces
 Bipole/Dipole _____ Surround speaker designs that give a more cohesive soundfield

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
Q Acoustics 2000i 5.1

Awards 2013: Best Traditional Pack up to £700



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Dali Zensor 15.1

Awards 2013: Best Style Pack £700-£1500



AWARD WINNER
Cambridge Audio Aero 5.1

Awards 2013: Best Traditional Pack £1500-£2500

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Front speaker (hwd, cm)	Center speaker (hwd, cm)	Rear speaker (hwd, cm)	Subwoofer (hwd, cm)	Finishes
Up to £500									
Boston Ac. Soundware XS SE	220	12.11/FT	★★★★★	Just as good as its predecessor: a must-hear	11x11x9	11x11x9	11x11x9	31x28x40	2
Canton Movie 130	450	05.12/FT	★★★★★	Likeable and listenable	12x9x10	9x19x10	12x9x10	41x24x42	3
Harman-Kardon HKTS20	450	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Neat, but a conservative listen	22x11x9	11x26x9	22x11x9	36x27x27	1
Jamo A101HCS5	230	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A great way to get started with home cinema	9x15x15	9x15x15	9x15x15	30x57x16	1
Jamo S426 HCS3	350	01.12/FT	★★★★★	A worthy home cinema solution	91x18x24	12x34x12	21x12x12	n/a	3
Tannoy HTS-101	400	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Best style package up to £700, Awards 2013	16x11x14	11x25x17	16x11x14	42x28x37	1
Teufel Motiv 3	460	06.10/GT	★★★★★	Another solid showing from this manufacturer	12x12x14	12x12x14	12x12x14	26x26x32	1
Teufel Theater 80	449	01.10/FT	★★★★★	Big sounds for not too much money	23x15x19	23x15x19	23x15x19	40x26x40	1
Wharfedale DX-1HCP	400	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Gets a lot right for this kind of money	19x12x12	12x29x12	19x12x12	34x29x32	2
£500-£1000									
Boston Ac. SoundWare S	510	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Dinky yet substantial-sounding	14x14x14	14x14x14	14x14x14	34x32x44	2
Cambridge Audio Minx S215	500	05.11/FT	★★★★★	Lots to admire here from very little	8x8x9	8x8x9	8x8x9	22x21x22	1
Dali Zensor 15.1	980	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £700-£1500, Awards 2013. Product of the Year	27x16x22	16x44x29	27x16x22	31x29x31	3
Jamo A 200 HCS 5	640	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A gutsy and entertaining sound at this price	22x9x5	22x9x5	22x9x5	31x28x31	7
KEF KHT3005 HD2	900	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Great build with an expansive sound	25x13x15	13x25x15	25x13x15	38x37x18	1
KEF E305	900	11.13/ST	★★★★★	A room-filling system but there are more dynamic packages out there	26x14x16	16x22x15	26x14x16	32x43x27	2
Mission MX15.1	600	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for a medium sized room	28x17x26	15x42x19	28x17x26	30x30x33	4
Monitor Audio MASS	800	11.13/ST	★★★★★	Still an excellent system, it narrowly falls short of the best	22x13x13	13x22x13	22x13x13	42x38x38	1
Q Acoustics 2000i 5.1	625	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package up to £700, Awards 2013	23x15x20	23x16x12	23x15x20	23x16x12	2
Q Acoustics Q7000	800	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Product of the year - Speaker packages, Awards 2011	24x10x16	12x21x16	24x10x16	37x51x22	2
Q Acoustics Q7000i	900	11.13/ST	★★★★★	Best style package £700-£1000, Awards 2013	24x10x16	12x20x16	24x10x16	32x46x20	2
Teufel Theater 200	799	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Big-screen soundtracks don't come bigger than this	44x20x29	25x44x27	23x16x12	60x38x49	1
Wharfedale 100-HCP	950	11.13/FT	★★★★★	A very good package, but could do with a better centre speaker	32x17x26	17x47x27	32x17x26	39x35x31	7
£1000-£2000									
Acoustic Energy Neo V2 5.1	1200	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Plenty to enjoy if you have a large room	91x20x24	18x48x20	36x18x23	41x36x33	2
B&W 685 Theatre	1200	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £1000-£1500, Awards 2010	23x16x12	34x20x33	27x17x33	26x26x33	6
B&W MT-50	1100	11.13/ST	★★★★★	Best style package £1000-£1400, Awards 2013	25x11x16	25x11x16	25x11x16	26x26x33	2
B&W MT-60D	1950	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Best style package £1800+, Awards 2013	25x11x16	25x11x16	25x11x16	34x27x36	2
Cabasse Eole 3	1000	11.13/ST	★★★★★	A likable, big-sounding system that lacks a little authority	13x13x13	13x13x13	13x13x13	33x33x35	2
Cambridge Audio Aero 5.1	1950	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £1500-£2500, Awards 2013	98x24x34	15x43x21	18x46x15	34x33x36	2
Dali Fazon 1	1500	07.10/GT	★★★★★	Preferable in many ways to its pricier big brother	26x14x13	26x14x13	26x14x13	28x26x27	2
Dali Fazon 3 5.1	1699	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Best style package £1200-£2000, Awards 2011	26x14x14	14x26x14	26x14x14	23x16x12	2
Dali Zensor 5 5.1	1499	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £700-£1500, Awards 2012	84x16x27	16x44x28	97x16x23	34x37x38	2
Elipson Planet M 5.1	1300	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Enjoyable looks and sound, just lacking a smidge of detail	15x15x15	15x15x15	15x15x15	39x32x32	3
Focal Dome 5.1	1000	11.13/ST	★★★★★	It's not perfect but this Focal charms nonetheless	17x14x14	17x14x14	17x14x14	40x28x28	3
Jamo D500 THX Select 2	1700	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Exceptional and unbeatable value too	26x45x13	26x45x13	26x45x13	42x40x42	2

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SURROUND SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Front speaker (hwd, cm)	Center speaker (hwd, cm)	Rear speaker (hwd, cm)	Subwoofer (hwd, cm)	Finishes
KEF Q300 5.1	1880	10.11/GT	★★★★★	An admirable package for the purists	36x21x30	21x63x30	36x21x30	33x34x33	3
KEF T105	1200	04.11/GT	★★★★★	A stealthy package that looks the part	33x14x4	33x14x4	33x14x4	38x37x8	1
Klipsch Synergy B20/SW450	1050	09.11/FT	★★★★★	A vibrant and exciting 5.1 package	32x18x20	15x41x13	14x30x12	43x36x50	1
Monitor Audio Bronze BX2 5.1	1050	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Thrillingly fit for purpose	35x19x26	17x46x17	29x28x11	33x32x33	4
Monitor Audio Bronze BX5 5.1	1215	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Does a good job of filling a big room	85x17x25	17x46x17	29x28x11	33x32x33	2
Monitor Audio Radius R90HT1	1500	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Best style package £1400-£1800, Awards 2013	20x13x14	17x46x17	20x13x14	33x32x33	3
Quad L-lite Plus 5.1 package	1200	12.13/FT	★★★★★	A fine package that's up against some formidable rivals at this price	25x14x18	15x38x17	25x14x18	31x24x24	3
Tannoy Rev. Compact 5.1	1300	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Exceptional sound in the average living room	27x15x16	15x30x16	39x31x34	32x29x29	2
£2000 and above									
Acoustic Energy 3-Series 5.1	2425	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Build, looks and performance combine for an attractive speaker package	90x19x30	19x45x26	30x19x25	36x36x36	2
Acoustic Energy Active Pro 5.1	3035	08.10/FT	★★★★★	A stunning listen that's great value too	22x15x18	22x15x18	22x15x18	35x35x33	1
Acoustic Energy Radiance 5.1	3000	05.09/FT	★★★★★	This 5.1 package has plenty of appeal	92x23x30	19x45x30	32x19x25	41x36x33	2
B&W CM9 Theatre	4200	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £3500+, Awards 2013	102x32x37	22x59x28	34x20x28	32x32x32	2
B&W CT800 system	67950	11.08/GT	★★★★★	Expensive but it's the best we've heard	110x33x55	33x110x55	110x33x10	48x48x48	1
Cabasse MT-30 5.1	2100	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Looks more assertive than it is, but still likeable	x11x21	16x48x37	41x23x20	42x31x43	2
Dali Ikon 5 MK2	2500	06.14/GT	★★★★★	An exciting speaker package that will thrill film and music fans	81x15x28	15x57x26	38x27x15	45x41x46	2
Dali Ikon 6 Mk2 5.1	2900	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for those with big listening areas to fill	103x19x35	15x57x25	38x27x15	48x41x46	3
Dali Lektor 5.1	2320	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Only just fails to get top marks against its rivals	106x25x37	17x60x18	31x17x22	36x31x40	2
Dali Mentor 5.1	5700	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Powerhouse of a system	103x20x39	20x89x29	32x16x24	37x33x33	2
KEF R100 5.1	2850	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £2500-£3500, Awards 2013	28x18x29	17x53x31	28x18x29	37x33x35	4
M&K 950-Series	5445	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Exceptional system with thrilling sound	41x18x22	41x18x22	26x18x22	60x39x51	2
Monitor Audio Apex	2400	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Best style speaker package £2000+, Awards 2011	25x14x14	14x61x10	25x14x14	34x34x41	2
Monitor Audio PL200AV	11400	08.10/FT	★★★★★	Exceptional in every sense	100x25x28	22x58x29	37x34x36	45x48x47	3
Monitor Audio PL300 AV	13500	10.09/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest 5.1 speaker packages on the market	111x41x47	22x58x29	37x22x28	45x48x47	2
Monitor Audio Silver 6 AV12	2875	06.14/GT	★★★★★	A hugely capable surround package. Worthy of serious consideration	94x35x20	19x50x24	25x31x12	23x16x14	6
Mon. Audio Silver RX6 AV12	2200	10.11/GT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £1500-£2500, Awards 2011	85x19x25	19x50x20	30x12x25	34x34x41	6
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 5.1	2000	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Guaranteed to keep you on the edge of your seat	95x21x32	18x46x23	95x21x30	42x31x36	3
Mordaunt-Short Mezzo 5.1	2300	11.08/GT	★★★★★	Lots of attack, with little respite	100x22x28	18x49x22	35x22x28	32x34x35	2
Paradigm MilleniaOne	2500	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Smooth and detailed, but slightly lacking in attack	20x12x15	20x12x15	20x12x15	34x30x32	2
PMC DB1i 5.1	4675	12.09/FT	★★★★★	Small and sonically brilliant package	29x16x23	16x29x23	29x16x23	55x20x55	4
Tannoy Revolution SE AV	2400	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Despite a few issues with the centre and sub, this is an exciting package	95x20x25	15x31x16	37x20x25	44x43x37	1
Tannoy Revolution Signature	2300	11.08/GT	★★★★★	As thrilling or as calming as you want it to be	85x17x18	17x45x18	27x17x18	37x34x34	2

How to: calibrate your AV receiver

A poorly set up AV receiver, with speakers at the wrong levels and EQ settings, is awful. Here's how to do it right

Do it manually

If you have a sound-pressure level meter, this is the time to free it from its current life of measuring car exhausts and burps.

In your AV receiver's settings menu, switch the test tone on, then cycle through the speakers. Switch the SPL meter to 'C' weighting and slow response mode, and then set the level of each speaker to around 75dB on the meter's display as you hold it head-height.

If you're using a phone or tablet with an SPL app, you should be fine setting the surround sound speakers, but many internal mics are pretty bad at registering bass – so you'll have to dial in the sub by ear. Now's a good time to check the overall balance, too.



Use the included microphone

The easiest way to do it is to plug in the calibration microphone that came with your receiver. Follow the on-screen instructions, moving it between the listening positions you usually sit in at the appropriate point (if your amp supports this).

Put it at ear-level (on a stand if possible), and stay absolutely silent while it works.

Check your work

Make sure the speakers are to the correct size in the amp's menus, and trust your ears. If it sounds wrong, it probably is – you can always tweak.





CD players

Integrated _____ Has both a CD mechanism and digital-to-analogue conversion tech
Transport _____ Needs an outboard DAC but can deliver a higher standard of sound

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Integrated	Transport	Co-axial out	Optical out	XL out	RCA out	Headphone out	Co-axial in	Optical in	AES/EBU in	USB in	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500																	
Cambridge Audio Azur 351C	300	11.12/FT	★★★★★	A worthy rival to the Award-winning Marantz CD6004	●		1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	9x43x31
Cambridge Audio Azur 651C	450	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Aspacious sounding disc spinner	●		1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x31
Marantz CD6004	300	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Best CD player up to £500, Awards 2012	●		1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	11x44x34
Marantz CD6005	350	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Best CD player up to £500, Awards 2013	●		1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x44x34
Sansui CDD-201V	200	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Sensibly priced, but not quite an all-rounder	●		1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	7x43x28
£500-£1000																	
Arcam FMJ CD17	650	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Basic on features, but capable enough	●		1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	9x43x29
Audiolab 8200CD	800	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1000, Awards 2012	●		1	1	1	1	0	2	2	0	1	1	8x44x30
Audiolab 8200CDQ	950	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Improves on the sky-high performance of the 8200CD	●		1	1	1	1	1	2	2	0	1	2	8x44x30
NAD C 546BEE	500	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Talented but struggles against the more enjoyable budget Marantz	●		1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	9x44x31
Cyrus CD Transport	750	01.12/ST	★★★★★	An impressive and affordable CD transport	●		1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36
Cyrus CD6 SE2	700	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Subtly upgraded, with worthwhile results	●		0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	8x22x36
Naim CD5si	995	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1500, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	●		0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	7x43x30
Pioneer PD-50	500	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Worth considering but this SACD player doesn't quite engage	●		1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	13x44x33
Rega Apollo-R	550	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Admirable, but lacks some cohesion	●		1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	9x22x32
Roksan Kandy K2	900	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Big and powerful, with an entertaining sound	●		1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	10x43x38
Yamaha CD-S2000	979	03.09/GT	★★★★★	A beautiful object that's involving to listen to	●		1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	14x44x44
£1000 and above																	
Audio Research CD6	8050	08.14/FT	★★★★★	In the market for a top-class CD player? This could be the one	●		0	0	1	1	0	0	2	1	1	2	13x48x31
Burmester 069	35840	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Quite possibly the best CD player money can buy			2	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	16x45x34
Cambridge Audio Azur 851C	1200	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Impressive sonic presentation but a touch too clinical for our tastes	●		1	1	1	1	0	2	2	1	1	2	12x43x34
Copland CDA 825	4298	05.13/FT	★★★★★	A hugely capable player with stunning sound quality	●		1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	10x43x39
Cyrus CD 8 SE2	1200	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Best CD player £1000-£1500, Awards 2012	●		1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36
Cyrus CDi	1050	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Arguably the best, most insightful integrated player Cyrus has ever made	●		1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	7x22x36
Esoteric K-05	7495	01.14/FT	★★★★★	A great place to start... if you're looking for your final disc-player	●		1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	13x45x36
Leema Antilla IIS Eco	2995	09.11/FT	★★★★★	The already good Antilla goes up another level in performance	●		1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	11x44x31
Musical Fidelity M6CD	2100	08.13/FT	★★★★★	Its powerful, yet refined sound will appeal to many, a fine performer	●		1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	13x44x39
Naim CD5 XS	1950	Aw.09/FT	★★★★★	It's an excellent CD player, but faces stiff competition	●		1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	7x43x30
Naim CD555/555PS	18345	10.09/FT	★★★★★	The CD555/555PS has a hefty price tag, but a classy performance	●		0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	11x43x31
Naim CDX2	3640	02.10/FT	★★★★★	The tweaked CDX2 remains a fine proposition	●		0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x31
Parasound Halo CD1	5000	07.13/FT	★★★★★	Not cheap but it's a fine CD player with an idiosyncratic design	●		1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x44x35
Primare CD32	2200	04.11/FT	★★★★★	It's massively detailed, but not as engaging as we'd like	●		1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	11x43x38
Roksan Caspian M2 CD	1650	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Best CD player £1500+ Awards 2013	●		1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x43x33
T+A MP 3000 HV	7900	12.13/FT	★★★★★	A classy multi-source player that delivers high-quality sound	●		1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	11x43x35

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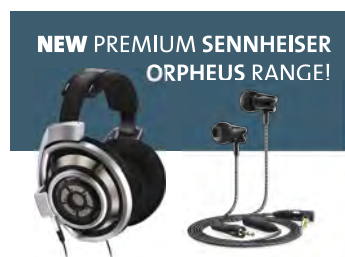
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— What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision magazine.

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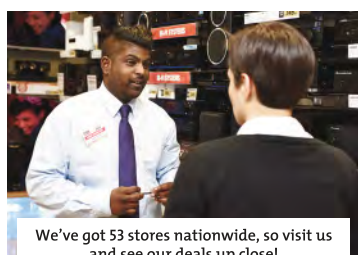
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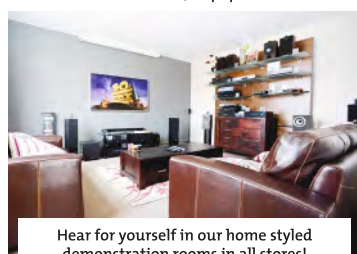
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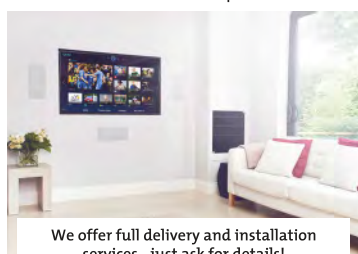
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YAMAHA RXV675 AV RECEIVER

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ONKYO TXNR838 AV RECEIVER & DALI ZENSOR 15.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE

Thanks to improvements in audio fidelity, the TXNR838 is a great partner to the hi-fi sound of the Dalis. What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision magazine described the Zensors as "enthusiastic and engaging performers that make sure the listener has a good time."

5 Year Supercare £169.95

£1699.95



PIONEER SCLX58 AV RECEIVER & CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AERO 5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE

What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision magazine called the Aero 5.1 speakers an "excellent 5.1 package that is as exciting, informative and seamless as we've heard for the money."

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£2499.95

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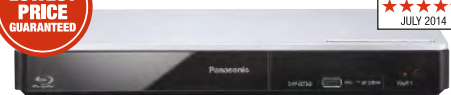
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SONY BDPS6200 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

"A talented player that should be on your shortlist." – What Hi-Fi? S&V mag.
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£149.95

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VIP CLUB MEMBER PRICE*

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"With gorgeous sound and looks, this Canton is an immensely satisfying improvement to TV sound" – WHF? Sound & Vision mag.

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MONITOR AUDIO ASB2 SOUNDBAR

"Good bass despite lack of separate subwoofer." – What Hi-Fi? S&V mag.

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TANNOY HTS101 5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE

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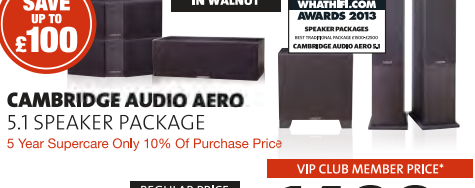
MONITOR AUDIO MASS 5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE

"Sound that is much bigger than their physical size would suggest." – What Hi-Fi? S&V mag.

TSP £799.95 | 5 Year Supercare £69.90

£699

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CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AERO 5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE

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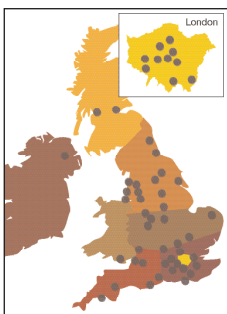
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DACs

Digital-to-analogue converters take a digital data stream from its source (such as a computer or CD transport) and turns it into an analogue signal that your amplifier can work with. These devices have become more popular in recent years due to the emergence of computer-based audio

Our recommendations

Our recommendations					USB in	Optical in	Co-axial in	AES EBU in	HDMI in	Wireless	Headphone out	RCA out	Balanced XLR out	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict											
Up to £500														
Arcam airDAC	400	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Not as good as the irDAC but delivers good sound on a budget	0	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	4x19x12
Arcam irDAC	400	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Best DAC £300-£500, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	4x12x19
Arcam irDAC Wireless	380	09.12/GT	★★★★★	No longer the default choice at the money, still very much a contender	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	4x16x11
Arcam miniBlink	90	05.14/GT	★★★★★	A compact DAC that makes a huge impression. Bluetooth sounds brilliant	0	0	0	10	0	●	0	1	0	2.5x3x4
Arcam rPAC	150	04.13/ST	★★★★★	More desirable alternatives, but the rPAC still has plenty of merit	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	3x10x6
Audioengine D1	150	05.12/FT	★★★★★	A DAC and headphone amp with a fine sound	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	3x9x10
Audioquest DragonFly	215	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC up to £300, Awards 2012	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	6x2x1
Audioquest DragonFly v1.2	130	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Outrageously good sound quality at an aggressive price	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	6x2x1
Belkin Song Stream BT HD	50	05.14/GT	★★★★★	A solid performer for the price	0	0	0	0	0	●	0	1	0	n/a
Camb. Audio DacMagic 100	200	06.12/FT	★★★★★	An affordable, fine looking and listenable DAC	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	5x11x13
Camb. Audio DacMagic Plus	350	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Better sound and features than the original - but pricey	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	1	5x22x19
Camb. Audio DacMagic XS	100	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Drops down a star but still a delightful little device	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	5x3x1
Crystal Acoustics BluDAC	60	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Doesn't quite have the finesse of others but this is still a real entertainer	0	0	0	0	0	●	0	1	0	6.5x7.5x2
Denon DA-300USB	330	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Soft bass detracts from what is otherwise a great first DAC from Denon	1	2	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	6x17x18
Furutech ADL GT 40	400	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Product of the Year - Cables & Accessories, Awards 2011	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	6x15x11
Focal Universal Wireless Receiv.	85	05.14/GT	★★★★★	A very talented performer that comes with a few quirks	0	0	0	0	0	●	0	1	0	n/a
HRT Headstreamer	145	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A neat headphone amp and DAC combination	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	3x6x7
HRT microStreamer	180	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC up to £300, Awards 2013	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1x3x6
LH Labs Geek Out	200	09.14/FT	★★★★★	A clever little device that's a solid performer	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1.3x3.5x6.7
Meridian Director	450	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Packs a sonic punch but lacks the swagger found in others	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	3x14x8
Meridian Explorer DAC	250	07.13/GT	★★★★★	The Explorer's design and assured sonic performance makes it a top contender	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2x3x10
Micromega MyDAC	260	04.13/ST	★★★★★	If you like your music to have an attacking edge, then this DAC's for you	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2x3x10
Musical Fidelity V-90 DAC	200	12.13/FT	★★★★★	A well-featured DAC that's a little too relaxed in its sound	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	5x17x10
NAD DAC 1	295	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A good, though not exceptional, wireless DAC	1	0	0	0	0	●	0	1	0	4x14x7
NAD D 1050	400	06.14/GT	★★★★★	For those looking for a desktop DAC, the NAD D 1050 is a brilliant box of tricks	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	1	19x6x21
Pro-ject DAC Box DS	299	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A solid performer but doesn't excel in any area	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	7x10x14
£500-£1000														
Audiolab M-DAC	600	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £500-£700, Awards 2013	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	6x25x25
Cambridge Audio Azur 851D	1000	07.14/GT	★★★★★	A fine DAC, even if it can't scale the heights of the class leaders	1	4	3	1	0	●	1	0	1	12x43x36
Chord Chordette QuteHD	990	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £700-£1000, Awards 2013	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	7x16x4
Rega DAC	500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Beefy build; natural, unforced, dynamic and detailed sound	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	8x22x27
Musical Fidelity M1SDAC	800	08.13/FT	★★★★★	An impressive spec list but performance is trumped by cheaper rivals	1	1	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	10x22x31
Parasound Zdac	500	11.13/GT	★★★★★	The Zdac produces a lively, likable sound	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	5x22x26
Rotel RDD-1580	600	05.14/FT	★★★★★	Plenty to be impressed with, but the poor quality of its USB input holds it back	1	2	2	0	0	●	0	1	1	5.5x43x32
Sony UDA-1	500	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Not the most musically exciting DAC, but an excellent choice for desktop users	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	7x23x26

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DACs continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	USB in	Optical in	Co-axial in	AES EBU in	HDMI in	Wireless	Headphone out	RCA out	Balanced XLR out	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
£1000 and above													
Aesthetix Romulus	6500	06.14/GT	★★★★★	A fine performer that draws in the listener with a smooth and elegant sound	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	11x46x45
Antelope Zodiac Gold/Voltikus	3100	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Unique and appealing, it just misses out on a fifth star	1	2	2	0	0	2	1	1	11x17x19
Audio Research DAC 8	4698	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Pricy, but as organic-sounding as you can get	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	13x48x25
Arcam FMJ D33	2000	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A well-equipped DAC, but not the best in class	3	2	2	1	0	0	1	2	11x43x37
Bricasti Design M1 DAC	7000	03.14/FT	★★★★★	An understated but deeply talented performer. Thoroughly impressive	1	1	2	1	1	0	1	1	6x43x30
Bryston BDA-1 DAC	2350	06.11/FT	★★★★★	A great sounding DAC with appealing build quality	1	2	4	1	0	0	1	1	4x48x29
Burmester 113	2300	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Small and unassuming but packs a seriously exciting sound	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	6x20x17
Chord QBD76 HDSO	4995	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A top-class, visually appealing DAC that delivers brilliant sound	2	2	2	2	0	0	1	1	6x34x15
Chord Hugo	1400	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Superb sound quality in an unbelievably small and versatile package	2	1	1	0	0	3	1	0	2x13x10
dCS Debussy	7930	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Worth every penny of its asking price	1	0	2	2	0	0	1	1	7x45x39
McIntosh D100	3000	06.13/GT	★★★★★	A solid and entertainer performer. Well featured, too	1	2	2	0	0	1	0	0	10x45x41
Musical Fidelity M6 DAC	2000	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A mighty performer but its price and competition rob it of a fifth star	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	13x44x39
NAD M51	1500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £1200+, Awards 2012	1	1	1	1	2	0	1	0	8x44x30
Naim DAC	2150	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Flexible, fine sounding and future-proof. The Naim is some DAC	2	3	3	0	0	0	1	0	7x43x30
Naim DAC-V1	1250	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £1000+, Awards 2013	1	2	3	0	0	1	1	1	9x21x32
T+A DAC 8	1250	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Beautifully engineered with a great sound to boot	1	1	4	1	0	1	1	1	9x27x27



Turntables

Turntable The main part of the player that actually spins the record
Tonearm The component that carries the cartridge across the record surface
Cartridge Turns the information in the record groove into sound

Our recommendations

Our recommendations					33.33	45	78	RPM	Elec. speed change	Manual operation	Phono amp	Tonearm inc.	Cartridges inc.	USB port	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict													
Up to £1000																
Edwards Audio TT1	380	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A tempting alternative to the class-leaders at this price	●	●			●		●	●		1	12x45x36	
Pro-ject Elemental	150	04.14/FT	★★★★★	A top-class budget deck from Pro-Ject	●	●			●		●	●		3	9x43x30	
Pro-ject Essential II	200	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable up to £400, Awards 2013	●	●			●		●			3	14x46x36	
Pro-ject 2-Xperience Basic +	600	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Fuss-free package with a strikingly clear sound	●	●			●		●	●		1	14x46x36	
Pro-ject 2Xperience Classic	750	12.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine deck that's worth auditioning	●	●			●		●	●		3	16x46x36	
Pro-ject Debut Carbon	300	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable up to £500, Awards 2012	●	●	●		●		●	●		7	12x42x32	
Rega RP1	225	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable up to £400, Awards 2011	●	●			●		●	●		3	12x45x36	
Rega RP3/Elys2	550	10.11/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable £400-£800, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	●	●			●		●	●		3	10x45x36	
TDK EMTV20102	350	01.12/FT	★★★★★	A neat solution to archive your vinyl	●	●			●		●	●	●	1	11x45x38	
£1000 and above																
Clearaudio Emotion SE	2110	11.09/FT	★★★★★	For the money, this is an excellent performer	●	●			●		●	●		1	8x40x32	
Clearaudio Ovation/Tali. V2 Gold	5995	04.14/FT	★★★★★	Beautifully made and a pleasure to use. A fantastic performer	●	●	●	●	●		●	●		4	14x42x35	
Clearaudio Performance SE	2660	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Quality engineering and top-class sound	●	●			●		●	●		2	13x42x33	
Kronos Turntable	30000	07.14/FT	★★★★★	Not perfect, but an incredibly tempting piece of kit nonetheless	●	●			●					1	28x56x36	



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TURNABLES continued

TURNTABLEScontinued					33.33	45	78	Elec. speed change	Manual operation	Phono amp	Tonearm inc.	Cartridges inc.	USB port	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict												
£1000 and above															
Kuzma Stabi S/Stogi S	2940	04.10/FT	★★★★★	A worthy alternative to the Michell Orbe	●	●			●		●			1	14x40x30
Linn Majik LP12	2350	03.09/FT	★★★★★	The LP12 offers great value for money with no compromise	●	●			●		●	●		5	14x45x36
Michell Gyro. SE/TecnoArm A	1478	09.08/FT	★★★★★	Packs a sublime punch – it makes listening a pleasure	●	●			●					1	19x41x53
Michell Orbe SE/Tecnoarm A	2675	01.09/FT	★★★★★	Don't buy anything without hearing this deck first	●	●			●					2	26x46x53
Origin Live Calypso package	2440	12.11/FT	★★★★★	Impressive package, but lacks some attention to detail	●	●		●	●		●	●		1	14x45x38
Pro-Ject 2 Xperience X-Pack	1000	08.10/GT	★★★★★	Precision and integration to keep it among the top players	●	●		●	●		●	●		1	14x46x39
P'ject Xten./Ortof. RS-309D	4000	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Proves Pro-ject can compete at all price levels	●	●	●	●	●		●			4	25x55x45
Rega RP6/Exact	1000	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable £800+, Awards 2013	●	●		●	●		●	●		8	12x45x36
Roksan Radius 5.2	1375	Aw.09/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable £1200+, Awards 2010. Superb performance	●	●			●		●			8	15x45x37
Roksan Xerxes 20 Plus (Pack)	6275	10.08/FT	★★★★★	A truly exceptional turntable	●	●		●	●		●			3	12x45x37
Thorens TD160HD/TP250	1560	10.08/GT	★★★★★	One of the best at this price	●	●			●		●			1	18x43x34
Thorens TD309	1250	06.10/FT	★★★★★	The TD309 is a good deck, but it's no TD160HD on the cheap	●	●		●	●		●	●		2	13x47x43
Townshend Rock 7	1500	09.09/FT	★★★★★	It's got its quirks, but it's great value for the money	●	●			●					1	15x40x34



Radios

DAB Digital radio signal that now offers coverage across most of the UK
 Internet Allows you to listen to thousands of radio stations from around the world

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
Pure Evoke D2

Awards 2013: Best Radio up to £100



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Pure Evoke F4

Awards 2013: Best Radio £100-£200



AWARD WINNER
Geneva World Radio DAB+
 Awards 2012: Best Radio £200+

Also consider

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		DAB	FM	MW	Internet	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £100										
Aves Air	50	09.13/GT	★★★★★	A neat, lightweight radio that's fine for listening on the go	●	●			●	10x6x2
iLuv Vibro Classic II	50	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Up-to-date compatibility with Apple devices, but at an old-school price			●			7x23x8
Pure Digital Elan II	99	01.10/GT	★★★★★	Classy and natural - another joy from Pure	●	●			●	16x28x9
Pure Digital Move 2500	90	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A great performer in the right circumstances	●	●			●	10x6x1.5
Pure Digital Move 400D	90	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Perfect for on-the-go casual listening, but not as your main home radio	●	●			●	8.5x15x2.7
Pure Digital One Classic II	65	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	An upgrade of an established favourite	●	●			●	15x21x7
Pure Evoke D2	85	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Best Radio up to £100, Awards 2013	●	●			●	15x21x7
Q2 Internet radio	90	03.11/FT	★★★★★	No-frills wi-fi radio that sounds great for its size	●	●		●		10x10x10
Roberts Duologic	75	01.10/GT	★★★★★	User friendly and sleek – with great sound	●	●			●	15x25x83
Sony XDR-S16	80	12.11/GT	★★★★★	An uncomplicatedly chunky listen	●	●				14x27x11
Tangent Trio DAB	90	01.11/GT	★★★★★	Fine value, smart-looking and future proof	●	●				17x33x20
View Quest WiFi200	80	01.11/FT	★★★★★	A handy, portable wi-fi internet radio					●	73x125x23
£100 and above										
Geneva World Radio DAB+	270	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Best Radio £200+, Awards 2013	●	●			●	17x30x7
Magicbox Nocturne XP-2	170	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Much more of a saint than a sinner, so well worth considering	●	●		●		17x30x15
Philips Original Radio Mini	110	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Terrific sound and features makes this radio an appealing buy	●	●				25x12x12
Pure Digital Avanti Flow i'net	250	12.10/GT	★★★★★	A genuine alternative to a micro system	●	●		●		13x39x23
Pure Evoke D4 with Bluetooth	150	08.14/FT	★★★★★	A decent radio that doesn't sound as good as some of its stablemates	●	●			●	18x22x12
Pure Digital Evoke Flow	150	05.10/GT	★★★★★	Internet and DAB-capable radio that's a delight to use and listen to	●	●		●		18x21x11
Pure Digital Evoke-1S Marshall	120	01.11/FT	★★★★★	A quirky and appealing style classic			●		●	17x22x12
Pure Evoke F4	180	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best Radio £100-£200, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	●	●		●	●	18x21x11
Pure Digital Oasis Flow	170	09.10/FT	★★★★★	Weatherproof, but its sound-per-pound ratio can be bettered	●	●		●		23x16x14

RADIOs continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		DAB	FM	MW	Internet	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Pure Digital One Flow	100	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best Internet Radio up to £150, Awards 2012	●	●	●			15x21x8
Pure Digital Sensia	250	01.10/FT	★★★★★	Plenty to offer: add to your shortlist of portable internet radios	●	●	●			17x28x18
Revo AXiS	200	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Product of the Year - Radios, Awards 2011	●	●	●			13x22x15
Revo AXiS XS	200	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best Internet Radio £150+, Awards 2012	●	●	●			12.5x22x15
Revo AXiS X3	200	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Great radio and a nice little streamer	●	●	●			12.5x22x15
Revo Domino D3	170	05.10/GT	★★★★★	There's lots to like here, but sound is a bit bottom-heavy	●	●	●			14x22x13
Revo Heritage	230	03.10/FT	★★★★★	Beyond reproach on paper, but comes up a bit short with sound	●	●	●			18x26x10
Revo Pico RadioStation	170	12.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine little radio/streamer for bathroom and kitchen	●	●	●	●		17x11x11
Revo Pixis	100	09.13/GT	★★★★★	A decent rather than ground-breaking effort from Revo. Worth an audition	●	●	●			13x16x16
Roberts Revival Cath Kidston	200	01.11/GT	★★★★★	Cath Kidston's flower-power version of this fine sounding radio	●	●	●			23x16x12
Roberts Stream 83i	150	05.10/GT	★★★★★	Good in most areas, but the 83i needs a more balanced sound	●	●	●			21x25x13
Roberts SuperConnect	250	09.14/FT	★★★★★	A feature-packed, attractive radio that impresses on many fronts	●	●	●			18x27x12
Ruark Audio R1 MkII	160	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best DAB/FM radio, Awards 2012	●	●	●			18x13x14
Tangent Uno	100	01.09/GT	★★★★★	With a sound like this, it should be on your list		●	●			13x19x13
Tivoli Albergo+	200	02.14/FT	★★★★★	On the expensive side, but a neat unit nonetheless	●	●	●			11x19x11
Tivoli Model 10+	160	09.13/GT	★★★★★	A good table-top offering at an affordable price	●	●	●			20x12x12
View Quest Retro 1	100	12.11/GT	★★★★★	A neat, talented portable radio that deserves an audition	●	●	●			16x28x9



Hi-fi speakers

Standmounters Usually smaller speakers that need to be put on a stand, not bookshelves
Floorstanders Larger speakers that tend to go louder and deeper than standmounters
Powered Have built-in amplifiers and need mains power to work

Theshortlist



Q Acoustics Concept 20

Awards 2013: Best Stereo Speaker £200-£400



KEF LS50

Awards 2013: Best Standmounter £400-£800



PMC Twenty 22

Awards 2013: Best Standmounter £1500+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Standmount	Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £200									
Acoustic Energy Compact 1	150	10.11/FT	★★★★★	Stylish looks meet grown-up performance	●			2	22x15x20
Audioengine P4	183	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Small in size, huge in sound: a must-audition pair	●			3	23x14x17
Cambridge Audio SX-50	130	04.14/ST	★★★★★	Full of zip and gusto, the SX-50s are excellent value for money	●			2	23x16x24
Mission MX1	150	06.11/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers up to £150, Awards 2010. A real return to form from Mission	●			4	28x17x26
Q Acoustics 2010i	120	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Set the standard at this price and size level	●			4	23x20x15
Q Acoustics 2020i	170	04.14/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers up to £200, Awards 2013	●			4	26x17x28
SoundScience Frankenspieler FS-1	130	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Best Budget desktop speakers, Awards 2011	●			1	9x9x9
SoundScience QSB	85	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Compact, clever and with a big detailed sound	●			1	85x85x85
£200-£500									
Acoustic Energy Neo One V2	210	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Real ability in most areas but they don't quite gel	●			2	36x18x23
Acoust. Energy Neo V2 Three	399	09.10/FT	★★★★★	Much to like, but not quite all-rounders		●		2	91x20x24
Acoustic Energy 301	425	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Very good speakers for the money, definitely worthy of consideration	●			2	30x19x25
Audioengine A5+	290	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Bigger, better and more flexible than the originals	●			3	27x18x20
Audio Pro Addon T8	250	06.14/ST	★★★★★	Punchy and energetic, these beautifully built speakers aren't perfect but they are enjoyable	●	●		2	16x10x14
Arcaidys DM1	299	10.10/GT	★★★★★	These brilliant DM1s will give every rival below £450 a fright	●			4	30x16x21
Bose Companion 20	200	05.13/GT	★★★★★	Solid, reliable speakers for buyers on a tight budget			●	1	22x9x12
Bose Computer MusicMonitor	250	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Enjoyable sound for a speaker this small	●			2	12x7x12
Boston Acoustics A-25	200	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Classy and likeable speakers	●			3	27x18x23
Boston Acoustics A-26	260	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A beautifully accomplished standmounter	●			2	33x21x27

SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
£200-£500							
B&W 685	400	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Great Award-winning speakers from B&W. Just edged out by newer rivals	●	4	34x20x33
B&W MM-1	399	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Still good, but there's better available	●	1	17x10x10
Cambridge Audio SLA-25	200	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Not at all bad, but some rivals are better	●	8	22x15x18
Cambridge Audio SX-60	200	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Impressive speakers but they could do with more refinement	●	2	34x20x27
Castle Knight 2	400	02.11/GT	★★★★★	Good, but not as adaptable as we'd like	●	8	38x20x34
Dali Lektor 1	250	10.09/GT	★★★★★	As musically enjoyable as you'll buy at this price	●	2	26x15x21
Dali Lektor 2	299	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Seriously entertaining speakers and simply stunning at this money	●	2	31x18x22
Dali Lektor 3	450	08.09/GT	★★★★★	Bigger isn't always better, as the Lektor 3s prove	●	2	39x20x26
Dali Zensor 1	200	04.14/ST	★★★★★	These brilliant budget standmounters demand a listen	●	2	27x16x22
Dali Zensor 3	300	01.14/FT	★★★★★	If it's entertainment you crave, then these standmounters deliver in spades	●	3	35x21x29
EB Acoustics EB1	470	08.09/GT	★★★★★	You'll have trouble faulting these nifty standmounters	●	2	31x17x27
Epos Epic 1	325	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Punchy and exciting but they can't deliver all-round ability	●	2	31x19x25
Focal Chorus 706V	390	03.11/FT	★★★★★	Thoroughly enjoyable but they may not cut it with dance music	●	3	39x22x29
Focal XS Book	300	07.12/GT	★★★★★	A potent-sounding speaker that brings hi-fi listening to your desktop	●	1	28x11x20
Focal XS Book Wireless	300	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Stacks of detail but not quite the measure of their rivals	●	1	28x11x20
KEF Q300	450	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Not quite at the top anymore, but still fine, engaging standmounters	●	3	36x21x30
Leema Xero	495	07.08/GT	★★★★★	Not a true all-rounder, but loaded with talent	●	5	25x25x16
Monitor Audio Bronze BX 1	200	05.11/FT	★★★★★	Stylish as you like, but not the complete article	●	4	26x17x18
Monitor Audio Bronze BX2	250	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers £200-£350, Awards 2012	●	4	35x19x26
Monitor Audio Silver RX1	425	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Well-made and refined speakers, just lacking the flexibility of its rivals	●	6	31x19x24
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 1XR	250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Still great, but the rivals have caught up	●	1	28x18x27
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 2	300	03.10/FT	★★★★★	Plenty of bang for your buck, and more besides	●	3	32x21x30
Mission MX2	200	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Dynamic enough but maybe too exciting	●	4	34x21x31
Mission MX3	350	11.11/GT	★★★★★	Peppy and communicative floorstanders	●	4	82x17x34
Pioneer S-CN301-LR	200	04.14/ST	★★★★★	Polished, insightful and appealing	●	1	23x14x22
Q Acoustics Concept 20	350	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers £200-£400, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	●	2	26x17x28
Q Acoustics Q-BT3	350	06.14/ST	★★★★★	There are few products as versatile and as easy to like as the Q-BT3s at this price	●	4	31x19x24
Q Acoustics 2050i	440	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £400-£800, Awards 2013	●	4	100x32x27
Quad 11L Classic	330	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Impressive standmounters but lack a touch of sparkle	●	4	31x19x24
Ruark Audio MR1	300	06.14/ST	★★★★★	Best desktop speakers, Awards 2013	●	3	17x13x14
Tangent Evo 5	200	05.09/FT	★★★★★	Considered, grown-up and a supremely easy listen	●	2	23x15x20
Tannoy Mercury V1i	150	04.14/ST	★★★★★	A stylish, self-assured pair of speakers that are well worth auditioning	●	2	30x17x26
Tannoy Mercury V4	380	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £350-£700, Awards 2011	●	2	97x20x28
Tannoy Mercury V4i	400	01.14/FT	★★★★★	An exciting and punchy listen, but it comes with compromises	●	1	100x20x28
Tannoy Revolution DC4	380	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Well worth considering if your listening room isn't too big	●	2	27x15x16
Tannoy Revolution DC6	400	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Best standmounter £350-£700, Awards 2012	●	1	36.5x20x25
Teufel Ultima 60	368	12.09/FT	★★★★★	Bargain speakers with a big, bold sound that's engaging and exciting	●	1	103x21x32
Triangle Color	470	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Small, but perfectly formed	●	3	29x17x24
Wharfedale Diamond 121	230	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Fabulous sound. For insight and entertainment, the 121s needn't fear any rival	●	7	32x17x23
£500-£1500							
Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic	1000	07.11/GT	★★★★★	A classic yes, but not the best around	●	2	30x18x26
Acoustic Energy AE22 Active	899	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Talented active speakers not easily matched	●	1	25x35x30
Audio Pro LV2e	700	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Wireless desktop speakers with a hi-fi flourish	●	3	98x14x24
Audiovector Ki1 Super	800	04.12/GT	★★★★★	These pint-sized speakers lack far-reaching dynamics, but are easy to live with	●	5	98x14x24
Audiovector Ki3 Standard	1200	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Packed with resolution and speed	●	5	98x14x24
Arcaydis SM35C	850	08.09/FT	★★★★★	If you want a quality small standmounter, audition these	●	3	30x16x14
ATC SCM11	1200	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best standmounter £800-£1500, Awards 2013	●	2	38x21x25
AVI ADM9.1	1125	07.12/GT	★★★★★	A simple way to make the most of your music	●	5	30x20x26
B&W 683 S2	1150	07.14/ST	★★★★★	A strong, talented and versatile performer	●	2	99x19x36
B&W 685 S2	500	05.14/GT	★★★★★	A superb, hugely entertaining pair of speakers. Worth the wait? Absolutely	●	2	35x19x32
B&W CM8	1250	08.11/FT	★★★★★	Stunning in some ways but not the last word in integration	●	4	96x25x30
Cabasse Minorca MC40	720	02.11/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for those who like finger-snapping ability	●	2	40x23x28
Dali Ikon 1 MK2	530	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Huge sound and good timing, these Dalis are heartily recommended	●	3	33x15x26
Dali Ikon 6 MK2	1200	09.10/FT	★★★★★	Cleaner, clearer and more insightful than its forerunner	●	3	100x19x36
Dali Lektor 6	750	12.08/FT	★★★★★	Only the bass stops these good speakers becoming great	●	3	26x16x14
Dali Lektor 8	1200	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Likeable as long as you can live with the size and bass	●	2	106x27x37
Dali Mentor Menuet	900	07.12/ST	★★★★★	These Menuets are something of a gem	●	2	25x15x23
Dali Zensor 5	549	11.11/GT	★★★★★	Compact and affordable floorstanders	●	2	84x16x27
Dali Zensor 7	729	06.12/FT	★★★★★	Not flawless, but musical and enjoyable performers	●	3	98x21x31

SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Dynaudio DM 2/6	535	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers £300-£600, Awards 2010. Just the right amount of sparkle at the top end	●		2	29x17x24
Dynaudio DM 2/7	600	08.09/GT	★★★★★	A seriously competitive speaker at this price point	●		1	36x22x27
Dynaudio DM3/7	1300	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Plenty of positives in this mid-range floorstander	●	●	2	96x20x27
Dynaudio Excite X14	945	12.13/ST	★★★★★	A crisp and clean sound is shortchanged by a lack of versatility	●			29x17x26
Dynaudio MC-15	780	09.08/GT	★★★★★	Well-executed active speakers	●		1	26x17x24
Dynaudio Xeo 3	1365	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Versatile wireless speakers	●		2	28x17x26
EB Acoustics EB2	669	09.10/GT	★★★★★	Remarkable performers that should worry the competition	●		2	45x23x30
Eclipse TD508 Mk3	960	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Not an all-rounder, but still a rather special speaker	●		3	29x18x27
Edwards Audio SP1	550	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Enjoyable performers but up against top-quality competition at this price level	●		4	31x17x25
Elac BS243	1050	07.11/GT	★★★★★	These standmounters crave excitement	●		5	29x17x22
Elac BS 142	600	05.14/GT	★★★★★	An organic sounding and entertaining pair of speakers that are fun to listen to	●		1	26x16x26
Elac FS 147	1100	07.14/AT	★★★★★	A fun set of speakers if you're after entertainment over analysis	●		1	95x22x30
Elipson Planet L	600	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Charming in many ways, with good transparency	●		3	40x42x43
Epos Epic 5	750	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Hugely likeable floorstanders with broad sonic appeal	●		2	92x21x32
Epoz AktiMate Blue	600	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Position them well and you'll be rewarded with a lovely, engaging sound	●		3	32x21x31
Guru Junior	800	12.13/ST	★★★★★	A rather mundane appearance is excused by some very expressive sound	●		3	28x18x24
Focal Aria 906	760	12.13/ST	★★★★★	For scale, power and refinement, you won't find many better	●		2	30x30x28
JBL Studio 530	650	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Odd looking - but fun sounding and refined	●		1	47x21x22
KEF LS50	800	12.13/ST	★★★★★	Best standmounter £400-£800, Awards 2013	●		1	30x20x28
KEF R100	600	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Still great but now surpassed by newer rivals	●		4	28x18x29
KEF X300A	600	09.13/FT	★★★★★	A smooth, relaxed sound that lacks punch and dynamics	●		1	28x18x24
Kudos X2	1450	03.11/GT	★★★★★	These floorstanders have much to recommend them	●		6	78x17x21
Leema Xone	995	10.09/FT	★★★★★	In certain areas nothing else comes close at this pricepoint	●		6	85x14x21
MAD 1920	1350	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Impressive and powerful, although not as precise as its peers	●		5	28x19x23
Martin Logan Motion 15	795	12.13/ST	★★★★★	Needs a bit more authority but let loose in a smaller room they can really sing	●		2	29x13x24
Mission SX2	700	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Dependable and capable, the SX2s product an authoritative sound at a fine price	●		5	38x23x37
Monitor Audio Bronze BX5	500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Fine, refined speakers but outclassed by stronger newcomers	●		4	85x17x25
Monitor Audio Gold GX50	950	12.13/ST	★★★★★	Still good and still great looking, but loses out to rivals in terms of musical engagement	●		5	30x17x26
Monitor Audio Silver 1	500	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A bit fussy when it comes to positioning, the Silver 1s still ooze quality	●		6	31x19x26
Monitor Audio Silver 6	1000	12.13/FT	★★★★★	The Silver 6s reveal plenty of detail, but there are better all-rounders out there	●		6	89x19x24
Monitor Audio Silver RX2	630	10.12/GT	★★★★★	A lot of speaker and a lot of sound	●		6	37.5x23x30
Monitor Audio Silver RX6	800	12.09/GT	★★★★★	A sensational product from Monitor Audio - detailed, dynamic and very attractive, too	●		6	91x28x31
Monitor Audio Silver RX8	1050	06.10/FT	★★★★★	If you're addicted to bass, these floorstanders will suit you	●		6	96x28x39
Monitor Audio SoundFrame 1	900	02.12/GT	★★★★★	An impressive alternative to conventional speakers			2	54x39x9
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 6	600	01.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine all-rounder, with power and bass in spades, and plenty more besides	●		3	95x21x30
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 8	750	12.09/GT	★★★★★	Great speakers for sure, but too controlled	●		3	95x21x32
Mordaunt-Short Mezzo 6	800	11.08/GT	★★★★★	Possibly the best in their class	●		2	100x22x28
Mordaunt-Short Mezzo 8	1000	03.09/FT	★★★★★	Not the best all-rounders in the Mezzo range, but still very likeable	●		2	107x22x31
Mission MX-5	600	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Physically and sonically impressive	●		4	100x25x39
Mission SX1	700	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Almost mission accomplished. Hugely capable but not as entertaining as the class leaders	●		5	31x19x29
Neat Iota	695	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Attractive but with a hefty sound too	●		5	13x20x17
Neat Motive 1	1350	02.09/GT	★★★★★	Charming unique speakers - they lean backwards	●		4	93x16x20
Neat Motive 2	945	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Cohesive, authoritative and downright exciting	●		4	77x16x20
Neat Motive SX2	1395	07.14/ST	★★★★★	Great little speakers with only a few small imperfections	●		4	77x16x20



Sendor D7 Technology or Music?

Sendor's approach is the most radical I've seen, going where no hi-fi manufacturer has gone before. D7 is extremely capable and very neutral indeed, but most importantly it puts the music first.

Hi-Fi + Dec 2013

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What Hi-Fi Oct 2013

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SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (WxDxH, cm)
£500-£1500							
Neat Petite SX	1250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Small and perfectly formed standmounters	●	6	31x20x18
PMC DB1i	1050	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Superbly detailed and rewarding small speakers	●	4	29x16x23
PMC Twenty 21	1485	10.13/GT	★★★★★	If you're looking for a top-class pair of standmounters, these are well worth a listen	●	4	33x15x28
PSB Imagine Mini	600	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Tiny speakers with a surprising amount of heft. Good for a smaller room	●	5	23x14x21
Opera Mezza	850	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Suave-looking and good-sounding, but these don't possess the sonic assertiveness of some	●	3	32x20x33
Q Acoustics Concept 40	1000	07.14/ST	★★★★★	A refined and easy-going pair of speakers. They deserve serious consideration	●	2	97x17x29
Quad 9AS	600	07.14/FT	★★★★★	A decent pair of speakers but they need more punch and verve	●	3	30x15x21.5
Quad 12L Classic	500	11.11/FT	★★★★★	There's plenty to admire here	●	4	34x21x28
Rega RS3	780	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Floorstanders that are effortless with dynamics	●	3	80x22x25
Revolver Music 3	650	06.10/FT	★★★★★	Big, bold looks disguise an easy-going character	●	4	39x21x28
Revolver Music 5	1300	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Fine all-rounders with the power to fill larger rooms	●	4	93x25x32
Ruark Acoustics Sabre III	899	06.09/GT	★★★★★	Communicate music so well they demand to be auditioned	●	2	34x20x27
Roksan Kandy K2 TR-5	750	06.09/GT	★★★★★	Stunning speakers that deserve to be labelled as contenders for class-leading status	●	1	37x19x28
Spendor S3/5R2	850	07.11/GT	★★★★★	A little less than the sum of their parts	●	4	31x17x18
Tangent Evo E45	650	12.09/GT	★★★★★	For those who like an exciting and exuberant listen	●	2	100x15x26
Tannoy Precision 6.1	900	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Rhythmic, detailed speakers but a lack of solidity leaves them sounding unbalanced	●	2	33x22x26
Tannoy Revolution DC6 SE	700	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Responsive with a good sense of cohesion. Could do with a little more spark	●	1	37x20x24
Tannoy Revolution DC6T	799	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £700-£1500, Awards 2011	●	1	95x26x29
Tannoy Revolution DC6T SE	1000	07.14/ST	★★★★★	Best floorstander £800-£1500, Awards 2013	●	1	100x31x28
Tannoy Rev. Sig. DC4	600	07.12/GT	★★★★★	DC4s are still appealing across the board	●	2	27x17x18
Totem Rainmaker	1095	06.10/FT	★★★★★	Hugely musical, and a pleasure to listen to	●	4	36x17x23
Triangle Color 123	600	08.12/FT	★★★★★	A brilliant desktop speaker package	●	3	14x14x14
Triangle Comete Anniv.	950	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for injecting energy into your music	●	1	42x20x34
Vienna Ac. Haydn Grand	1000	10.10/FT	★★★★★	Beautifully built, they pack a sweet sonic punch that's focused and purposeful	●	5	36x17x27
Wharfedale Denton	500	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Relaxed yet engaging sound has a lot of appeal	●	1	32x20x31
Wharfedale Diamond 155	500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Class leaders when it comes to sound, but let down by average build quality	●	7	94x20x31
£1500 and above							
Acoustic Energy Reference 1	1500	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Terrific all-rounders for the money	●	1	31x19x28
ADAM Aud. Classic Compact 3	2800	06.10/GT	★★★★★	For those who like their music ear-poppingly loud	●	1	44x23x29
ADAM Audio Tensor Gamma	12500	05.09/FT	★★★★★	Quite possibly the best speakers we've seen in a decade	●	2	108x32x34
Audiovector S1 Avantgarde	2950	03.10/FT	★★★★★	At their best these are stunning, but not for all tastes	●	5	37x19x28
Aurousal VS	1650	04.11/FT	★★★★★	When they're good, these Aurousal's are great	●	3	108x22x27
Analysis Audio Omega	14500	08.11/FT	★★★★★	These planar floorstanders are a sonic treat	●	1	168x61x6
ATC SCM 100A	11615	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Massively talented and proportioned	●	4	107x40x56
Beaughorn Rhapsody B2	2750	10.07/FT	★★★★★	Outlandish shape but treat them right and you'll be deeply rewarded	●	98	120x34x75
B&O BeoLab 9	5060	05.07/FT	★★★★★	Work not just as style but in hi-fi terms too	●	4	78x40x430
B&O BeoLab 5	11000	10.08/FT	★★★★★	Active speakers with outlandish looks that sound fabulous	●	1	97x49x49
B&W 800 Diamond	18000	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Some of the best speakers money can buy	●	3	118x45x65
B&W 805 Diamond	3750	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Good, but easier to admire than really love	●	3	42x24x35
B&W PM1	1995	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Best standmounter £1500+, Awards 2011	●	1	33x19x30
Burmester B10	3220	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Well built, well refined and an engaging listen. We're in love	●	3	39x22x28
Dali Epicon 2	3750	01.13/FT	★★★★★	Reinforces Dali's reputation for making top-class speakers	●	3	39x21x37
Dali Epicon 8	11500	08.13/FT	★★★★★	Give them space and they'll deliver a muscular, enthusiastic sound	●	3	126x35x50
Dali Fazon F5	2700	12.11/FT	★★★★★	Stylish deliverers of audiophile sound	●	3	92x28x32
Dali Helicon 300 Mk2	2100	02.08/FT	★★★★★	Excellent midrange; woolly bass	●	2	44x21x40
Dali Mentor 6	2200	02.07/FT	★★★★★	Dynamic floorstanders that are really fast and agile	●	1	40x8x15
Dynaudio Confidence C1	5325	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Set up with care, the C1s are quite exceptional	●	4	45x20x43
Dynaudio Excite X32	1765	02.09/GT	★★★★★	These pack an eloquent, expansive sound	●	4	92x17x27
Dynaudio Focus 110A	1700	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Fun, flexible and hugely capable active speakers	●	6	31x17x32
Dynaudio Focus 160	1800	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Just do the job and don't intrude on the entertainment	●	6	35x20x29
Dynaudio Focus 220 Mk II	2630	10.09/FT	★★★★★	These Dynaudios are fine speakers; all they lack is a little star quality	●	4	98x21x30
Diapason Astera	6050	02.11/FT	★★★★★	Spellbinding performance with the right kind of music	●	1	38x26x44
Eclipse TD 510Z Mk2	3840	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Superb timing, detail and imaging	●	3	98x38x39
Eclipse TD 712z Mk2	6500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	They have a few compromises but their strengths can't be matched at any price	●	4	99x35x43
Focal Diabolo Utopia	7686	12.12/FT	★★★★★	When it comes to levels of insight, little at this price even comes close	●	Any	43x26x43
Focal SM9	4580	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Intended for professional use, the SM9s work brilliantly as home speakers	●	1	32x49x39
Focal Easys	1800	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Convenient and easy to use, these Focals are compromised by a relaxed delivery	●	2	90x17x24
GamuT M'inert M3	5140	03.14/FT	★★★★★	These are some of the best standmounters we've ever heard	●	10	40x23x46
Image Audio IA8	2000	02.12/GT	★★★★★	Deeply impressive wall-mounted alternatives to convention	●	1	59x48x10

SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Standmount	Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Jamo R907	5500	04.09/FT	★★★★★	The innovative R907s are stunningly capable speakers	●			1	119x44x19
JBL Studio 580	1500	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Hugely capable floorstanders for the money	●			2	107x25x35
KEF Reference 207/2	12000	10.08/FT	★★★★★	Big, bold and stunningly built, they major on bass	●			4	123x40x69
Kudos Cardea C30	5650	07.10/FT	★★★★★	Ideal if musical enjoyment is your top priority	●			7	112x20x27
Linn Akubarik	15600	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Deeply impressive engineering but its presentation veers towards the clinical	●			200+	105x35x45
Monopulse 42A	2000	07.09/GT	★★★★★	Odd appearance apart, there's an awful lot to like about these Monopulses	●			10	108x23x25
Monitor Audio Gold GX200	2300	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Pretty looks and excellent refinement	●			2	90x17x30
Mon. Audio Platinum PL300	6000	03.08/FT	★★★★★	Its been a long time coming, and it is well worth the wait	●			3	111x41x47
Naim Ovator S-400	3650	10.13/GT	★★★★★	The most rounded Naim speaker we've heard	●			5	106x33x35
Neat Ultimatum XLS	4500	09.12/FT	★★★★★	An entertainer of the highest order if partnered with care	●			9	38x22x37
Opera Callas	2375	01.09/FT	★★★★★	Arguably the best standmounter at this price level	●			3	37x23x34
PMC Fact 3	4100	08.11/FT	★★★★★	Hugely capable but a touch overcontrolled	●			4	54x16x30
PMC Fact 8	4700	04.10/FT	★★★★★	These PMC floorstanders are quite simply magical - even at this price	●			4	103x15x38
PMC PB1i	5850	09.09/GT	★★★★★	Simply excellent speakers: big, bold and accomplished	●			1	108x20x40
PMCTwenty 22	1970	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Best standmounter £1500+, Awards 2013	●			4	41x18x37
PMCTwenty 23	2300	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £1500+, Awards 2013	●			4	92x15x33
PMC Wafer 2	2295	02.12/GT	★★★★★	A real achievement for those after proper hi-fi				2	57x35x10
ProAc Response D18	2145	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £1500+, Awards 2011	●			6	93x19x27
ProAc Response D28	3250	07.07/FT	★★★★★	Another excellent pair of floorstanders from ProAc	●			6	108x20x29
ProAc Response D30R	4750	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Superb all-rounders	●			6	104x22x31
ProAc Response D40/R	6125	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Articulate and dynamic, a top-class pair of floorstanders	●			6	120x21x34
ProAc Studio 140 Mk2	1650	12.10/FT	★★★★★	An entertaining and dynamic performer	●			4	104x19x28
Quad ESL-2812	6500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Won't be to everyone's tastes but these electrostatic speakers truly excel	●			1	107x69x38
Quad ESL 2905	6000	01.07/FT	★★★★★	A truly world-class speaker	●			1	143x70x39
Sonus F. Cremona Auditor M	2690	06.08/FT	★★★★★	One of the best standmounts money can buy	●			2	35x20x37
Sonus F. Liuto Monitor Wood	1649	01.10/FT	★★★★★	These are classy and natural standmounters	●			2	35x19x34
SP Acoustics SP1 Signature	14950	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Able to challenge the very best at this exalted level	●			Any	106x35x46
Spendor A5	1695	03.11/GT	★★★★★	The most accomplished speakers for this money	●			4	79x17x25
Spendor A6R	2500	02.14/GT	★★★★★	An outstanding pair of speakers that do very little wrong	●			5	87.5x19x28
Spendor D7	3500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	The finest Spendors in years	●			6	95x20x32
Tannoy Precision 6.2	1700	10.13/GT	★★★★★	A beautifully balanced and hugely listenable pair of standmounters	●			3	100x31x28
Tannoy Precision 6.4	2200	02.14/GT	★★★★★	If bass is important to you, then these speakers are worth an audition	●			3	105x31x35
Tannoy Definition DC8	2500	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Capable of seriously controlled sound	●			3	47x27x26
Tannoy Definition DC10T	5250	10.13/GT	★★★★★	While the DC10Ts aren't the most refined speakers out there, they're easy to love	●			3	113x34x32
Totem Element Ember	3995	05.14/FT	★★★★★	If you're looking for entertainment, we can't think of a better alternative	●			2	36x11x25
Totem Mani-2 Signature	4600	12.10/FT	★★★★★	When it comes to outright enjoyment we can't think of any rival speakers we prefer for this money	●			4	42x21x31
Triangle Magellan Cello SW2	6699	05.10/FT	★★★★★	A speaker dedicated to actually enjoying music	●			2	114x42x37
Triangle Signature Delta	4900	07.14/FT	★★★★★	If you value excitement and entertainment, put these speakers at the top of your shortlist	●			3	123x37x39
Vivid Audio V1.5	5250	11.09/FT	★★★★★	They might look odd, but these are a must hear	●			5	113x26x24
Wharfedale Jade-5	1650	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Floorstanders that pack immense power and poise	●			3	106x25x40
Wilson Audio Duette	11000	10.08/FT	★★★★★	One of the best pairs of speakers we've ever heard	●			Any	47x23x35
Wilson Audio Sophia 3	16500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Expensive, but they deliver a stunning sound full of detail, dynamics and drive	●			7	105x35x48
Wilson Benesch A.C.T	8800	08.07/FT	★★★★★	Good looking, solid and superb sounding floorstanders	●			1	108x23x37
Wilson Benesch Trinity	4700	03.08/FT	★★★★★	An awful lot of technology and ability for the money	●			4	108x24x30



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OCTOBER 2012

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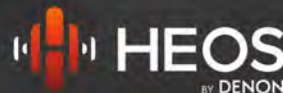
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Stereo amplifiers

Integrated These amplifiers combine a preamp and power section in one box
Power output A higher number usually means louder, depending on speakers
Digital inputs Some amplifiers now have a DAC built in, which could be useful

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Power (w)	DAC	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	USB in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Speakers out	Tone controls	Headphone out	Remote control	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £1000																		
Audiolab 8200A	750	05.13/ST	★★★★★	Capable, but lacks some subtlety	60		6	0	0		3	●	1		●	●	2	7.5x45x34
Arcam FMJ A18	500	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Comfortable, with impressive detail and agility	50		6	1	0		2	●	1	●	●	●	1	8.5x43x33
Arcam FMJ A19	650	05.13/ST	★★★★★	Best Stereo amp £500-£800, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	50		6	1	0		1	●	2		●	●	1	9x43x28
Cambridge Audio Azur 350A	250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A budget amp with a decent grasp of timing	45	●	6	0	0		1	2	●	●	●	●	2	9x43x34
Cambridge Audio Azur 351A	300	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Worth considering if you prefer an energetic approach	45	●	5	0	0	●	1	2	●	●	●	●	2	9x43x34
Cambridge Audio Azur 651A	450	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Meaty and powerful, but not the most refined	75	●	5	0	0		1	●	2	●	●	●	1	12x43x35
Cambridge Audio Topaz SR10	230	06.10/FT	★★★★★	This affordable stereo receiver has plenty to offer	85		5	1	0		1	2	●	●	●	●	1	11x43x34
Cyrus 6a	800	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £600-£1000, Awards 2012	40		6	0	0		0	●	2		●	●	2	7x22x36
Cyrus 6XP	925	09.09/FT	★★★★★	Stereo amplifier Product of the Year, Awards 2010	40		6	0	0		1	●	2		●	●	2	7x22x36
Denon PMA-710	350	07.10/GT	★★★★★	The most enjoyable Denon amp we've heard in ages	50		5	1	0		2	●	2	●	●	●	2	12x43x21
Denon PMA-720AE	350	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Entertaining and capable, but sonically stubborn	50		4	1	0		1	●	1	●	●	●	2	12x43x31
Icon Audio Stereo 25	500	01.09/FT	★★★★★	The Stereo 25 is superbly made for the money	30		3	0	0	0		0	1				1	22x32x31
Marantz PM-KI Pearl Lite	900	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Decent performance at an affordable price	70		3	1	0		2	●	2	●	●	●	2	13x44x38
Marantz PM6004	310	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Product of the Year - Stereo amplifiers, Awards 2011	45		5	1	0		1	2	●	●	●	●	2	11x44x37
Marantz PM6005	300	05.14/GT	★★★★★	A shot across the bow to Marantz's rivals. An excellent system	45		5	1	0		1	2	●	●	●	●	2	11x44x37
Monitor Audio Airstream A100	400	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Insightful and composed, this is a worthy rival to the NAD D 3020	50	●	1	0	0		0	●	1			●	2	5x37x21
NAD C316BEE	260	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A decent listen that's overshadowed by rivals	40		5	0	0		1	1	●	●	●	●	2	8x44x29
NAD C326BEE	300	07.10/GT	★★★★★	A really musical amplifier to grace any budget system	50		7	0	0		2	●	1	●	●	●	1	10x44x29
NAD C356BEE	600	10.10/FT	★★★★★	A party animal of an amplifier	80		7	0	0		2	●	2	●	●	●	1	13x44x34
NAD C356BEE DAC	695	01.12/FT	★★★★★	A good amplifier with a great DAC	80	●	8	0	0	●	2	●	2	●	●	●	1	13x44x34
NAD D 3020	400	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp up to £500, Awards 2013	30		2	0	0	●	0	1			●	●	1	19x6x22
NAD D 7050	800	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Admirable, but not quite the measure of its cheaper rivals	50	●	0	0	0	●	0	●	1		●	●	1	24x7x27
Naim Nait 5i	875	05.13/ST	★★★★★	A strong all-round performer	50		4	0	0		1	1				●	1	7x44x31
Naim Nait 5si	925	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £800-£1500, Awards 2013	60		3	0	0		1	1	●	●	●	●	1	7x43x31
Onix A-25	775	05.13/ST	★★★★★	A good choice for those who value finesse over muscle	30		3	0	0		0	●	1			●	1	9x21x36
Onkyo A-9030	300	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Proof that Onkyo knows how to build good stereo gear	65		4	1	0		1	2		●	●	●	2	14x44x33
Onkyo A-9050	350	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Lean presentation, but there's plenty to like	75		5	1	0		1	●	1	●	●	●	2	14x44x33
Peachtree iDecco	999	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for a digital based set-up	40		1	0	0	●	1	●	1		●	●	1	13x38x29
Pro-Ject Stereo Box S	200	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A small amp that's worth investigation	40		2	0	0		0	1				●	2	4x10x10
Pioneer A-A6	350	03.08/FT	★★★★★	Among the most fluent amps under £500	45		3	1	0	●	1	1	●	●	●	●	2	10x42x36
Pioneer A-70	800	05.13/ST	★★★★★	Excels in many areas, falls short of class-leading	90		3	1	1	●	1	●	2	●	●	●	2	14x44x36
Rega Brio-R	480	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £400-£600, Awards 2012	50		4	1	0		1	1				●	2	8x22x31
Roksan Kandy K2	795	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £700-£1000, Awards 2011	125		5	1	0		1	●	1		●	●	3	10x43x38
Roksan Kandy K2 BT	895	05.14/FT	★★★★★	Full of power and punch but some heart and soul is missing	140		5	1	0		1	●	1		●	●	2	11x43x38
Rotel RA-10	350	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Sounds good, but rivals offer more insight and better digital features	40		4	1	0		1	●	2	●	●	●	2	7x43x34
Rotel RA-12	600	05.13/ST	★★★★★	Well priced, appealing amp, just lacks a little expression	60	●	4	1	0	●	1	●	1	●	●	●	2	14x44x36
Wadia 151 PowerDAC Mini	999	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A compact digital amp with plenty of appeal	25	●	0	0	0	●	0	1				●	1	7x20x20
Yamaha A-S300	195	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Solid performer but you can get better for a little more money	60		6	1	0		1	1	●	●	●	●	2	15x44x39
£1000 and above																		
Audio Analogue Class A Int. SE	9190	06.11/FT	★★★★★	A fantastic, and sonically rounded performer	50		5	0	0		1	1				●	1	33x45x41
ATC SIA 2-150	2379	02.10/GT	★★★★★	One of the best amplifiers at this price level	150		4	0	0		1	●	1		●	●	1	14x44x35
Bryston B60R	2600	07.09/FT	★★★★★	The Bryston B60R may be unassuming, but has quality	60		4	0	0		1	1			●	●	2	5x43x28
Cambridge Audio Azur 851A	1200	12.12/GT	★★★★★	For scale, power, build and style, this is hard to beat	120		8	0	0		1	●	2	●	●	●	2	12x43x39
Chord Elec. Cyan Click HP	4215	07.10/FT	★★★★★	Stylish, and astonishingly well built too	100		2	0	0	●	0	1				●	2	6x34x15
Creek Evolution 5350	1025	06.10/FT	★★★★★	There's lots to like here, but better available elsewhere	120		5	1	0		0	●	2		●	●	1	9x43x34

"For an amplifier that gives every impression of being quite relaxed and easy to listen to, the Roksan Kandy K2 can be ferociously fast and attacking when required"

June 2012

AMPLIFIERS continued

AMPLIFIERS continued					Power (w)	DAC	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	USB in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Speaker out	Tone controls	Headphone out	Remote control	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict															
Cyrus 6XPD	1250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A sturdy DAC-toting amp that's a cracker	40	●	6	0	0	●	1	●	2		●	●	2	7x22x36
Cyrus 8a	1350	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Everything we've come to expect and love about Cyrus	70		5	0	0		1	●	2		●	●	2	7x22x36
Cyrus 8 DAC	1400	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Meticulous and engaging amp and DAC combo	70	●	6	0	0	●	0		2		●	●	2	7x22x36
Cyrus 8 XPd	1500	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Sets a sky-high standard at the price point	70		5	0	0	●	1	●	1		●	●	2	7x22x36
Cyrus 8XP	1250	11.09/GT	★★★★★	The Cyrus 8XP misses nothing out in sonic thrills	70		6	0	0		1	●	1		●	●	2	7x22x36
Cyrus DACXP Signature	3000	11.13/FT	★★★★★	With the Signature upgrade, the DACXP remains a fine product	70		2	0	0		1	●	1		●	●	2	7x22x36
Dartzeel CTH-8550	16858	05.10/FT	★★★★★	Well engineered - but with a colossal price tag	200		7	0	0		1	●	1			●	2	17x44x34
Denon PMA-2010AE	1700	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Listen to this amp in full flow and it's a monster	80		4	1	1		2	●	2	●	●	●	1	18x43x44
Devialet 110	4490	02.14/FT	★★★★★	An exceptional all-rounder	110	●	1	1	0	●	0		1			●	1	4x38x38
Devialet D-Premier	11450	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A fresh look at amp design	240		2	1	1		1	●	1	●		●	3	4x40x40
EAR Yoshino V12	7000	07.13/FT	★★★★★	This terrific integrated amp needn't fear any rival at this price	50		5	0	0		1	1					1	14x42x14
Heed Audio Obelisk si	1300	06.12/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £1000-£1500, Awards 2012	35		5	1	0		0	●	1			●	2	9x22x36
Karan Acoustics KA I180Mk2	5995	09.13/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest amps we've heard	180		4	0	0		1	1				●	2	9x50x34
Lavardin IS Reference	2950	01.10/FT	★★★★★	Amazing: its rivals sound mechanical in comparison	30		4	0	0		1	1					1	8.5x43x35
Leema Tucana Mk II	3595	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier £2000+, Awards 2010.	148		7	0	0		1	●	1		●	●	2	10x43x36
Leema Elements	1395	12.12/GT	★★★★★	Solid choice, wide connection range and optional DAC	56	●	3	0	0	●	0	●	1		●	●	2	9x22x28
Myryad MXI2080	1000	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Assiduous, precise presentation	80		6	1	1		1	●	1		●	●	1	9x44x38
NAD C 390DD	2250	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Novel thinking delivers an alternative to the favourites	150		1	0	0	●	0	●	2	●	●	●	1	13x43x39
Naim Nait XS	1500	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Still a top class premium amplifier	60		3	0	0		2	●	1			●	1	7x43x30
Naim Nait XS 2	1595	10.13/GT	★★★★★	An improvement on the Nait XS, even if it sacrifices a little detail	70		5	1	0		1	●	1		●	●	1	7x43x30
Naim Supernait 2	2750	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Even at this price, the Supernait 2 is a fantastic buy	80		5	0	0		1	●	1		●	●	1	9x43x31
Pathos Ethos	3800	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Mixes style and substance better than any rival	100		7	0	0	●	0	●	1			●	1	15x43x49
Pathos InpolRemix	3800	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Not cheap or powerful - just brilliant	10		1	0	0		0	●	1			●	2	18x33x29
Pathos Logos	3650	09.08/FT	★★★★★	An inspirational amp: wonderful with all music	110		6	0	0		1	2			●	1	15x48x22	
Plinius Hautonga	4455	07.11/FT	★★★★★	A powerhouse of an integrated amplifier	200		5	1	1		2	●	1		●	2	12x45x50	
Plinius Hiato	6759	08.09/FT	★★★★★	If you're after a top class amplifier the Hiato is for you	300		5	0	0		1	●	1		●	2	17x45x45	
Quad II Classic Integrated	4500	04.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine integrated amplifier with a hefty price tag	25		3	1	1		1	1					1	20x31x38
Rega Osiris	5998	06.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine amp that makes sense partnering its Isis sibling	162		6	0	0		1	1			●	1	12x44x35	
Rega Elicit-R	1600	10.13/GT	★★★★★	This is truly a fantastic amplifier	105		5	1	0		1	●	1		●	1	8x43x34	
Roksan Caspian M2	1695	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier £1500+, Awards 2013	85		5	0	0		1	●	1		●	2	8x43x33	
Sony TA-A1ES	2000	04.14/FT	★★★★★	Not quite a flawless effort but talented enough in key areas	80		5	1	1		0	1		●	●	1	13x43x42	
Synthesis Shine	2449	07.10/FT	★★★★★	This valve design needs sensitive speakers to fly	40		5	0	0		1	1			●	4	16x32x22	
T+APA 3000 HV	9900	11.13/FT	★★★★★	A truly impressive piece of kit despite its polite disposition	300		6	0	0		0	1		●	●	1	17x46x46	
Unison Research Preludio	2295	02.10/GT	★★★★★	Rubs shoulders with the very best at this price	14		4	0	0		1	1					1	20x40x38
Unison Research S6	2995	05.11/FT	★★★★★	In the right system, the S6 is truly magical	33		5	0	0		1	1		●	2	21x35x49		
Unison Research S9	6995	02.10/FT	★★★★★	We can't help but love this quirky valve amplifier	35		4	0	0		0	1			●	1	25x41x57	
Unison Research Simply Italy	1495	09.12/FT	★★★★★	A well-engineered valve amplifier at a sensible price	12		5	0	0		1	1		●	2	26x19x35		
Unison Research Triode 25	2350	08.14/FT	★★★★★	An absolutely superb amplifier from Unison Research	45		5	0	0	Opt	1	1		●	1	20x30x45		



Preamps

Preamps are also known as control units. On a most basic level, they perform two functions: source selection and volume control. Most powered preamps also amplify the signal slightly in order to make matching to a power amplifier easier. Some include phono stages.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Balanced out	Headphone out	Tone controls	Remote control	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £5000														
Audio Research LS17	3399	01.09/FT	★★★★★	This top quality product should serve you for decades	7	0	0	1	●	●			●	14x48x31
Audionet Pre 1 G3	3525	01.10/FT	★★★★★	As revealing as amplifiers get for the money	5	0	0	1	●	●	●		●	7x43x31
ATCCA-2	1058	12.09/FT	★★★★★	A matchless preamp when paired with the P1 power amp	5	0	0	1	●	●	●		●	9x44x32
Cyrus DACXP+	2550	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Massive ability in a small box	2	0	0	1	●	●			●	7x22x36
Cyrus Pre XP d	1300	02.10/GT	★★★★★	Works wonders when coupled with the matching 8 power amp	6	0	0	0	●		●		●	7x22x36
Heed Audio Obelisk pre/px	2230	04.13/FT	★★★★★	A superb-sounding preamp, but Heed needs to make it feel more luxurious	5	0	0	1	●				●	9x22x33
Lavardin C62	3471	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Belongs near the top of any shortlist	6	0	0	1	●					9x43x31
Leema Pyxis	3995	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A versatile, enjoyable preamp	5	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	●	11x44x31
Linn Akurate Kontrol	4200	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Part of the Linn Akurate system - and truly awesome	4	1	1	1	●	●	●		●	9x38x38
NAD C165BEE	650	08.10/FT	★★★★★	A brute of a preamp	4	1	1	0		●	●		●	8x44x29

PREAMPS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Balanced out	Headphone out	Tone controls	Remote control	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £5000													
Naim NAC152XS	975	02.10/GT	★★★★★	It's good, but could do better with dynamics	5	0	0	0	●		●		7x43x30
Quad Elite Pre	850	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Doesn't blow us away, but it's still worth consideration	6	1	1	1	●		●	●	7x32x31
Quad QC-twenty four	1000	06.13/FT	★★★★★	Pleasant listen but works best with Quad's valve power amps	5	0	0	2	●				9x30x22
Rotel RC-1580	995	03.10/FT	★★★★★	A likeable, fully featured performer that delivers much for the money	5	1	1	2	●	●	●	●	10x43x34
Townshend Allegri	1895	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Basic features, but terrific sound	6	0	0	0	●				5x13x31
£5000 and above													
Audio Research LS27	6500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	A fine preamp but struggles to shine in comparison to the Reference 75	6	0	0	1	●	●		●	13x48x34
Aesthetix Calypso Signature	6400	03.11/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest preamps on the market today	5	0	0	1	●	●		●	11x46x45
Bryston BP26DA	5050	08.06/FT	★★★★★	A must-hear preamp. Lacks style but built to last	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	6x49x28
Burmester 808 MK5	22242	02.13/FT	★★★★★	A beautifully constructed, highly versatile preamp for serious devotees	Opt	Opt	Opt	Opt	●	●		●	95x48x33
Chord Electronics CPA8000	25500	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A magnificent preamp, but not quite the masterpiece its price demands	8	0	0	2	●	●	●	●	31x42x36
Chord Electronics Indigo	8670	11.09/FT	★★★★★	A far sighted design mixing useful features with great sound	6	0	0	0	●	●	●	●	36x42x9
Krell Phantom II	12000	11.12/FT	★★★★★	A hugely capable preamp that is able to dig deeply into any recording	8	0	0	1	●	●		●	10x44x46
McIntosh C2500	7495	01.14/FT	★★★★★	A refined and entertaining preamp that needs a little care in partnering	8	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	19x44x46
Naim NAC252/Supercap	9070	11.08/FT	★★★★★	Makes a magical combination with the NAP250 power amp	6	0	0	0	●			●	9x43x31
Plinius Tautoro	6325	09.08/FT	★★★★★	A mighty amplifier in every sense of the word	4	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	16x45x48



Power amps

These are effectively the powerhouse of the system. They deliver the high currents necessary to make a loudspeaker work. They can be configured as a stereo unit, or monoblocs, where the circuitry for each channel is housed separately. Don't judge a power amp by its output level.

Our recommendations

Our recommendations					Type	Power (w)	Phono in	XR in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Weight (kg)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict							
Up to £5000										
Audiolab 8200MB	1900	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Hefty, but a bit of a blunt instrument	Mono	250	1	1	15x22x38	9
Audionet Amp 1 V2	4850	01.10/FT	★★★★★	As revealing as amplifiers get for this kind of money	Stereo	200	1	1	18x43x32	28
ATC P1	1566	12.09/FT	★★★★★	A matchless power amp when paired with the CA-2 preamp	Stereo	150	1	1	14x44x35	26
Bryston 2B SST	2925	08.06/FT	★★★★★	Big, strong and very powerful	Stereo	100	1	0	49x13x41	14
Chord Electronics Maxx	990	05.11/FT	★★★★★	This could be a sign of hi-fi to come	Stereo	20	1	0	7x16x4	0.4
Chord Electronics SPM 1050	3990	10.07/FT	★★★★★	Very fast and punchy, exciting and stable sound	Stereo	200	2	2	13x42x36	15
Croft Polestar 1	800	06.07/FT	★★★★★	Great buy if you want sound quality not quantity	Stereo	25	1	0	11x22x33	6
Cyrus 8 Power	850	02.10/GT	★★★★★	Performs with panache, we'd spend our cash here	Stereo	60	3	0	7x22x36	5
Cyrus Mono X300	2500	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Exceptionally fluid and agile. Recommended	Stereo	235	1	1	7x22x36	7
Cyrus Mono X300 Signature	2750	10.13/FT	★★★★★	A deceptively compact monobloc that surpasses the Mono X300	Mono	225	1	1	8x22x37	6.5
Heed Audio Obelisk ps	1350	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Engaging and a pleasure to listen to, even if it's not the classiest in terms of finish	Stereo	50	1	0	9x22x33	6
Leema Hydra II	3595	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A top class power amplifier for the money	Stereo	160	1	1	11x44x31	33
NAD C275BEE	820	08.10/FT	★★★★★	A great power amp, best matched with the C165BEE preamp	Stereo	150	1	0	13x44x35	15
Naim NAP 155 XS	1115	02.10/GT	★★★★★	It's a good performer, but not the last word in dynamics	Stereo	60	0	0	7x43x30	7.5
Naim NAP 250	3050	11.08/FT	★★★★★	Paired with the NAC252 preamp it's magical	Stereo	80	0	0	9x43x32	16
Plinius P10	3390	09.07/FT	★★★★★	Makes a terrific amp when partnered with the Plinius M8 preamp	Stereo	200	2	1	12x45x40	14
Quad Elite Stereo	700	11.10/FT	★★★★★	The Elite power amp paired with the Elite Pre is well worth consideration	Stereo	80	1	0	7x32x31	6.25
Quad QSP	1200	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Needs to be auditioned - a confident listen	Stereo	140	2	0	15x33x27	14
Rotel RB-1582	1095	03.10/FT	★★★★★	Great when paired with the RC-1580 preamp	Stereo	200	1	0	14x43x41	33
£5000 and above										
Aesthetix Atlas	7600	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Sophisticated brute - pair with the Aesthetix Calypso	Stereo	200	2	2	19x45x46	33
Audio Research Reference 75	8495	03.13/FT	★★★★★	A fabulous power amp, match it with care and you'll have sonic magic	Stereo	75	0	1	22x48x50	21
Audio Research VS115	5395	02.09/FT	★★★★★	Ignore the looks and enjoy the sound	Stereo	120	1	1	20x45x21	29
Burmester 911 Mk3	32800	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Awesome price, awesome bit of kit	Stereo	535	0	1	22x48x48	31
Chord SPM 14000 MkII	24480	01.13/FT	★★★★★	An awe-inspiring monobloc, yet not quite as sonically rounded as we'd like	Mono	700	1	1	31x48x69	75
Krell Evolution 402e	18500	11.12/FT	★★★★★	The Evolution 402e is world-class. It isn't cheap, but quality such as this never is	Stereo	400	1	1	25x44x56	61
Lavardin AP150	7686	12.10/FT	★★★★★	For sound quality and musical enjoyment, the C62 with the AP150 is hard to beat	Stereo	50	1	0	14x43x31	12
Marantz MA-9S2	5000	02.08/FT	★★★★★	Right up there with the very best power amplifiers	Mono	300	2	1	45x46x20	37
Plinius SA-REF	12650	09.08/FT	★★★★★	As enticing an amplifier as you can get	Stereo	300	1	1	28x51x54	57
Quad II eighty	6000	06.13/FT	★★★★★	A capable monobloc amp that should be considered	Mono	80	1	0	21x43x18	57

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- Transferrable warranty – the freedom to move
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Basically Sound
Norwich
basicallysound.co.uk
01362 820 800

Martins Hi-Fi
Norwich
www.martins-hifi.co.uk
01603 627 010

LONDON
Adair Acoustic Design
Clerkenwell
adairacousticdesign.co.uk
020 7253 2326

Bartletts Hi Fi
Islington
www.bartlettshifi.com
020 7607 2148

Billy Vee
Sound Systems
Lewisham
www.billyvee.co.uk
020 8318 5755

Grahams Hi-Fi
City of London
www.grahams.co.uk
020 7226 5500

Oranges & Lemons
Clapham
www.oandlhifi.co.uk
020 7924 2040

Unilet Sound & Vision
New Malden
www.unilet.net
020 8942 9567

MIDLANDS
Nottingham
Hi-Fi Centre
Nottingham
nottinghamhifi-centre.co.uk
0115 978 6919

NORTH EAST
Sound Organisation
York
www.soundorg.co.uk
01904 627 108

NORTH WEST
Acoustica
Chester
www.acoustica.co.uk
01244 344 227

SOUTH EAST
Home Media
Maidstone
www.thehomeofhifi.com
01622 676 703

Infidelity
Kingston-on-Thames
www.infidelity.co.uk
020 8943 3530

P J Hi-Fi
Guildford
www.pjhifi.co.uk
01483 504 801

Soundcraft Hi-Fi
Ashford
www.soundcraft-hifi.com
01233 624 441

SCOTLAND
Glasgow Audio
Glasgow
www.glasgowaudio.com
0141 332 4707

Holburn Hi-Fi
Aberdeen
www.holburnhifi.co.uk
01224 585 713

SOUTH CENTRAL
Overture
Banbury
www.overture.co.uk
01295 272 158

Oxford Audio Consultants
Oxford
www.oxfordaudio.co.uk
01865 790 879

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Worthing
www.phase3.co.uk
01903 245577

The Sound Gallery
High Wycombe
www.soundgallery.co.uk
01494 531682

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sound.vision.soul



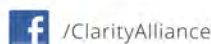
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The end for MP3?

If you own a half decent hi-fi system, using 'FLAC' instead of 'MP3' files could be music to everyone's ears

For those of us that consider themselves a music lover, albeit to different degrees, we are part of a very fortunate generation. We now have access to an ever-growing wealth of recorded music of extraordinary range and depth, effectively accumulated over the last 60 years. With the introduction of the microgroove LP record in the early 1950's, playback quality took a quantum leap forward and this also coincided with a far higher standard of recording techniques. Although further improvements have been made over the years, this was a watershed time that first introduced hi-fi as a reality.

Listening to music has many benefits

Hi-Fi is, of course, a means to an end – the reproduction of music. Many studies over the years have shown remarkable benefits for mankind through listening to music. Making music is intrinsic to all cultures and music is often used for various therapeutic purposes because it involves using the whole brain. It is believed to improve memory and intelligence, improve physical development and coordination, reduce stress and blood pressure, and even reduce levels of pain.

We now have literally millions of recorded music tracks available to us in all genres and many different formats. One trend over recent years, however, has been to deliberately downgrade the quality in order to offer quantity. The main culprits have been MP3 and AAC formats which were designed as a low cost form of delivery when download speeds were slow and computer chip memory was expensive. Neither now applies and both formats should be consigned to history

along with 78 rpm records and the 8-track cartridge. Unfortunately, such is the current market penetration of MP3 and AAC formats that many people today are listening to a considerably lower quality of music reproduction than their peers back in the 1970's.

Bach - my favourite!



Quality vs quantity

Let us explain. The maximum resolution from MP3 and AAC file formats, which are both highly compressed, is 320 kbps (kilobytes per second) which compares with CD quality of 1411 kbps. This means the resolution quality is less than a quarter of that provided by a standard CD. However, most MP3 or AAC files are downloaded over the internet and the most used download resolution is 128 kbps, which is around one-eleventh of CD quality. This should ring alarm bells. If you are only playing back these tracks on an iPod or mobile phone with a pair of earbuds, the quality may be irrelevant to

you. But if these tracks are your primary source of music, perhaps with an iPod dock into a decent hi-fi system, you are only making a very poor quality sound louder. Information is irretrievably lost and the full dynamic range is lacking. The quality will be very poor in contrast with a full resolution version even if you are completely unaware of the loss you are inflicting upon yourself. This can even affect the type of music listened to as most classical recordings downloaded as an MP3 or AAC file will have so much information missing, and all the complexities of the music lost, with the end result that the recording is reduced to just the essence of a tune.

What is the future of recorded music?

There are now positive signs for the future of recorded music. Audiophiles, or hi-fi connoisseurs, have been very important to the music industry as they are generally avid music lovers who aim to maximise their enjoyment by listening to music at its best quality level, which means the play-back of great recordings through hi-end hi-fi to achieve the most outstanding results. Without them, a main driver for quality would probably be removed from the music industry. They have always sought out quality but there is now an increasing awareness among the wider public of the serious deficiencies of the highly compressed formats. Full resolution audio streaming, as well as CD quality downloads, are already available and will surely become the eventual norm with this greater awareness of the tremendous quality benefit. Consumers will vote through their purchases and will seek out higher resolution recordings. Look at Qobuz for a new high-profile entry into this field who offer CD quality (16 bit/44.1 kHz FLAC) streaming for over 15 million tracks.

The benefits of using a specialist dealer

Specialist hi-fi dealers are also a significant driver for maintaining high quality in the music industry. Hi-end hi-fi very soon exposes poor quality recordings and specialist hi-fi dealers are constantly assessing the relative merits of different brands from manufacturers for potential stocking. With specialist hi-fi dealers, achieving the best system performance and seeking out the most outstanding combinations is almost invariably both their hobby and their livelihood. Without them, hi-fi manufacturers and potential customers would have to rely on the opinion of magazine reviewers to assess levels of performance – a notoriously unreliable decision making process. For specialist hi-fi dealers, their relationship with audiophiles and hi-fi connoisseurs is also crucial to them for, if they are to stay in business, they must satisfy the most discerning customers in the industry. The reality is that audiophiles and specialist hi-fi retailers (and the ones listed on this page represent the UK's finest) are essential to each other.

Specialist dealers know how to choose the products that combine as a superb system and how to get the best out of it by expert installation in the home. They also appreciate how exciting and involving music can be and how it can deliver a powerful emotional experience. If there's a price premium over an internet purchase by choosing a specialist dealer, it's probably a small one, but it's unquestionably worth the difference.

“...there is now an increasing awareness among the wider public of the serious deficiencies of the highly compressed formats. Full resolution audio streaming, as well as CD quality downloads, are already available and will surely become the eventual norm.”

Listed below is our selection of **THE BEST HI-FI DEALERS IN THE UK**. They have been chosen because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards hi-fi that will give years of musical enjoyment and total satisfaction.

Our Top 20 UK Hi-Fi Dealers

SOUTH

Ashford, Kent

SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI
40 High Street.
t: 01233 624441
www.soundcraftthifi.com

Chelmsford

RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
216 Moulsham Street.
t: 01245 265245
www.rayleighhifi.com

Kingston-upon-Thames

INFIDELITY
9 High Street,
Hampton Wick.
t: 020 8943 3530
www.infidelity.co.uk

Maidenhead

AUDIO VENUE
36 Queen Street.
t: 01628 633995
www.audiovenue.com

Norwich

MARTINS HI-FI
85-91 Ber Street.
t: 01603 627134
www.martinshifi.co.uk

Rayleigh

RAYLEIGH HI-FI
44a High Street.
t: 01268 779762
www.rayleighhifi.com

Southend-on-Sea

RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
132/4 London Road.
t: 01702 435255
www.rayleighhifi.com

LONDON

Ealing

AUDIO VENUE
27 Bond Street.
t: 020 8567 8703
www.audiovenue.com

N1

GRAHAMS HI-FI
190a New North Road.
t: 020 7226 5500
www.grahams.co.uk

SW11

ORANGES & LEMONS
61/63 Webbs Road.
t: 020 7924 2043
www.oandlhifi.co.uk

SOUTH WEST

Bath

AUDIENCE
14 Broad Street.
t: 01225 333310
www.audience.org.uk

Exeter

GULLIFORD HI-FI
97 Sidwell Street.
t: 01392 491194
www.gullifordhifi.co.uk

MIDLANDS

Banbury

OVERTURE
3 Church Lane.
t: 01295 272158
www.overture.co.uk

Coventry

FRANK HARVEY
163 Spon Street.
t: 024 7652 5200
www.frankharvey.co.uk

Leicester

CYMBIOSIS
6 Hotel Street.
t: 0116 262 3754
www.cymbiosis.com

Nottingham

CASTLE SOUND & VISION
48/50 Maid Marian Way.
t: 0115 9584404
www.castlesoundvision.com

NORTH

Chester

ACOUSTICA
17 Hoole Road.
t: 01244 344227
www.acoustica.co.uk

Gateshead

LINTONE AUDIO
7-11 Park Lane.
t: 0191 477 4167
www.lintone.co.uk

Hull

THE AUDIO ROOM
Savile Street, Hull
t: 01482 891375
www.theaudiroom.co.uk

York

SOUND ORGANISATION
2 Gillygate.
t: 01904 627108
www.soundorg.co.uk

WALES

Monmouth

CERITECH AUDIO
5 Monnow Bridge.
t: 01600 716362
www.ceritech-audio.co.uk



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SERVICE ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
FACILITIES ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
VERDICT ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



iPod docks

Docks with power _____ These are ready-made systems for your iPod and usually include speakers

Docks without power _____ These integrate an iPod into an existing system as a line level source

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	Dock type	Aux	Power (w)	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500									
Audyssey South of Market	350	04.11/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	n/a	23x13x28
Arcam rCube	350	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	90	20x20x20
Bose SoundDock II	250	09.10/GT	★★★★★			iOS	●	n/a	17x30x17
B&W Z2	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	18x32x10
Epox Aktimate Micro	260	09.13/GT	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	24x15x20
Epox AktiMate Mini	350	07.12/GT	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	30x19x21
Epox AktiMate Mini+	360	08.13/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	40	30x19x21
Gear4 AirZone Series 1	200	04.12/ST	★★★★★	●		iOS	●	n/a	18x33x19
JBL OnBeat Venue LT	200	03.13/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	30	13x42x14
Klipsch iGroove HG WWI	110	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	30	14x40x16
KitSound Boom Dock	100	12.10/FT	★★★★★			iOS		60	15x42x28
Logitech S71 5i	80	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	20	6x39x13
Logitech UE Air Speaker	300	06.12/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	n/a	17x53x15
Orbitsound T12v3	299	12.11/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	180	10x61x11
Philips Fidelio Primo DS9	300	09.11/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	50	18x51x21
Philips Fidelio Primo DS9010	400	08.11/GT	★★★★★			iOS	●	100	21x56x23
Pure Digital Contour	200	04.11/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	23x37x18
Pure Digital Contour 100Di	100	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	20	18x31x15
Pure Digital Contour 200i Air	200	09.12/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	36	23x37x18
Revo K2	300	02.12/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	33x11x11
Ruark Audio R2i	280	09.09/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	20	12x34x18.5
TEAC SR-80iDAB	150	10.11/FT	★★★★★			iOS		20	18x39x21
£500 and above									
B&O BeoSound 8	895	03.11/FT	★★★★★			iOS		n/a	24x66x16
Bose SoundDock 10	699	08.11/GT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	n/a	22x43x24
B&W Zeppelin Air	500	12.11/ST	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	150	17x54x21
Geneva Lab Model L	1000	08.09/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	100	29x45x37
Geneva Lab Model M	550	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	50	20x37x25
Geneva Lab Model XL	1500	10.09/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	600	79x55x37
JBL OnBeat Xtreme	500	04.12/ST	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	120	23x44x24
Loewe AirSpeaker	500	01.13/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	4x20	13x24x24
Marantz Consolette	700	05.13/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS		150	26x54x21
Philips Fidelio SS DS9800	700	05.12/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	100	22x27x9
Pro-ject DBS1	500	06.11/FT	★★★★★			iOS		n/a	4x10x11
Samsung DA-E750	600	10.12/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS/Android	●	100	15x45x24



Wireless speakers

Bluetooth _____ Universal wireless system that's incorporated into most sources

AirPlay _____ Apple's accepted wireless system; works over your home network

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	Aux	Charging	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £1000									
Audio Pro Allroom Air One	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★		●		●		20x31x19
Bayan Audio SoundBook	150	01.14/GT	★★★★★			●	●	●	9x16x4
Bose SoundLink Mini	170	01.14/GT	★★★★★			●	●	●	5x18x6
B&WA5	400	08.13/GT	★★★★★		●		●		18x30x20
B&WA7	700	12.12/FT	★★★★★		●		●		22x36x16

WIRELESS SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		AirPlay	Bluetooth	Aux	Charging	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Bose SoundLink Air	300	12.12/GT	★★★★★	Not the last word in power or dynamics, but a tidy little package	●	●	●	●	●	17x31x10
Cabasse Stream 1	500	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Mediocre software lets this very enjoyable speaker down	●	●	●	●	●	14x46x33
Cambridge Audio Minx Air 100	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★	A worthy option but it can't match the best when it comes to sound	●	●	●	●	●	18x35x12
Cambridge Audio Minx Air 200	430	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Majors in excitement, detail and power – a real entertainer	●	●	●	●	●	45x22x17
Cambridge Audio Minx Go	100	08.13/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker up to £150, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	●	●	●	●	●	23x24x6
Dali Kubik Free	625	03.14/FT	★★★★★	Dali strikes gold with these enthusiastic-sounding, well-featured speakers	●	●	●	●	●	31x15x15
Denon Cocoon Stream DSD-501	250	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £150-£300, Awards 2013	●	●	●	●	●	24x45x17
Eclipse TD-M1	1000	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Great stereo imaging, but we'd like more refinement to go with it	●	●	●	●	●	24x16x22
Geneva Model M Wireless	500	08.14/GT	★★★★★	If you're after Bluetooth and radio features, then this would be a good choice	●	●	●	●	●	22x30x18
Geneva Model S Wireless DAB+	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £300-£400, Awards 2013	●	●	●	●	●	15x14x18
Harman/Kardon Go+Play	280	05.13/FT	★★★★★	These wireless active speakers deliver good sound	●	●	●	●	●	24x50x23
Jawbone Big Jambox	260	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Great for bass and sound, lacks a little finesse though	●	●	●	●	●	9x26x8
iLuv MobiOut	70	05.13/GT	★★★★★	A small unit that boasts a likable sound	●	●	●	●	●	0x0x0
JBL Charge	120	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A punchy and energetic sound is let down by some coarse and harsh treble	●	●	●	●	●	18x7x7
JBL Flip	100	05.13/GT	★★★★★	A great value bluetooth speaker	●	●	●	●	●	0x0x0
JBL Flip 2	100	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Good performer for the money, but has issues with volume and battery life	●	●	●	●	●	6.5x16x16
JBL OnBeat Rumble	260	10.13/ST	★★★★★	A chunky, versatile unit that has a real sense of fun	●	●	●	●	●	17x45x22
Libratone Zipp	370	10.13/ST	★★★★★	Stylish, portable and fully-featured. Libratone hits the jackpot with the Zipp	●	●	●	●	●	26x12x12
Libratone Loop	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★	An enjoyable-sounding speaker with some unique looks	●	●	●	●	●	33x33x8
Loewe AirSpeaker	500	03.13/GT	★★★★★	Fussy set up issues aside, this is one incredibly capable speaker	●	●	●	●	●	24x13x24
Logitech UE Boombox	200	12.12/GT	★★★★★	It's not faultless, but for the money it's difficult to argue with this	●	●	●	●	●	16x39x8
Logitech UE Mobile Boombox	75	05.13/GT	★★★★★	Limited functionality but a good choice for portable users	●	●	●	●	●	6x7x11
Monitor Audio Airstream WS100	250	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Cracking speakers. A desktop force to be reckoned with	●	●	●	●	●	13x12x12
NAD Viso 1 AP	500	08.14/GT	★★★★★	A strong, rounded package that thoroughly deserves your attention	●	●	●	●	●	26x48x30
Panasonic SC-NA10	130	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A speaker that oozes class and subtlety. Watch out for the cabinet vibrations, though	●	●	●	●	●	10x20x3
Philips Fidelio E2	300	06.14/ST	★★★★★	Classy, versatile speakers but you'll need some room to accommodate them	●	●	●	●	●	30.5x16x16
Philips Fidelio P9	240	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Hard to find fault with this Bluetooth speaker	●	●	●	●	●	12x29x5
Pioneer XW-SMA4	350	12.12/GT	★★★★★	Bags of features, solid build and smart design – just watch that bass	●	●	●	●	●	21x36x17
Pure Jongo S3	170	06.13/FT	★★★★★	Great sound and easy portability make this a real gem	●	●	●	●	●	13x13x14
Pure Jongo S3 (pair)	340	06.14/ST	★★★★★	A tad disappointing as a pair; rivals offer a more insightful performance	●	●	●	●	●	13x13x14
Roth Oli POWA-5	250	06.14/ST	★★★★★	Updated and better than before but rivals still have in edge in terms of sound	●	●	●	●	●	27x18x21
Samsung M7	330	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Overly fussy in terms of setting up, the M7 is a comfortable performer nonetheless	●	●	●	●	●	14x40x19
Sonos Play:1	170	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Another strong addition to the Award-winning Sonos multi-room family	●	●	●	●	●	16x12x12
Sony RDP-XA700	285	03.13/GT	★★★★★	With a bit more definition and a bit less bass this could have been the speaker for us	●	●	●	●	●	18x40x16
Sony SRS-X3	130	07.14/GT	★★★★★	A hugely confident performer but its tonal balance won't be for everyone	●	●	●	●	●	7x19x7
Sony SRS-X9	600	06.14/FT	★★★★★	A do-it-all speaker with superb sound quality	●	●	●	●	●	13x43x13
Sony SRS-BTM8	85	05.13/GT	★★★★★	Classy, cleverly designed speaker that can handle large volumes.	●	●	●	●	●	19x25x9
Tangent Classic	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★	A speaker with a big sound and plenty of bass	●	●	●	●	●	23x60x32
Ultimate Ears Boom	170	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Loads of fun to listen to, the Boom is exciting, attractive and packed with features to boot	●	●	●	●	●	16x6.5x6.5

What to look for: wireless speakers

Choosing a wireless speaker can be a bit tricky, so we've outlined a few things to consider...

AirPlay/Bluetooth

The two most common options for streaming music are AirPlay and Bluetooth. Which one you choose is likely to come down to your personal preferences and what devices you have.

AirPlay is Apple's proprietary streaming system, so you'll need an iTunes music library and an iOS device to get up and running.

Bluetooth is more flexible, being supported by Apple, Android and plenty of other devices, and also capable of direct streaming music between multiple devices.

Most computers and portable devices will have Bluetooth, but look out for devices that support

the aptX Bluetooth variant, which offers higher quality sound than the standard A2DP Bluetooth.

Apps

More and more wireless speakers come with their own app, the performance of which may be something to consider when you're on the hunt for a new speaker.

In general, apps serve as portals for setting up your speaker, managing them and enabling playback from one device to another. Some – like Libratone's – offer tips for calibration whereas others have added features such as streaming radio from the web or integrating other streaming services like Deezer or Spotify.

Performance can be iffy with connection drops and freezes, so check the performance of the accompanying app as well as the speaker to see which ones offer the best experience.

Positioning

Size is a consideration too. The past few months we've tested wireless speakers in different shapes and sizes, some single speakers and some stereo pairs, others that are perfect for a desktop and some that are ideal for a bedroom or kitchen top.

Positioning is key as some will play better close to a wall and others will need space. As always, do your research before you commit to buying.



Headphones

Ear tips _____ Most in-ears come with these. Experiment with size to get the best fit
In-line remote _____ Mostly for Apple devices, but Android-friendly units are increasing. Handy...

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
SoundMAGIC E10

"These are exceptional in-ears for the money, and the new affordable choice for those looking to upgrade those bundled buds."



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
AKG K451

"That character, combined with their excellent build and compact size, makes the K451s a must-audition pair of cans."



AWARD WINNER
Sennheiser Momentum

"They certainly aren't the cheapest, but their refreshingly balanced sound and great design makes them worth every penny."

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	In-ear On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight (g)
Up to £70								
AKG K323XSi	50	08.14/FT	★★★★★	As good as you can reasonably expect at this price range	●	Closed		n/a
AKG K451	50	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears up to £100, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	●	Closed		120
Audio Technica ATH-CK550	49	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Smooth and weighty with lashings of detail	●	Closed		8
Audio Technica ATH-CKS55i	45	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Big on bass, these cans are no shrinking violets	●	Closed		6
Audio Technica ATH-T400	50	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Nicely balanced pair that just lack the wow factor of the class leaders	●	Closed		260
Apple EarPods	25	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A big upgrade of Apple's original earbuds, but there are better rivals	●	Open		10
Beyerdynamic DTX101IE	65	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £40-£80, Awards 2013	●	Closed		11
Beyerdynamic DTX71IE	54	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Detailed and with supreme tone control	●	Closed		11
dBLogic EP-100	25	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A dramatic, enjoyable musical performance	●	Closed		117
Digital Silence DS-321D	60	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Admirable noise-cancelling buds	●	Closed	●	11
Etymotic Research MC5	57	01.12/GT	★★★★★	A likeable sound for the money	●	Closed	●	17
Grado iGrado	49	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Fabulous iPod upgrade: these are unbeatable at the price	●	Open		85
Jays a-Jays Four	50	12.11/FT	★★★★★	The Jays combine looks and performance to alluring effect	●	Closed		14
Jays t-Jays Two	67	09.11/ST	★★★★★	A sure-fire winner for those who like their bass	●	Closed		8
Ministry of Sound MOS003	30	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Tidy, well balanced and nicely made	●	Closed		15
Mix-Style inner headphones	30	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Punchy, controlled and balanced	●	Closed		13.5
Panasonic RP-HTX7	35	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears up to £50, Awards 2012	●	Closed		153
Philips CitiScape Downtown	55	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Fun, stylish and great to use on an everyday basis	●	Closed	●	174
RHA MA-350	30	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Nicely made from quality materials, with impressive sound to match	●	Closed	●	48
Sennheiser CX 300-II	30	09.10/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ear headphones up to £50, Awards 2010	●	Closed		4
Sennheiser CX281	35	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Enjoyable enough, but a touch quiet	●	Closed		16
Sennheiser CX495	35	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A brilliant upgrade bargain	●	Closed		4
Sennheiser HD 202	26	02.11/FT	★★★★★	Great sound for the money and a bargain buy	●	Closed		130
Sennheiser HD 218	40	11.09/FT	★★★★★	For closed-back cans, the Sennheisers are very good – but not the best	●	Closed		224
Sennheiser MM 70i	50	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Nice features for the money	●	Closed	●	12
Sennheiser PX100-II	40	11.10/FT	★★★★★	An improvement over the previous model, very good open-backed cans	●	Open		80
Skullcandy Full Metal Jacket	65	07.10/FT	★★★★★	An extremely likeable pair of in-ear 'phones	●	Closed		13
Slick Distributions SD50	30	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Features and price make it easy to forgive minor sonic flaws	●	Closed	●	71
SoundMagic E10	35	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears up to £40, Awards 2013	●	Closed		11
SoundMagic PL30	30	01.10/GT	★★★★★	Great headphones that are held back by better value rivals	●	Closed		10
SoundMagic PL50	50	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Comfy and smooth-sounding; great all-rounders	●	Closed		8
Sony MDR-570LP	30	08.10/GT	★★★★★	Comfortable, all-round, on-ear headphones	●	Closed		110
Sony MDR-AS40EX	24	03.09/GT	★★★★★	Sporty headphones that sound weighty and clear	●	Closed		6
Sony MDR-EX500LP	45	09.10/GT	★★★★★	Display good solidity and weight – well worth an audition	●	Closed		7
Sony MDR-EX650	60	09.14/FT	★★★★★	The EX650s are everything we would expect from a pair of in-earphones	●	Closed		9
Vivanco Airc. Studio Monitors	50	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Capable - but should be approached with caution	●	Closed		n/a

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HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		In-ear On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling Wireless	Weight (g)
£70 and above								
AKG K3003i	1000	04.12/FT	★★★★★	The best, and priciest, in-ears we've seen	●	Closed		10
AKG K370	73	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Impressive for the money	●	Closed		4
AKG K450/HA450	180	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Product of the Year Headphones, Awards 2011	●	Closed		120
AKG K545	210	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Built to last but lacks refinement and likeability	●	Closed		280
AKG K550	200	02.12/ST	★★★★★	Best home on-ear headphones £150+, Awards 2013	●	Closed		305
AKG K551	230	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Smashing all-rounders that really sing	●	Closed		305
AKG K845BT	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★	If you like your music clear and uncoloured, then these AKGs are definitely worth a listen	●	Closed	●	292
AKG Q701	250	09.14/ST	★★★★★	A great, solid sounding set of cans. Comfy, too	●	Open		235
AKG Q460	140	02.11/GT	★★★★★	More pros than cons, but still not complete	●	Closed		120
AKG Y50	80	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Stylish with a great sound. A promising start for AKG's new range	●	Closed		190
Audeze LCD-3	1725	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Very expensive, but there's little to complain about here. Even with that price	●	Open		548
Audio Technica ATH-A500	140	02.10/GT	★★★★★	If you're after closed-back cans, give these a try	●	Closed		290
Audio Technica ATH-AD700X	190	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Huge headphones that offer an airy, open sound	●	Open		265
Audio Technica ATH-A900X LTD	390	09.14/ST	★★★★★	Remarkably clear and spacious sounding pair of headphones	●	Open		340
Audio Technica ATH-ANC1	80	06.10/FT	★★★★★	Their portability and noise-cancelling makes them a viable buy	●	Closed	●	100
Audio Technica ATH-CKX9iS	75	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Easy on the ears and very comfortable, but they need a bit more refinement to be great	●	Closed		10
Audio Technica ATH-ES55	90	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ear headphone up to £100, Awards 2010	●	Closed		120
Audio Technica ATH-ES7	140	02.11/GT	★★★★★	Appearance apart, there's an awful lot to like here	●	Closed		160
Audio Technica ATH-ES88	230	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Appealingly eccentric cans	●	Closed		130
Audio Technica ATH-EW9	159	10.07/FT	★★★★★	Featherlight phones are awesomely detailed	●	Closed		33
Audio Technica ATH-M50	130	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Immersive and refined: a great effort	●	Closed		284
Audio Technica ATH-W1000	650	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Expensive, but offer magnificent hi-fi sound	●	Closed		350
Audio Technica ATH-W1000X	650	07.10/FT	★★★★★	Best home on-ear headphones £500-£800, Awards 2010	●	Closed		350
Audio Technica ATH-WS55i	89	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	An excellent pair of on-ears for the bass-loving iPhone-owner	●	Closed		165
Beyerdynamic DTX102iE	75	08.14/FT	★★★★★	There's little to fault with a pair of in-ears that demand to be listened to	●	Closed		11
Beyerdynamic Custom One Pro	170	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Accomplished and easy to listen to. We like them	●	Closed		290
Beyerdynamic DT880	200	06.09/GT	★★★★★	Comfortable and the sound is impressive	●	Open	●	340
Beyerdynamic DT990 Premium	290	09.14/ST	★★★★★	Impressive, if a little lacking in dynamics	●	Open		290
Beyerdynamic DTX80	80	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ear headphones £50-£100, Awards 2010	●	Closed		12
Beyerdynamic MMX 101iE	95	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £80-£150, Awards 2013	●	Closed	●	11
Beyerdynamic T1	880	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Best home on-ear headphones £800+, Awards 2010	●	Closed		350
Beyerdynamic T50P	230	02.12/ST	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears £200+, Awards 2012	●	Closed		174
Beyerdynamic T51P	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A fine replacement for the T50ps, superbly entertaining	●	Closed		174
Beyerdynamic T70	456	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Undeniably capable, but don't quite feel worth the money	●	Closed		330
Blackbox M10	90	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Good noise-cancellers, but sonically slack	●	Open	●	180
Blackbox M10-RB	99	04.12/GT	★★★★★	Impressive, capable and clear-sounding	●	Closed	●	180
Blackbox i10	80	12.10/GT	★★★★★	A great set of noise-cancellers, with a good sound to boot	●	Closed	●	25
Bose AE2w	200	02.14/GT	★★★★★	No aptX Bluetooth onboard, but still a very listenable pair of cans	●	Closed	●	150
Bose MIE2i	120	09.11/ST	★★★★★	A perfect headphone meets microphone solution	●	Closed		19
Bose QuietComfort 15	280	04.12/GT	★★★★★	Best noise-cancelling headphones, Awards 2013	●	Closed	●	227
B&W P3	170	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Stylish and sonically talented on-ear headphones	●	Closed		130
B&W P5	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	They look fantastic and sound just as good	●	Closed		195
B&W P7	330	09.14/ST	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears, Awards 2013	●	Closed		290
Denon AH-D600	200	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Open and spacious. A crisper presentation would make this a five-star product	●	Closed		365
Etymotic Research HF2	180	08.09/FT	★★★★★	The same money buys punchier cans, but not ones that fit as well	●	Closed	●	26
Etymotic Research HF3	134	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Serious hi-fi quality in a stylish little package	●	Closed	●	11
Focal Spirit Classic	250	09.14/ST	★★★★★	Needs more 'oomph' to challenge the best	●	Closed		310
Focal Spirit One	200	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Refined enough, but not the most exciting	●	Closed		225
German Maestro GMP 8.35 D	150	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Virtually indestructible sonic goodness	●	Closed		220
Golding NS-1000	100	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Sweet, powerful sounding noise-cancellers	●	Closed	●	183

Three things to listen for in a demo

Attacking sounds

Snare drums, the kick of a bass-drum, claps... these should all sound crisp and clean. If they lack precision and impact, so will the rest of the sound.

Decaying sounds

Listen to a crash cymbal. Does it sound like it's made of metal? Or does it sound dull and lifeless? You know which one you'd rather listen to...

Detail

Can you hear the singer's mouth move? The little breaths they take between lines. If not, then either the recording isn't great, or the kit isn't quite up to scratch.

Audio Technica's ATH-A900X LTD have a big, open sound that lends itself well to a large sense of scale



HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	In-ear On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling Wireless	Weight (g)
£70 and above							
Grado GR10	399	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Stunningly insightful and expressive	●	Closed	9
Grado GR8	300	04.10/GT	★★★★★	Precisely detailed and balanced, but they lack a certain richness	●	Open	9
Grado GS1000i	1000	10.09/GT	★★★★★	For sheer, sonic pleasure these cans are stunning	●	Open	312
Grado PS1000	1700	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Undoubtedly one of the finest headphones money can buy	●	Open	500
Grado SR325e	300	09.14/ST	★★★★★	An open-backed pair of headphones that offer top-quality sound	●	Open	330
Grado SR325is	300	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Best home on-ear headphones £150+ Awards 2011	●	Open	330
Grado SR60i	80	02.10/GT	★★★★★	Hugely accomplished and built to last too	●	Closed	125
Grado SR80i	100	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home on-ear headphones up to £150, Awards 2013	●	Open	200
Grado iGi	90	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Classy and compact buds	●	Closed	12
Harman/Kardon CL	170	09.12/FT	★★★★★	An impressive headphone debut for Harman/Kardon	●	Closed	195
Jamo IN40i	90	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Chunky and enjoyable buds	●	Closed	11
Jamo wEAR IN20m	70	06.11/FT	★★★★★	These quiet Jamos aren't without charm	●	Closed	13
KEF M200	150	10.13/FT	★★★★★	They don't quite set the market alight, but they are worth an audition	●	Closed	12
KEF M500	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A smooth and refined effort from KEF. Needs a touch more excitement	●	Closed	208
Klipsch Image One	140	05.11/GT	★★★★★	Perfect for those who enjoy a lot of bass	●	Closed	138
Klipsch Image X7i	170	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Klipsch has gone for energy and warmth with the X7is, and it's an addictive combo	●	Closed	16
Klipsch Image X10i	219	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Best in-ears £140+, Awards 2011	●	Closed	320
Klipsch Mode M40	290	02.13/FT	★★★★★	Klipsch's first noise-cancelling headphones are excellent performers	●	Closed	356
Klipsch S4i	90	12.09/GT	★★★★★	These Klipschs are great all-rounders, with an exciting edge	●	Closed	12
Klipsch S5i	120	05.11/FT	★★★★★	In-ear buds that strain at the leash	●	Closed	12
Logitech UE 9000	300	03.13/GT	★★★★★	Could be more refined, but make up for this with bundles of energy	●	Closed	378
Lindy Premium Headphones	75	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Ideal for those unwilling to break the £100 barrier	●	Closed	225
Martin Logan Mikros 70	150	04.13/GT	★★★★★	If you like your music to be presented with a matter-of-fact approach, these are just the job	●	Closed	13
Monster Beats by Dr Dre	280	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Noise-cancelling cans that are seriously good	●	Closed	260
Monster Beats by Dre iBeats	80	03.11/GT	★★★★★	For smooth, bassy sounds they're ace	●	Closed	n/a
Monster Beats Pro by Dre	350	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Brilliant at what they do well	●	Closed	299
Monster Gratitude	199	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Celebrity hook-up cans sound good for the money	●	Open	453
NAD Viso HP50	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A promising pair of cans from NAD, but the design lets them down	●	Open	453
Nocs NS400 Titanium	80	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Still great, but there's better for the money	●	Closed	12
Onkyo ES-HF300	180	10.13/GT	★★★★★	A pleasant listen, laid-back and amiable	●	Closed	240
Oppo PM-1	1100	07.14/FT	★★★★★	Oppo's first pair of headphones are a resounding success	●	Open	395
Panasonic RP-HC101	82	04.12/GT	★★★★★	Nice enough sound but average noise cancelling	●	Closed	79
Parrot Zik	300	07.13/FT	★★★★★	High-tech headphones that deliver a good performance	●	Closed	352
Phonak Audeo PFE 022	80	03.11/GT	★★★★★	Pacey, detailed, insightful and recommended	●	Closed	14
Phiaton MS300	150	02.12/ST	★★★★★	These over ears deserve careful consideration	●	Closed	140
Philips Fidelio L1	230	05.12/FT	★★★★★	Easy going and comfortable	●	Closed	272
Philips Fidelio M1	125	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears £100-£200, Awards 2013	●	Closed	166
Philips Fidelio M1BT	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best wireless headphones, Awards 2013	●	Closed	500
Philips Fidelio S1	70	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Smart and non-invasive earphones. We quite like them	●	Closed	14
Philips Fidelio X1	200	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Another great set of headphones from Philips	●	Open	430
PSB M4U1	219	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Better than the M4U2? Close but no cigar	●	Closed	340
PSB M4U2	300	10.12/ST	★★★★★	PSB's first headphones are truly brilliant. Hear them now!	●	Closed	362
Sennheiser CX880i	90	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Great sounding in-ears, although there's a hard edge	●	Closed	11
Sennheiser HD 380 Pro	110	02.10/GT	★★★★★	Still seriously good headphones, but rivals have caught up	●	Closed	220
Sennheiser HD25-1 II Adidas	190	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Stylishly excellent all-rounders	●	Closed	140
Sennheiser HD 558	130	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Other headphones are more skilled but these cans have a silky smooth sound	●	Open	260
Sennheiser HD 598	190	02.12/ST	★★★★★	Too well-mannered for our tastes	●	Open	270
Sennheiser HD 800	1000	10.09/GT	★★★★★	They offer much, but close rivals pip them to the post	●	Open	350
Sennheiser IE 8i	260	03.11/GT	★★★★★	Enjoyable enough, but need a better tonal balance	●	Closed	18
Sennheiser IE 80	270	02.11/FT	★★★★★	Expensive, but a truly quality option	●	Closed	5
Sennheiser IE 800	600	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £300+, Awards 2013	●	Closed	8
Sennheiser MM 200	99	10.09/GT	★★★★★	In terms of detail, clarity and musicality you could do a lot worse	●	Closed	28
Sennheiser MM 400-X	150	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Best wireless headphones, Awards 2012	●	Closed	105

"We really like the Klipsch Image X7is. They deliver in every aspect of their performance - from detail and dynamics, to frequency balance and comfort"

April 2013

HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		In-ear On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling Wireless	Weight (g)
Sennheiser MM 70s	70	01.14/GT	★★★★★	An unassuming pair of earphones that are never less than engaging	●	Closed		13
Sennheiser Momentum	260	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears £200-300, Awards 2013	●	Closed		190
Sennheiser Momentum On-ears	170	10.13/GT	★★★★★	A comfortable pair of cans, just lacking a little presence in the mid-range	●	Closed		160
Sennheiser PXC 310 BT	190	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Best Bluetooth headphones, Awards 2011	●	Closed	● ●	105
Sennheiser PXC310	200	02.11/GT	★★★★★	Perfect for a walk on the mild side	●	Closed	●	115
Sennheiser RS 160	115	05.10/GT	★★★★★	An exciting, affordable option but tiring over longer periods	●	Closed	●	226
Sennheiser RS 180	185	05.10/GT	★★★★★	These comfortable, wireless headphones justify their premium price	●	Open	●	204
Sennheiser RS 220	350	10.12/ST	★★★★★	A very neat wireless solution with great sound quality	●	Open	●	329
Sennheiser X 320	70	10.12/ST	★★★★★	The best Xbox gaming headphones we've heard so far	●	Closed		280
Shure SE215	100	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Affordably opulent buds	●	Closed	●	30
Shure SE310	120	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Detail and clarity is first class	●	Closed		7
Shure SE425	200	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £150-£300, Awards 2013	●	Closed		32
Shure SE535	450	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Still good but no longer the best	●	Closed	●	272
Shure SE846	950	06.14/FT	★★★★★	The most capable in-ears we've heard	●	Closed		36
Shure SRH1840	500	06.12/FT	★★★★★	Not cheap, but worth every penny	●	Open		268
Sony MDR-1R	210	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Detailed and airy, but need more kick	●	Closed		240
Sony MDR-Z1000P5	385	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Impressive sounding cans - with good flexibility	●	Closed		270
Sony XBA-2iP	130	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £120-£200, Awards 2012	●	Closed		6
Sony XBA-3iP	225	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £200+, Awards 2012	●	Closed	●	7
Sony XBA-4iP	275	10.12/ST	★★★★★	The best Sony headphones we've heard in years	●	Closed	●	8
SoundMagic HP100	150	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Sparkling detail, spacious character	●	Closed		228
TDK ST700	150	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Tonally balanced and solidly musical	●	Closed		205
thinksound ts02+mic	90	02.13/FT	★★★★★	Eco-friendly buds provide a clear sound and a clearer conscience	●	Closed		10
Ultrasonics HFI-580	125	11.10/GT	★★★★★	Not class-leading, but still worthy of consideration	●	Closed		285
Ultrasonics HFI-780	160	02.12/ST	★★★★★	Big and bold, and offer excitement in spades	●	Open		285
Ultimate Ears Super Fi 5vi	110	12.09/GT	★★★★★	These in-ears are, in a word, brilliant	●	Closed		14
V-moda Crossfade M-80	160	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Good-looking and great fun, with lots of bass	●	Closed		200
V-moda Remix Remote	70	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Smooth and enjoyable sounding buds	●	Closed		17

Headphones Jargon Buster

Know you over-ear from your open-backed cans? Here's a simple guide to the differences between each one

OVER-EAR



The most popular hi-fi headphone design (also called circumaural), these cup your ears completely, usually with semi-air-tight earcups. You'll notice cans of this type used as monitors in recording studios: depending on the type of design they use they can be extremely effective at cutting out the outside world.

ON-EAR



Supra-aural or on-ear designs tend to be smaller and lighter than circumaural models. They sit on your ear rather than over it, usually pressing on to it as well. Some listeners find them lighter and easier to wear for extended listening than over-ear models, but they do tend to allow in more sounds from outside.

IN-EAR



Gone are the days when everyone else needs to hear your music. In-ear buds are a great way to isolate yourself in sound. Nowadays, in-ears usually come with rubber tips, which provide a good seal and help the music travel only down your ear canals. A better fit means better sound, so experiment with tip sizes.

Try these

AKG K550 ★★★★★ £180

The K550s are sweetly communicative, handle tempos in a natural, unforced manner and punch into and out of low-frequency information with precision.

Philips Fidelio M1 ★★★★★ £160

A rounded, refined presentation. Vocals are given room to breathe, while high-frequency sounds are natural and don't harden up when you crank the volume.

Sony XBA-2iP ★★★★★ £125

Agility and precision is up there with the very best at this price, and the spacious delivery allows for plenty of detail all the way up the frequency range.



Stereo systems

This category includes a wide range of products including all-in-one packages where the speakers are part of the system, through to micro systems where the electronics are housed separately from the speakers. A streaming option is available on many newer systems.

Our recommendations

Our recommendations					CD	Streaming	Internet Radio	DAB	FM	Analogue inputs	Digital inputs	Headphone out
Product	£	Tested	Verdict									
Up to £500												
Denon CEOL Piccolo	260	03.13/FT	★★★★★	No matter what the source, the CEOL Piccolo will play all your music in superb style		●	●			●	●	●
Denon CEOL RCD-N8	350	02.14/FT	★★★★★	An attractive option if you're looking for a compact system that does a bit of everything	●	●	●			●	●	●
Denon D-M39DAB	310	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Best music system up to £400, Awards 2013	●	●		●	●	●	●	●
Onkyo CR-N755	300	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best networked micro system, Awards 2012	●	●	●	●		●	●	●
Panasonic SC-PMX9DB	450	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Well-featured but its laid-back sound makes it a solid buy	●	●			●	●		●
Pioneer X-HM70	350	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Not flawless, but gets much right	●		●	●	●	●		●
Pioneer X-SMC5-K	300	02.12/FT	★★★★★	An excellent jack of all trades	●	●				●	●	
Sony CMT-G1BiP	400	12.11/FT	★★★★★	Capable and fun to listen to	●				●	●	●	●
Yamaha MCR-232	300	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Harsh treble docks it a star but it's an impressively compact micro system	●				●	●	●	●
Yamaha MCR-555	380	10.11/GT	★★★★★	Vastly improved over the original	●				●	●	●	●
£500 and above												
Aura Note Premier	1500	05.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine sounding all in one system	●	●				●	●	●
Arcam Solo Neo	1350	09.10/FT	★★★★★	Extra functionality over the original Solo - great buy	●	●	●	●	●	●		●
Camb. A. Sonata DR30/CD30	550	10.09/FT	★★★★★	Decent, but the performance doesn't hit the heights	●	●		●	●			●
Cabasse Stream3	850	07.13/FT	★★★★★	Hardware is great but the app needs developing	●	●	●			●	●	
Consonance F. City - Ping	1495	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Delightful CD receiver in one box	●	●			●			
HRT Stage	1200	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Limited inputs and a low-rent feel, but judged on sound alone and it's fantastic							●	
Lyngdorf Digital 2.2 System	12350	05.10/FT	★★★★★	Not without its flaws, but a system worth a look	●	●				●	●	
Linn Majik DSM	2965	02.13/FT	★★★★★	A thoughtfully designed system and a pleasure to use	●	●	●			●	●	●
Marantz M-CR610	500	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £400-£800, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	●		●	●	●	●	●	●
Naim Uniti	2670	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best Network Music Player £1500+, Awards 2010	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Naim UnitiQute	1600	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Systems Product of the Year, Awards 2010	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Pioneer P1DAB	550	07.13/FT	★★★★★	Great sound for a sensible price	●	●		●	●	●	●	●
Ruark Audio R4i	599	07.11/FT	★★★★★	Best all-in-one music system, Awards 2012	●	●		●	●			●
Sony CMT-G2BNiP	500	04.12/FT	★★★★★	A solid performer in every respect	●	●	●	●	●			●
TEAC CR-H700DAB	550	10.11/GT	★★★★★	Great - but not a total all-rounder	●	●	●	●	●			



Surround systems

This category includes a wide variety of systems. Most include a disc drive and now tend to feature video and music streaming capabilities. The speakers supplied tend to either be small satellite designs, or towers that usually provide greater scale and sonic authority.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Blu-ray	3D Blu-ray	DVD	Streaming	Optical in	HDMI in	Channels
Up to £500										
LG HX906PA	425	07.11/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●		1	2	5.1
Panasonic SC-BTT460	350	06.13/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●		1	0	5.1
Philips HTS5563	400	08.12/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●		1	2	5.1
Pioneer BCS-SC626	400	01.12/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●		2	2	2.1
Q Acoustics Q-TV2	330	11.09/FT	★★★★★					1	0	2.1
Samsung HT-E5530	450	08.12/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●		1	2	5.1
Sony BDV-E380	400	07.11/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●		1	2	5.1
Sony BDV-N590	400	09.12/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●		1	2	5.1
£500-£1000										
Harman-Kardon BDS-570	750	04.12/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●		2	3	5.1
LG BH8220B	600	08.12/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●		1	2	5.1
LG BH9520TW	600	11.12/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●		1	2	9.1
Panasonic SC-BFT800	600	10.11/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●		1	0	2.1

SURROUND SYSTEMS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Blu-ray	3D Blu-ray	DVD	Streaming	Optical in	HDMI in	Channels
Panasonic SC-BT735	600	08.10/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	2	0	5.1
Panasonic SC-BT7590	500	08.12/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
Sony BDV-N7100W	600	09.13/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	1	2	5.1

£1000 and above

Harman-Kardon BDS 477	1100	01.13/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	0	3	2.1
Harman-Kardon BDS-800	1300	05.11/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	1	0	5.1
Meridian G95	3995	12.07/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	2	0	5.1



Soundbars

One-box speaker systems that include amplification, and are a great alternative to a full-on home cinema package if you don't have much space. Few soundbars include a Blu-ray player as standard.

Theshortlist



Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Discrive	Smart	Ext. subwoofer	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	RCA in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £2000											
Bowers & Wilkins Panorama 2	1650	09.13/GT	★★★★★	●	3	1	0	●	●	●	13x110x18
Cambridge Audio Minx TV	200	02.14/ST	★★★★★	●	0	1	0	●	●	●	8x43x38
Canton DM 50	400	09.14/GT	★★★★★	●	0	1	1	●	●	●	6.5x54.5x30
Canton DM 90.2	1100	09.13/GT	★★★★★	●	0	2	2	●	●	●	15x90x30
Harman/Kardon SB30	800	07.12/FT	★★★★★	●	0	1	1	●	●	●	10x116x8
JBL Cinema SB200	200	03.14/ST	★★★★★	●	0	1	0	●	●	●	12x90x10
JBL Cinema SB400	450	06.13/ST	★★★★★	●	3	1	0	●	●	●	10x110x6
LG NB3520A	250	01.13/GT	★★★★★	●	0	2	0	●	●	●	8x100x5
LG NB3530A	190	03.14/ST	★★★★★	●	0	2	0	●	●	●	71x950x50
LG NB4530A	300	06.13/ST	★★★★★	●	1	1	0	●	●	●	8x104x4
Maxell MXSP-SB3000	220	02.14/ST	★★★★★	●	3	1	1	●	●	●	8x94x39
Monitor Audio ASB-2	800	11.13/FT	★★★★★	●	3	1	1	●	●	●	101x19x17
Orbitsound M9	300	06.13/ST	★★★★★	●	0	1	0	●	●	●	9x30x10
Philips HTL5120	250	03.14/ST	★★★★★	●	2	1	0	●	●	●	15x1010x81
Philips HTL9100	600	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	●	2	1	1	●	●	●	7x103x16
Pioneer SBXN700	350	05.14/GT	★★★★★	●	●	0	2	0	●	●	9x90x12
Q Acoustics Media 4	400	08.14/FT	★★★★★	●	0	1	0	●	●	●	11x14x100
Sandström S42SWLH13	150	03.14/ST	★★★★★	●	2	1	0	●	●	●	11x3x900x48
Samsung HW-E551	400	10.12/FT	★★★★★	●	2	1	0	●	●	●	10x45x5
Samsung HT-E8200	500	11.12/FT	★★★★★	●	2	1	0	●	●	●	10x104x13
Sonos Playbar	600	05.13/FT	★★★★★	●	0	1	0	●	●	●	9x90x14
Sony HT-XT1	300	09.14/GT	★★★★★	●	3	1	0	●	●	●	7x72x31
Tannoy BaseStation One	350	09.14/ST	★★★★★	●	1	0	●	●	●	●	12x64x36
Yamaha YAS-201	350	06.13/ST	★★★★★	●	3	2	1	●	●	●	14x43x35
Yamaha YSP-1400	400	05.14/GT	★★★★★	●	0	1	1	●	●	●	10x100x13
Yamaha YSP-2200	800	10.11/GT	★★★★★	●	3	2	1	●	●	●	9x89x12

Subscriptions 0844 848 8813 email: whathifi@servicehelpline.co.uk



Media servers

These have hard drives built in. Go for the largest storage possible as that leaves room for future expansion of your music and video library.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Hard drive capacity	HDMI out	Optical out	Coaxial out	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/kHz)	Video
Up to £3000														
Lacie Lacinema Classic HD	190	04.10/GT	★★★★★	As good as Apple TV, this needs to be auditioned	1TB	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	24/92	●
Microsoft Xbox 360 (250GB)	200	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Now an appealing media hub as well	250GB	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	16/48	●
Netgear EVA9000	190	04.10/GT	★★★★★	Needs better sound and Apple TV-like usability	500GB	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	24/92	●
Olive 4HD	2150	02.10/FT	★★★★★	This is 21st-century hi-fi at its best	2TB	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	24/192	●
Olive O3HD	900	12.10/FT	★★★★★	A great music server that's nearly excellent	500GB	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	24/192	●
Raumfeld 3Raumfeld	1680	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	A fabulous product to make Sonos sweat	160GB	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	24/96	●



Media streamers

These access the music or video files you have stored on your network. Check for file compatibility and decent control apps that improve usability.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	HDMI out	Optical out	Co-axial out	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/kHz)	Video
Up to £500													
Apple TV	100	06.12/GT	★★★★★	A limited but likeable streamer from Apple	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
Asus O!Play HD2	110	01.11/FT	★★★★★	A flexible streamer improved by a hard disk	1	1	1	0	0	0	3	20/48	●
Cambridge Audio NP30	430	05.12/ST	★★★★★	Still worthy, but there's better around	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	24/96	●
Denon DNP-720AE	250	02.12/GT	★★★★★	A bargain for its features	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	24/192	●
LG ST600	130	07.11/GT	★★★★★	With more apps it could be a class king	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	20/48	●
Marantz NA7004	430	05.12/ST	★★★★★	Unique, flexible and packed with dynamics	0	1	1	0	1	1	2	24/96	●
Netgear NeoTV 550	150	07.11/GT	★★★★★	Decent enough if you know what you're doing	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	24/192	●
Now TV	10	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Oodles of free and premium content makes this a great upgrade for a 'dumb' TV	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
Popcorn PopBox 3D	140	10.11/FT	★★★★★	A Swiss Army Knife of streaming	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	16/48	●
Pure Jonga T2	130	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Cheaper than Sonos but comes with a few niggles	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
QED uPlay Stream	150	03.14/FT	★★★★★	A handy device that boasts decent sound and good features	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24/196	●
Roku 2XS	100	06.12/GT	★★★★★	A family friendly streamer	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	16/48	●
Sonos Play 3	259	12.11/ST	★★★★★	A cracking little performer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/44.1	●
Sonos Play 5	349	12.11/ST	★★★★★	An ideal one-box network player	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/44.1	●
Sony NSZ-GS7	180	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Good first Google TV device but needs more apps	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	24/48	●
Sony SMP-N100	120	07.11/GT	★★★★★	A fine mixture of paid-for and catch-up content	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	24/96	●
Sony SMP-N200	100	06.12/GT	★★★★★	A competent and easy to use device	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	24/192	●
ViewSonic VMP72	117	04.10/GT	★★★★★	A decent streamer at a good price	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	24/96	●

Wake up to streaming!



The New World of Audio
The Sound Gallery has the finest range of British music streamers, designed to produce beautiful sound in your home!

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www.soundgallery.co.uk
65 Castle Street, High Wycombe, Bucks.

STREAMERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		HDMI out	Optical out	Coaxial out	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/kHz)	Video
£500-£1000														
Cambridge Audio MinxXi	600	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Easy to use, well built and sounds great. A terrific streamer	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	●	24/96	
Camb. Audio Stream Magic 6	700	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £600-£1000, Awards 2013	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	●	24/96	
Olive O2M	700	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Affordable, but a bit too refined for our tastes	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	●	24/96	
Pioneer N-50	400	05.12/ST	★★★★★	Best streamer up to £600, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	●	24/192	
Rotel RT-09	650	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Does a lot but not all of it to the standard we'd like	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	●	24/192	
£1000 and above														
Bryston BDP-1	2350	06.11/FT	★★★★★	A true hi-fi media player	0	1	1	0	1	0	3	●	24/192	
Cyrus Lyric 09	3000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Controversial looks aside, the Lyric is a really strong sonic performer	0	0	0	0	2	2	3	●	24/192	
Cyrus Stream XP	2000	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best streamer £1000-£2500, Awards 2011	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192	
Cyrus Streamline	1600	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Best streaming system up to £2000, Awards 2011	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192	
Cyrus Stream XP2-Qx	2300	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best streaming system £2000+, Awards 2013	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192	
Linn Kiko	2500	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £1500+, Awards 2013	1	0	0	4	1	0	0	●	24/192	
Linn Majik DS-I	2500	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Gives a glimpse of the music-streaming future	1	1	1	4	1	1	0	●	24/192	
Naim NAC-N 172 XS	1650	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £1000-£2000, Awards 2013	0	2	0	0	2	2	1	●	24/192	
Naim ND5 XS	1950	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A thrillingly musical music streamer	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	●	24/192	
Naim NDS/555PS	12620	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Engaging sound, bags of detail and many features	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	●	24/192	
Naim NDX	2995	07.11/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £2500+, Awards 2011	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	●	24/192	
Naim Uniti	2670	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best streaming system £2000+, Awards 2011	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	●	24/192	
Naim Uniti 2	2795	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Uniti continues to lead the market at this price	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	●	24/192	
Naim UnitiLite	1650	12.12/FT	★★★★★	UnitiLite hits the streaming sweet spot	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	●	24/192	
Naim UnitiQute	1600	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Systems Product of the Year, Awards 2010	0	0	1	0	2	2	1	●	24/192	
Naim UnitiQute 2	1150	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £800-£1500, Awards 2013	0	0	1	0	2	2	1	●	32/192	
Pixel Magic Lumin	5000	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A fine player that leads the field in terms of file compatibility	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	●	24/192	
Sony HAP-Z1ES	2000	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A smartly designed, superb-sounding piece of hi-fi	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	●	24/192	
T+A MP 1260R	2700	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Amazing – this is proper high-end hi-fi	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	●	24/192	

Explained: High-resolution audio

Interested by hi-res audio? Here's our guide to figuring out what's what with the format

What is high-res audio?

High-resolution audio has been around for years but it's lacked a definition. That changed when consumer bodies and music studios in the US struck a new agreement in June. High-res audio is now defined as lossless audio that's "capable of reproducing the full range of sound from recordings that have been mastered from better-than-CD quality music sources."

To go along with that definition, there are now four different Master Quality Recording categories, describing where the recording has come from. MQ-P is from a PCM master source; MQ-A from an analogue master source, MQ-C is from a CD master source (44.1kHz/16-bit) and MQ-D from a DSD/DSF master source.

Begun, the format wars have

There are several file compression formats to choose from including FLAC and Apple's ALAC.

The Neil Young-backed PonoMusic venture is aiming for a "revolution in music listening" via high-res playback



Others include WAV, AIFF and DSD (used by Super Audio CD).

Each has its advantages and drawbacks but it will come down to whether the format is supported by your kit as not all devices, systems or services will support the above formats. Currently, Sonos does not even support high resolution music playback so check before you buy.

Who supports it

As we alluded to above, Sonos do not support 24-bit playback and iTunes lacks support for FLAC (but 24-bit files are supported).

However, 2014 has seen companies launch new products to take advantage

of the recent surge in high-res audio with Astell & Kern releasing the AK100 MkII music player, FiiO the X5 and Sony both the ZX1 and F886, along with the HAP-Z1ES music server.

Arcam's irDAC and Naim's DAC-V1 can handle hi-res audio stored on a PC. Streamers such as Pioneer's N50 and Cambridge Audio's Stream Magic 6 can belt out tunes, with the Neil Young-backed PonoMusic launching in the US soon and smartphones such as the LG G3 and HTC One (M8) capable of high-res playback, there are now more ways of enjoying your music in all its high-res glory.



Want to know more? Scan this to read our in depth overview on whathifi.com



Set-top boxes

Freeview	Large choice of digital TV channels via a rooftop aerial
Freesat	Much like Freeview, but takes signal from a satellite dish
Subscription	Services from Sky and Virgin give a vast array of premium content

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Humax DTR-T1010 (500GB)

"The Humax DTR-T1010 doesn't go in for the bells and whistles. But you know what? We don't mind. This box does what it does extremely well."



AWARD WINNER

Humax HDR-1000S (500GB)

"If great sound, superb picture quality and one of the most user-friendly TV experiences out there sounds like everything you want from a PVR, the HDR-1000s is the one to get."



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Sky+ HD 2TB

"The Sky+ HD delivers excellent picture and sound quality as ever: the 1080i HD pictures are crisp and vibrant, while standard-definition content is generally clean and stable."

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Freeview	Freesat	Sky	Virgin	YouView	Tuners	Hard drive capacity (GB)	HDMI out	Smart
Up to £500												
Equinix Tizi	150	03.11/FT	★★★★★	●					1	n/a	0	
Humax DTR-T1000	230	10.12/FT	★★★★★					●	2	500	1	
Humax DTR-T1010 (500GB)	230	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★					●	2	500	1	
Humax Foxsat HDR	300	04.10/GT	★★★★★			●			2	320	1	
Humax HD-FOXT2	100	07.10/GT	★★★★★			●			1	n/a	1	
Humax HDR-1000S (500GB)	220	01.13/FT	★★★★★		●				2	500	1	
Icecrypt T2400 (2TB)	330	01.12/FT	★★★★★	●					2	2TB	1	
Panasonic DMR-PWT500	350	01.12/FT	★★★★★	●					2	320	1	●
Philips DTR-5520	150	07.10/GT	★★★★★	●					2	n/a	1	
Philips HDT8520	270	09.10/GT	★★★★★	●					2	500	1	
Sagem DTR94250S	250	04.10/GT	★★★★★			●			2	250	1	●
Samsung BD-D8500	450	05.11/FT	★★★★★			●			2	500	1	●
Samsung STB-E7500	270	09.12/FT	★★★★★			●			2	500	1	●
Sky+ HD 1TB	249	Aw.12/GT	★★★★★			●			2	1TB	1	
Sky+ HD 2TB	250	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★			●			2	1TB	1	
Sony SVR-HDT1000	300	12.11/GT	★★★★★	●					2	1TB	1	
TechniSat HDFS	180	04.10/FT	★★★★★			●			1	n/a	1	
TVonics DTR-HD500	280	12.10/FT	★★★★★			●			2	500	1	
Virgin Media Samsung V+	99	07.09/FT	★★★★★					●	3	320	1	●
Virgin Media TiVo	200	06.11/FT	★★★★★					●	3	1TB	1	●

What Hi-Fi? recommends: TV shows

What Hi-Fi? team members share which current TV shows they like and what they're looking forward to...



Computer Chess

Ced Yuen - Staff writer

1980: computer nerds share a hotel with a therapy group for open-minded couples. And many cats. Boldly dull to start, it soon becomes quirky and then seriously freaky. You won't see anything like it for a long time, if ever.



Hannibal - Series Two

Kashfia Kabir - Multimedia journalist

Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham continue their cat-and-mouse game amidst surreal visuals and a spellbindingly discordant soundtrack. Series two is superb, with grislier murders, finger-chewing tension and more cannibal puns.



The Strain - Series One

Kobina Monney - Buyer's Guide editor

There's a big 'what if?' at the heart of this upcoming TV show. What if vampirism was spread by a virus and not through bites? It's an intriguing set-up, one that turns the established vampire myth into an out of control epidemic.



Louie - Series Four

Richard Walker - Designer

Since the beginning *Louie* has the finest writing of any show on TV and all series four has done is prove this further. It goes darker, weirder and more ambitious than ever before. In short, it will leave you speechless.



Music/video players

A category of products that has been put under increasing pressure by the rise of the ubiquitous smartphone. At the most basic level it will be a standard music player that can be use in the gym. Higher-end machines will add video, internet browsing and apps as well.

The shortlist



Apple iPod Touch



Astell & Kern AK100 MkII



Sony NWZ-NX1

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Web browsing	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Up to £1000								
Astell & Kern AK100 MkII	700	04.14/GT	★★★★★	A few design issues mar a very talented performer	2.5	320x240	32	79x59x15
Apple iPod Classic 160GB	229	09.09/FT	★★★★★	Carry your entire music collection, uncompressed	2.5	320x240	160	60x100x14
Apple iPod Nano 16GB (2012)	130	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A simple, attractive, music-playing wonder	2.5	240x240	16	77x40x5
Apple iPod Shuffle 2GB	40	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Simple and brilliantly effective	n/a	n/a	2	30x30x10
Apple iPod Touch 64GB (2012)	330	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Best iPod Touch so far, but it's fast becoming niche	4	1136x640	64	123x59x6
Archos 5 Internet Tablet	280	03.10/GT	★★★★★	A desirable media player with the occasional flaw	4.8	800x480	32	80x130x13
Cowon X7	200	02.11/FT	★★★★★	A genuine rival to the monopoly of Apple	4.3	480x272	120	127x79x15
Cowon Z2	200	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	A great music player with good sound and flexible storage	3.7	800x480	16	116x63x12
Creative Zen Style M100 4GB	35	12.11/GT	★★★★★	An ultra-portable player with punch	1.45	128x128	4	55x44x13
FiiO X5	290	08.14/GT	★★★★★	A bulky design gives way to a strong, if not outstanding music player	2.4	400x360	n/a	114x68x16
iBasso DX50	200	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Enjoyable and affordable. However it's not the last word in sound quality	1	96x96	8	60x40x20
SanDisk Sansa Clip+ 8GB	40	12.11/GT	★★★★★	A worthy Apple alternative	2.4	320x240	8	10x64x17
Sony NWZ-F805 16GB	200	01.13/FT	★★★★★	This multimedia Walkman is a fine choice	3.5	800x400	16	115x57x9
Sony NWZ-F886	240	08.14/GT	★★★★★	An intuitive interface, good sound and battery make for a well-realised music player	4	854x480	32	116x59x8
Sony NWZ-ZX1	550	04.14/GT	★★★★★	A seriously impressive first attempt at a premium high-res audio player	4	854x480	128	123x61x16

Streaming on the go

Looking for something to watch or listen on the go? We've had a look at several new titles available to stream to your portable device to help fill the void...



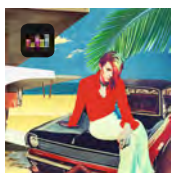
Spotify - Common - *Nobody's Smiling*

Common's 10th album takes his socially & politically conscious lyrics and applies them to gun crime in Chicago. *Nobody's Smiling* is an aggressive, distorted-sounding effort that keeps up with current stylings in Rap/R&B but also manages to tell a story too.



Sky Go - *Scandal*

One of the most popular shows in the US makes its way across the water with the debut of the third series of *Scandal*. Following Kerry Washington's Olivia Pope, it tells the story of a professional 'fixer' whose past come backs to haunt her. Compulsive viewing.



Deezer - La Roux - *Trouble In Paradise*

After her break out album in 2009, it's been a very long wait for La Roux's follow up. Management problems along with the loss of her voice for two years did not help, but this second offering is an infectious synth-pop concoction.



Amazon Prime - *Orphan Black* - Series One

We're loathe to spoil the mystery at the heart of this BBC/BBC America show but it's one that invites the viewer to dig deeper and deeper. The result is a fine genre TV show with a terrific set of performances from lead actress Tatiana Maslany.



iPlayer - *Doctor Who* - Series Eight

The eighth series of *Doctor Who* sees Peter Capaldi (Malcolm Tucker from *The Thick of It*) replace Matt Smith as the 12th Doctor. This Doctor is much older than recent ones and a little more alien, too. Expect this Doctor to be less playful than before.



Netflix - *The Desolation of Smaug*

Too long and boring? Perhaps. While *The Hobbit* trilogy doesn't have the world-ending importance of the *Lord of the Rings*, there's still lots of fun to be had here. The barrel sequence is marvelous, as is Benedict Cumberbatch's mo-capped dragon, Smaug.



Tablets

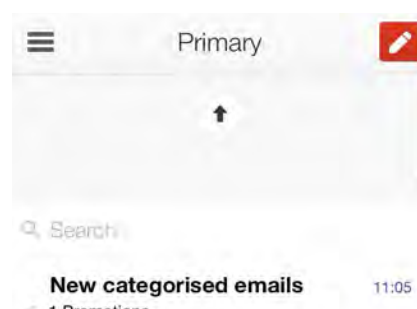
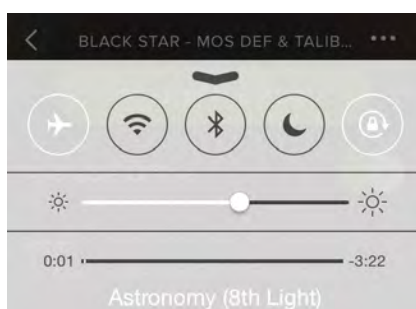
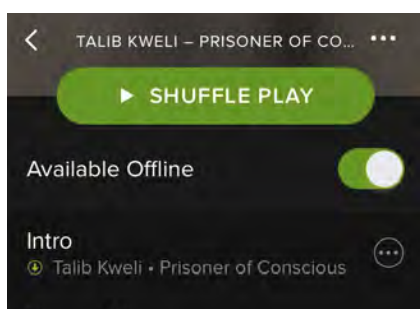
Android	Offers great flexibility and innovation
Apple iOS	Fantastic ease of use; massive choice of quality apps
Windows	New kid on the block. Watch this space

Our recommendations

Our recommendations											
Product	£	Tested	Verdict		OS	NFC	3G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Up to £600											
Amazon Kindle Fire HD 16GB	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	A great option for those looking for a user-friendly tablet	Android	●		7	1280x800	16/32	193x137x10
Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 7	200	01.14/FT	★★★★★	An excellent tablet but Android fans might find it a little restrictive	Android	●		7	1920x1200	16/32/64	186x128x9
Asus VivoTab ME400	400	04.13/GT	★★★★★	A convincing rival to the Microsoft Surface in the Windows 8 space	Windows 8	●		10.1	1366x768	32/64	263x171x10
Apple iPad Mini 64GB Wi-Fi	430	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Apple hits the bullseye. Again	iOS		●	7.9	1024x768	16/32/64	200x135x7
Apple iPad Mini/Retina display	320	01.14/ST	★★★★★	An absolutely superb tablet that shows its rivals how it's done	iOS 7		●	7.9	2048x1536	16/32/64	200x135x7
Apple iPad 4 16GB Wi-Fi	400	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Best tablet over 8in, Awards 2013	iOS		●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x190x9
Apple iPad Air	400	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Refined and improved, the iPad Air is a stunning piece of technology	iOS 7		●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x170x8
Asus Eee Pad Transformer	380	09.11/GT	★★★★★	A competitive tablet with a keyboard dock	Android		●	10.1	1280x800	16/32	271x177x13
Asus Eee Pad Transformer Prime	500	07.12/FT	★★★★★	A slim and smart tablet that we love	Android		●	10.1	1280x800	16/32	181x263x8
Asus Transformer Pad Infinity	600	04.13/GT	★★★★★	A very capable iPad alternative and one of the best android tablets	Android			10.1	1900x1200	32/64	263x181x9
Blackberry PlayBook 16GB	400	09.11/GT	★★★★★	There's plenty on offer here, but lacks apps	QNX		●	7	1024x600	16/32/64	130x194x10
Dell XPS 10 32GB	340	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Not perfect but an appealing alternative to the usual suspects	Windows RT		●	10.1	1366x768	32/64	270x180x10
Google Nexus 7	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Best tablet up to £300, Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	Android	●	●	7	1280x800	16/32	199x120x11
Google Nexus 7 (2013)	200	01.14/ST	★★★★★	Best tablet up to 8in, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	Android	●	●	7	1920x1200	16/32	200x114x9
Google Nexus 10	319	01.13/FT	★★★★★	Great performance and price: a real iPad-botherer	Android		●	10	2560x1060	16/32	264x178x9
LG G Pad	260	01.14/ST	★★★★★	Looks the part but struggles against its price rivals	Android		●	8.3	1920x1200	16	216x127x8
Kobo Arc 16GB	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Not for music buffs but a great budget option nonetheless	Android			7	1280x800	16/32	190x120x10
Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1	450	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A great screen that's let down by a cluttered interface	Android		●	10.1	2500x1600	16/32/64	171x243x8
Samsung Galaxy Tab 2 7.0	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Find it for the right price and it's a capable all-rounder	Android		●	7	1024x600	8/16	190x120x10
Sony Xperia Tablet S	330	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Plenty of potential, but there are niggles	Android			9.4	1280x800	16/32	240x170x10
Sony Xperia Tablet Z	399	06.13/FT	★★★★★	Sony fans will love it, but there are tablets out there for less money	Android		●	10.1	1920x1200	16/32	172x266x69
Sony Xperia Tablet Z2	400	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Another solid effort, but doesn't do quite enough against the iPad	Android		●	10.1	1920x1200	16/32	172x266x64
Tesco Hudl	120	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Not flawless, but this is a superb budget tablet from Tesco	Android			7	1440x900	16	192x129x10

Preserve your battery

All that smartphone streaming and gaming comes at the price of battery juice. Here are some tips to stop your phone going belly-up before bedtime...



Auto brightness

Your smartphone's display taxes your battery life the most. 'Auto' mode lowers and adjusts the brightness level according to ambient light, saving power for when you really need it.

Bluetooth

If your smartphone has a power-saving or Airplane mode, use it. It'll turn off extraneous data and lower power consumption. If you don't want to completely disconnect yourself from the

outside world, turning off Bluetooth and wi-fi can also help if you don't need them: that way the device won't be constantly searching for networks when you're not connected.

Listen offline

If you're a Spotify premium user, download your favourite tunes to your portable device for offline listening. Streaming eats up battery power and could cost you money, too.

Pull, don't push

Set your email to be checked manually, rather than be pushed from the server end. You might have to check more regularly, but at least it'll be on your terms and you won't be draining the battery.

Nix the EQ

Equalisation presets use processing power – and therefore battery power – to work. So if you can live without them, then we urge you to do it – if only for sonic clarity.



Smartphones

Android	Offers great flexibility and innovation
Apple iOS	Fantastic ease of use; massive choice of quality apps
Windows	New kid on the block. Watch this space

The shortlist



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Apple iPhone 5S

"Finding a smartphone that innovates while still getting all the basics right isn't always as easy as you'd expect, but the iPhone 5s has nailed it."



Sony Xperia Z2

"The Z2 is one of the best phones money can buy. Is it the best Android can offer? Possibly. The Xperia Z2 is the one to beat, doing everything right. It's magnificent."



HTC One (M8)

"The HTC One (M8) is a resounding success, building on one of the best phones of last year and making it even better. We like this phone alot."

Also consider

Product	Tested	Verdict	OS	NFC	4G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (wxd, mm)
Apple iPhone 4S	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Former reigning smartphone, now replaced but still good	iOS		3.5	960x640	16/32/64	115x59x9
Apple iPhone 5S	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best smartphone, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	iOS	●	4.0	1136x640	16/32/64	124x59x8
Google Nexus 4	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A top performer and a brilliant realisation of Android power	Android		4.7	1280x768	8/16	134x69x9
Google Nexus 5	07.14/GT	★★★★★	A decent all-rounder but new rivals have bettered it	Android	●	4.95	1920x1080	16/32	138x69x9
HTC One	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Sets the bar high for smartphones in 2013	Android	●	4.7	1080x1920	32	137x68x9
HTC One (M8)	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Improves considerably on its predecessor. Does very little wrong	Android	●	5	1920x1080	32	146x71x9
HTC One Max	05.14/ST	★★★★★	A fine performer but could make better use of its bigger screen	Android	●	5.9	1920x1080	16/32	165x82x10
HTC One X+	01.13/ST	★★★★★	Well worth considering: good for music and a joy to use	Android		4.7	1280x720	32/64	134x70x9
HTC One XL	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Great for mobile media fans but its poor battery life just takes the edge off it	Android	●	4.7	1280x720	32	135x70x9
HTC 8S	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Capable and fun, if feature-light	Windows	●	4.7	800x480	4	121x63x10
LG Optimus 4X HD	01.13/ST	★★★★★	Not outstanding, but a worthy alternative to the best	Android		4.7	1280x720	16	132x68x9
LG Optimus L5 II	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Not a thrilling phone but the user experience is good	Android		4.0	800x433	4	118x62x9
LG G2	07.14/GT	★★★★★	A little outdated but still a worthy contender	Android	●	5.2	1920x1080	16/32	139x71x9
LG G3	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Has everything we liked about the G2 and then some	Android	●	5.5	1440x2560	16/32	146x75x9
LG G Flex	05.14/FT	★★★★★	All the pros of the G2, but with a low-res screen	Android	●	6	1280x720	32	161x82x8
Nokia Lumia 920	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A promising start for Nokia's flagship	Windows	●	4.5	1280x768	32	130x71x11
Nokia Lumia 925	09.13/FT	★★★★★	The best Windows Phone yet	Windows	●	4.5	1280x768	16/32	129x71x9
Nokia Lumia 1520	05.14/ST	★★★★★	Apps still disappoint but this is the best Windows Phone yet	Windows	●	6	1920x1080	32	163x85x9
Oppo N1	05.14/ST	★★★★★	Quirky and flexible, this is a great effort from a promising brand	Android	●	5.9	1920x1080	16/32	171x83x9
Samsung Galaxy Nexus	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Great in many ways but pipped by rivals for audio	Android		4.65	1280x720	16/32	136x68x9
Samsung Galaxy Note	07.12/ST	★★★★★	A hybrid between a smart phone and a tablet	Android		5.29	1280x800	16/32	147x83x10
Samsung Galaxy Note II	01.13/ST	★★★★★	Massive screen, massive battery, very tempting	Android		5.55	1280x720	16/32/64	151x81x9
Samsung Galaxy Note III	05.14/ST	★★★★★	The original phablet, updated and still the best	Android	●	5.7	1920x1080	32	151x80x8
Samsung Galaxy S II	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Still great but upped by the new kids on the block	Android		4.3	800x480	16/32/64	125x66x8
Samsung Galaxy S III	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Best smartphone, Awards 2012	Android		4.8	1280x720	16/32	137x71x9
Samsung Galaxy S4	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Better than its predecessor but not as good as its rivals	Android	●	5.0	1920x1080	16/32/64	137x70x8
Samsung Galaxy S5	07.14/GT	★★★★★	An improvement on the S4, but not radical enough	Android	●	5.1	1920x1080	16/32	142x73x8
Sony Ericsson Xperia Arc S	01.12/GT	★★★★★	An excellent addition to the market	Android		4.2	854x480	1	125x63x9
Sony Xperia S	07.12/ST	★★★★★	A real rival to the iPhone	Android		4.3	1280x720	32	128x64x11
Sony Xperia T	01.13/ST	★★★★★	A strong all-rounder for music and movie lovers	Android		4.55	1280x720	16	129x67x9
Sony Xperia Z	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A triumph for Sony – one capable of taking the fight to Google	Android	●	5	1920x1080	16	139x71x8
Sony Xperia Z1	03.14/FT	★★★★★	Sony fans will love it, a speedy, sleek and impressive smartphone	Android	●	5	1920x1080	16	144x74x9
Sony Xperia Z2	07.14/GT	★★★★★	The phone to beat in 2014. Outstanding	Android	●	5.2	1920x1080	16	147x73x8

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HDMI cables

Digital cables that carry both picture and sound. These carry control signals as well, so they can integrate the operation of components in your system.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Length as tested (m)	HDMI type
Up to £80					
Audioquest Pearl	23	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Best HDMI cable, Awards 2012	1 1.4
Cambridge Audio 500 (5m)	69	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A perfectly acceptable cable for the money	5 1.3a
Chord Company Supershield	50	10.10/GT	★★★★★	Still a class-leading cable, but now it's 1.4 too	1 1.3
Clearer Aud C-line HDMI (2m)	60	08.07/FT	★★★★★	Will improve even 1080p pictures, helping stability. Well worth the money	1 2
Kimber Kable HD-09	73	03.09/GT	★★★★★	Picture quality is up with the best and it creates a wide sound field	2 1.3
Philex Thor Flat HDMI	40	10.09/GT	★★★★★	A gutsy, well built HDMI cable.	1 1.3
Philex Thor HDMI/DVI kit	60	09.06/FT	★★★★★	A very decent cable for not much cash - you can't really go wrong	5 1.3
QED HDMI-P	50	11.08/FT	★★★★★	This award winning cable just got better	1 1.3
QED Performance HDMI	70	03.09/GT	★★★★★	Capable performer - finely balanced sound and a wonderfully rendered picture	3 1.3
QED Performance HDMI-e	35	03.11/FT	★★★★★	Perfectly good cable that just falls down in its pricing	1 1.4
QED Perf. HDMI-e S/speed	60	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Communicates a superb and natural colour balance and virtually noise-free images	2 1.4
QED Profile HDMI	25	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Now with 1.4 status, this is still a worthy cable	1 1.4
QED Qunex HDMI-P (5M)	75	09.08/GT	★★★★★	Fantastic picture quality mated with a dynamic and powerful sound	5 1.3
ThatCable HDMI	5	10.09/FT	★★★★★	Brilliant way to spend a fiver - will give rivals up to £20 something to think about	1.5 1.3
ThatCable HDMI (5m)	10	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A no-brainer for those on a tight budget	5 1.3a
Vivanco Powire	45	10.10/GT	★★★★★	A fine cable that's worth seeking out	1.5 1.3
Vivanco Sound and Image	30	11.09/GT	★★★★★	A respectable upgrade, it provides greater fidelity in sound and vision over budget cables	2 1.3

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AudioQuest FLX-SLIP 14/4 Cable



QED Performance Digital Cable



Supra USB 2.0 Cable



Merlin Tarantula MK6 Mains Cable

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HDMI CABLES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Length as tested (m)	HDMI type
Wireworld Chroma (Miami)	60	10.09/GT	★★★★★	1	1.3
Wireworld Chroma 6	60	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	1	1.4
Wireworld Island 6	46	10.10/GT	★★★★★	1.4	2.0
£80 and above					
Audioquest Cinnamon	80	01.11/FT	★★★★★	2	1.4
Audioquest Forest	80	06.10/GT	★★★★★	5	1.4
Audioquest HDMI-1	180	09.08/GT	★★★★★	3	1.3
Audioquest HDMI-X	95	03.09/GT	★★★★★	3	1.3
Atlas HDMI	160	07.07/GT	★★★★★	7	1.3
Black Rhodium Coral HDMI	100	10.06/FT	★★★★★	4	1.3
Chord Company Active	115	10.09/GT	★★★★★	1.5	1.3
Chord Co. Active Silver + HDMI	95	01.11/FT	★★★★★	1	1.4
Chord Co. Supershield (5m)	90	06.10/GT	★★★★★	5	1.3a
Ecosse Picture Perfect Ultra	110	09.08/GT	★★★★★	5	1.3
Ecosse Picture Perfect Ultra +	169	09.08/GT	★★★★★	5	1.3
QED Qunex HDMI-P (7m)	85	07.07/GT	★★★★★	7	1.0
QED Reference	125	06.10/GT	★★★★★	5	1.3a
QED Signature HDMI	150	10.09/GT	★★★★★	1	1.3
Supra HF100 HDMI (8m)	112	08.06/GT	★★★★★	8	1.0
van den Hul Flat 180	90	10.09/GT	★★★★★	2	1.3b
van den Hul Flat HDMI (3m)	105	03.09/GT	★★★★★	3	1.3
van den Hul Ultimate	300	10.08/FT	★★★★★	1	1.3
Vivanco SHQ Ultra	80	06.10/FT	★★★★★	1.2	1.4
Wireworld Chroma 5 HDMI (7m)	109	07.07/GT	★★★★★	7	1.0

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Digital interconnects

USB	An increasingly common way to connect your computer to your hi-fi
Optical	Digital cable that uses light to transmit sound between components
Coaxial	Sends audio via an electrical signal between your hi-fi and AV kit

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Length tested (m)
Up to £50					
Audioquest Forest USB 1.5	25	11.10/FT	★★★★★	USB	1.5
Atlas Fibre Optic	32	06.09/GT	★★★★★	Optical	1
Profigold PROI2102	30	03.11/FT	★★★★★	USB	2
QED Performance Coaxial	30	10.08/GT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
QED Performance Graphite	40	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Optical	1
Supra USB 2.0	29	11.12/GT	★★★★★	USB	1
True Colours Industries Coral	35	06.09/GT	★★★★★	Optical	1
Wireworld Nova 6	40	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Optical	1
£50 and above					
Audioquest Cinnamon	60	11.12/FT	★★★★★	USB	1.5
Atlas Equator Optical	50	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Optical	1
Chord Company Optichord	51	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Optical	1
Chord Co. Prodac Pro Digital	70	05.11/FT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
Clearer Audio Copper-line 75	97	Aw.08/FT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
Clearer Aud. Silverline Optimus	185	09.09/GT	★★★★★	Co-axial	0.5
Ecosse The Director SE	89	09.09/GT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
Furutech Formula 2	55	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	USB	1.2
Kimber USB	52	11.12/GT	★★★★★	USB	1
QED Qunex 75 Signature	80	09.09/FT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
QED U Play (Bluetooth)	65	05.10/FT	★★★★★	Bluetooth	10
Vertere Pulse D-Fi	70	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	USB	1
Wireworld Ultraviolet 5 USB	50	08.09/FT	★★★★★	USB	2



Analogue interconnects

These carry audio signal from source to amplifier, or between pre-amplifier and power amplifier. Some use a shielding construction to reduce external electrical interference.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	RCA phono	3.5mm-to-RCA	XLR (balanced)	Length tested (m)
Up to £50							
Atlas Element Integra (1m)	45	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Best analogue interconnect, Awards 2013	●		1
Black Rhodium Twist	36	06.14/GT	★★★★★	We wouldn't recommend this cable for bright-sounding systems but it's a decent option for the money	●		1
Clear. Aud. C-line Alpha One	30	12.11/FT	★★★★★	A bargain interconnect that should be on your shortlist	●		1
Ecosse Conductor CA1.2	49	06.11/GT	★★★★★	Excellent with detail - a good all-rounder	●		1
Ecosse The Composer	37	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Lacks excitement, but a lovely design with warm and punchy sounds	●		0.8
Merlin Mozart	40	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Open and exuberant, if lacking in warmth	●		1
QED Performance Audio 2	40	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Agile, fun and nuanced: would do well in pretty much any system	●		1
QED Profile	18	06.11/GT	★★★★★	At the top of the first upgrade tree	●	●	1
Wireworld Luna	37	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Excellent with subtlety and dynamics: should be on any interconnect shortlist	●		1
Wireworld Luna 6	36	12.09/GT	★★★★★	Looks strange, but delivers a great refined sound	●		1
Wireworld Luna 7	40	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Delivers a confident and likable sound. A great option at this price	●		1
£50 and above							
Atlas Equator Integra	75	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A recommended second-upgrade cable	●	●	1
AudioQuest Red River	85	06.14/GT	★★★★★	What it lacks in smoothness and subtlety, it makes up for in scale and dynamics	●		1
Chord Co. Chameleon Plus	125	11.11/FT	★★★★★	New plugs make these even more essential	●		1
Chord Company Cobra VEE 3	95	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Clear and detailed, this cable brings a very driven and focused feel to music	●		1
Chord Company Indigo Plus	995	05.09/FT	★★★★★	It's genius in an interconnect - but you need the right system	●		1

ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		RCA phono 3.5mm-to-RCA XLR (balanced) Length tested (m)
Chord Crimson Vee3	50	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A nice, easy-going cable that's a little too restrained	1
Ecosse The Baton MkII	104	08.08/GT	★★★★★	Although there's much to admire, the Baton MkII can struggle to gel sounds	0.8
Furutech Alpha Line-1	80	03.11/FT	★★★★★	A cable for owners of midrange systems to get very excited by - very good indeed	1
QED J2P	50	12.09/FT	★★★★★	Fast and agile 3.5mm-RCA cable	1.5
QED Reference Audio 40	85	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Reassuring build quality from a cable that brings fantastic depth and dimension	1
QED Reference Audio J2P	50	12.09/FT	★★★★★	Clean sounding and packed with detail	1.5
QED Signature Audio S	190	09.09/FT	★★★★★	QED's new flagship interconnect offers great dynamics and punch	1
van den Hul The Bay C5	85	06.14/GT	★★★★★	For bright-sounding systems The Bay could be the antidote	1
van den Hul The Name	60	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Energy and fun trump ultimate precision	0.8
van den Hul The Wave	100	01.09/FT	★★★★★	The Wave has a formidable array of talents and is one of the best cables at this kind of money	1
van den Hul The Well	100	06.11/GT	★★★★★	An ideal booster for thin sounding kit	1
Wireworld Oasis 6	130	06.11/GT	★★★★★	A truly splendid cable for kit worth £800-£1000	1



Mains products

IEC _____ Usually a three-pin connector used in most hi-fi (and kettles)
 Figure of 8 _____ Small, two-pin connector. Tends to be used on lower-priced products
 Blocks and conditioners _____ Multi-plug units, some of which attempt to filter noise out of the mains

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Cable Block Conditioner Figure of 8 (2-pin) IEC (3-pin) Number of sockets
Up to £100					
Clear. Aud. C-Line Alpha One	25	11.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine first stage mains cable upgrade	n/a
Clear. Aud. C-L Alpha P/HUB	90	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Makes a noticeable difference, but not the last word in cohesion	6
Ecosse Big Orange MK2+	60	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Provides worthwhile gains in performance – and plenty of them	n/a
Lindy 6-way	40	12.08/FT	★★★★★	For just £40, this conditioner is a bona fide system booster	6
Merlin Tarantula Figure '8'	40	01.11/GT	★★★★★	Incredible bang for your buck from Merlin	n/a
Merlin Tarantula MK6	40	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Best mains cable, Awards 2010. A good tweak for a hi-fi or AV system	n/a
Russ Andrews Powerkord-8	75	01.11/GT	★★★★★	An ideal choice for a simple upgrade	n/a
Tacima CS929	40	08.06/FT	★★★★★	Explicitly illustrates the gains a modest outlay can achieve	6
£100 and above					
Audioquest NRG 1.5	100	01.11/GT	★★★★★	A lively and precise cable that does much right	n/a
Atlas Eos	147	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Well-balanced, delivering impressive depth and scale	n/a
Clearer Audio Silver-line	150	07.06/FT	★★★★★	Capable of truly astonishing improvements	n/a
Furutech G-320AG	165	02.11/GT	★★★★★	A pricey but worthwhile addition to your set-up	n/a
R Andrews Ref P/Kord W350i	232	05.09/GT	★★★★★	If you have components costing £2000 upwards, consider this cable	n/a
R Andrews Sig P/Kord W350i	275	11.06/GT	★★★★★	Top mains cable that will really get a system purring	n/a
Russ Andrews X2	200	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Effective but suffers from a lack of sockets	2
Supra MD-06	150	07.08/FT	★★★★★	It adds clarity, but some might not like the leaner sound	6
van den Hul M/Server Hybrid	150	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Not boring or dull, but it's just too relaxed and safe sounding	n/a
Wireworld Stratus 52	100	08.10/FT	★★★★★	One of the best mains cables for this money	n/a

Tacima™ CS929 Award winning mains conditioner

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION

★★★★★
Aug 2006

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2008



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Speaker cables

These carry the audio signal from your amplifier to your speakers. Bi-wiring uses two runs of cables per speaker and can lead to improvements in the speakers' performance.

The shortlist



Wireworld Luna 7

£6.50/m



Talk Electronics Talk 3

£4/m



QED Revelation

£15/m

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	
Up to £10/m				
Audioquest FLX-SLIP 14/4	5.80	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Best Speaker Cable, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Audioquest G4	4.50	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Loses out when it comes to the weight and solidity of its sound. Exciting and articulate nonetheless
Audioquest X2	5	07.11/GT	★★★★★	A perfectly smooth and even-handed sounding performer
Atlas Equator 2.0 OFC	6	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Allows for an impressive sense of weight and power, but doesn't quite match its rivals
Chord Co. Carnival Silv. Screen	6	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Slightly overtaken by newer rivals, but still a mighty fine choice
Cl. Audio C-line Alpha Shield	5	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Restrained dynamics hold this otherwise good cable back from the full five stars
Ecosse CS 2.3	5	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Balanced, nuanced and an easy listen, but a little subdued
Ecosse CS 4.2	3	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A decent cable that needs a touch more punch

Biwire

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WHAT HI-FI?
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★★★★★
July 2008



QED Silver Anniversary XT

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
March 2014



Wireworld Luna 7 Speaker Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
March 2014



Van Den Hul The Clearwater

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
July 2008



Atlas Hyper 2.0 Speaker Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2013
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
ACCESSORIES
AUDIOQUEST FLX-SLIP 14/4



AudioQuest FLX-SLIP 14/4 Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
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CABLES & ACCESSORIES
BEST WIREWORLD
CHORD COMPANY
CARNIVAL SILVERSCREEN



Chord Carnival Silverscreen Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
March 2014



QED Ruby Anniversary Evolution

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
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Recommendation



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SPEAKER CABLES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	
QED Ruby Anniversary	6	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Rich and detailed but lacking in rhythm and dynamics
QED Ruby Anniversary Evolution	6	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Rich, detailed, energetic and clean. A great cable
QED Silver Anniversary XT	5	07.08/GT	★★★★★	Our budget cable Best Buy for three years on the trot
QED X-TC	4	09.10/FT	★★★★★	A great budget cable that's able to hold its own
QED XT Evolution	6	10.09/FT	★★★★★	QED is now a twin threat in the sub-£10/m speaker cable market
Talk Electronics Talk 3	4	07.11/GT	★★★★★	An essential first cable upgrade
Wireworld Luna 7	6.50	03.14/GT	★★★★★	The all-round ability of this cable means it should sit well with a wide range of systems
Wireworld The Stream 16/2	5	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Still a cracking cable, but losing out to better competition
Wireworld Stream 7	6	11.13/GT	★★★★★	If you're a fan of detail then you should definitely consider the Stream 7

Biwire

£10/m and above

Atlas Hyper 2.0	15	07.08/GT	★★★★★	If your system warrants this kind of cable, you won't be disappointed
Atlas Mavros (5m)	2290	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Pair with an extravagant system and get excellent performance
Chord Company Signature	125	01.07/GT	★★★★★	One of the most effective upgrades you will ever hear if you own expensive kit
Ecosse MS2.4	50	01.08/FT	★★★★★	A massively detailed cable that reveals subtleties with refinement
Kimber 4VS	12	04.10/GT	★★★★★	An accomplished performer with an expressive sound
QED Revelation	15	04.10/GT	★★★★★	A fine cable that should be on your audition list
QED Silver Anniv. XT Biwire	10	10.06/GT	★★★★★	A clear class-leader with exceptional sonic transparency on display
van den Hul CS122	17	04.10/GT	★★★★★	Still great with subtleties, but rivals have caught up
van den Hul The Clearwater	10	03.14/GT	★★★★★	A cable with an impressive level of detail and clarity



Speaker stands

Many stands are hollow and can be filled with sand or other similar heavy materials. This is to increase mass and dampening and the sonic benefit is tighter bass – although too much of it can be counter-productive and end up deadening the sound.

Theshortlist



Quadrapire QV60
£250



AWARD WINNER
Custom Design FS104 Signature
Awards 2013: Best Speaker Stands



Q Acoustics Concept 20 speaker stands
£200

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Fillable	Finishes
Up to £5000							
Apollo A3/6	80	07.10/GT	★★★★★	Spacious and well-focused fillable stands	60x23x26	●	2
Atacama HMS2	200	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Retain detail and cohesion with these solid stands	60x31x31	●	1
Atacama Moseco 6	120	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Weighty and dynamic stands that work well with a variety of speakers	60x24x28	●	4
Custom rc60 Deluxe	125	10.07/FT	★★★★★	This bespoke service has made a fine pair stands	60x20x25		5
Custom Design FS103	160	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A good pair of stands but rivals offer better overall performance	61x22x26	●	4
Custom Design FS104 Sig.	200	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Best speaker stands, Awards 2013	62x16x18	●	4
Custom Design RS300	90	03.07/GT	★★★★★	Minimal design, a thoroughly appealing listen	61x22x26	●	2
Custom Design RS302	120	11.06/FT	★★★★★	Plenty of detail & clarity especially with vocals	61x22x26	●	3
Hi Fi Racks Podium T5 IV	150	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Ideal for those with forward sounding speakers	50x24x30		2
Hi Fi Racks Podium Slimline	120	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A comfortable listening experience that's marred by some less than appealing fuzziness	60x15x21		5
Mission Stance	100	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Will do a fine job with £200-£400 speakers	58x21x28	●	3
Partington ANSA 60	150	09.11/GT	★★★★★	They remain fine stands - but no longer outstanding value	60x23x28	●	1
Part. D'nought Broadside	300	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Deliver wide ranging improvements to sound	60x23x28		1
Partington Heavi	399	03.07/FT	★★★★★	If you demand the best, buy these	60x30x21		1
Part. Super Dreadnought	180	03.07/GT	★★★★★	Best £100+ speaker stands in Awards 2007	60x16x17	●	1
Q Acoustics 20 speaker stands	200	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Clever construction and great performance makes these stands ideal support for all types of speakers	66.5x39x24		2
Soundstyle Z2	70	11.08/FT	★★★★★	Best sub-£100 speaker stand in Awards 2007	57x17x23	●	2



AV & hi-fi racks

Many racks are built to be expanded. Several manufacturers offer you a number of shelving options for ready-made products, but what if you want to get more kit in a few years? We like having the option to build upwards at a later date.

The shortlist



Hi-Fi Racks Podium
£460



AWARD WINNER
Atacama Eris Eco 5.0

Awards 2013: Best Equipment Support



Atacama Evoque Eco 60-40
£450

Also consider

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Modular Shelves	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Finishes	
Up to £500							
Alphason Finewood 1100	300	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Looks great and provides sturdy support for your kit	3	51x110x45	1
Alphason ST560/3	260	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A well isolated modular design that does much right	4	65x56x59	2
Atacama Equinox AVI	380	05.07/FT	★★★★★	Neat solution to mount a TV above AV electronics	2	110x106x60	3
Atacama Equinox	339	11.09/GT	★★★★★	Still a good rack, but newer rivals offer more	2-5	Variable 60x55	3
Atacama Evoque Eco 60-40	450	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A well-designed rack that allows your music to sound its best	3	Variable 60x40	3
Atacama Eris Eco 5.0	460	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Best equipment support, Awards 2013	4	70x59x56	4
Audiophile Base Stratabase	360	01.08/FT	★★★★★	It isn't cheap but justifies the cost	1	0.4x43x36	2
Custom Design Concept AV	350	04.07/GT	★★★★★	Looks and sounds excellent, plus four colour options	3	60x101x40	4
Custom Design Icon Sig.	330	10.06/FT	★★★★★	A great rack for an upgrade to tame unruly systems	4	42x75x66	11
Custom Design Milan 4	470	11.09/GT	★★★★★	Small and well made, but lacks subtlety	4	59x57x40	5
Custom Design Milan LCD3	350	09.08/FT	★★★★★	A stylish addition to Custom Design's catalogue	3	42x77x40	4
Custom Design Tokyo Hi-Fi 4	430	08.11/GT	★★★★★	A lightweight rack with immense potential	4	64x58x40	3
Hi Fi Racks Podium	460	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Best equipment support, Awards 2011	3	62x60x40	1
HiFi Racks Podium SL Ak. XL	260	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Easy to build and a very good deal for the good price	3	Variable 79.5x40	5
Hi Fi Racks Podium Slimline	350	03.13/FT	★★★★★	A simple rack design with pretty decent results	4	Variable 55x40	1
Quadraspire Q4evo	380	11.09/GT	★★★★★	A solid, cohesive and supremely affordable rack	4	Variable 59x39.5	8
Sonorous PL2200	280	09.08/FT	★★★★★	Classy looks and features	2	82x95x44	6
Target CL470	299	06.10/GT	★★★★★	For pure performance, this is a winner at this price	4	82x50x55	2
Techlink Ovid	200	04.07/GT	★★★★★	Perfect for a minimalist system in a trendy flat	3	32x95x40	4
£500-£1000							
Atacama Elite Eco 12.0	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Offers solid performance and flexibility	5	Variable 115x32	1
BDI Valera 9724	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Complicated to assemble but the results make it worthwhile	3	54x112x52	3
Hi Fi Racks Akomer XL	930	09.12/FT	★★★★★	A corner-friendly alternative to the Podium	3	45x110x40	6
Optimum Avion 8925	999	06.10/GT	★★★★★	Heavyweight, but likeable and good with sonics	3	57x127x56	3
Quadraspire Q4 Bamboo	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	An all round performer. Easy to set up and excellent results	4	Variable 59x40	1
Quadraspire QAVM (Oak)	540	04.07/GT	★★★★★	Solid and rigid, delivers a fine performance	3	50x109x50	8
Quadraspire QAVX	560	12.07/FT	★★★★★	Supports a great big telly and expansive system	2	Variable 163x52	8
Quadraspire Sunoko Vent T	800	11.09/GT	★★★★★	A first-rate rack, that highlights subtleties	4	Variable 59x47	6
£1000 and more							
Audiophile Base StarBase	1180	12.06/GT	★★★★★	Exceptional, spectacular results with high end hi-fi	3	65x59x52	3
Hi Fi Racks Podium XL	1050	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A great performer: plenty of weight and dynamics	3	53x140x40	1
Spectral Closed CL1050	1100	07.07/FT	★★★★★	Fantastic build and style, plus numerous options	2	31x101x53	17
Spectral Closed CL1552	1800	07.07/GT	★★★★★	Awesome style and decent abilities - a great rack	6	Variable 53x16	1

"For sound-only use we still prefer a dedicated hi-fi rack, but if you want something that can take a large TV too, then the Alphason Finewood 1100 is a great option"

March 2013



Headphone amps

The headphone outputs on most products are usually afterthoughts and have had little care taken in trying to make them sound good. A dedicated headphone amp is a must if you want the best headphone sound.

Our recommendations

Our recommendations					Line level in Outputs
Product	£	Tested	Verdict		
Up to £1500					
Beyerdynamic A1	975	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Best headphone amplifier £500+, Awards 2010. A formidable combo when partnered with T1 headphones	2 1
Chord Electronics Toucan	800	10.10/FT	★★★★★	A headphone amp with built in DAC that's worth a punt	2 2
Creek OBH-21SE	280	04.09/GT	★★★★★	Perfectly pleasant but it could do with more bite	2 2
Edwards Audio HA1	280	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Packs a punch but not that refined	2 1
FIIO E7	65	03.11/FT	★★★★★	One of the most cost-effective ways to improve headphone sound from a computer	1 2
Lehmann Black Cube Linear	750	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Deeply impressive device given the right system	1 1
Lehmann Rhineland	400	04.09/GT	★★★★★	Best headphone amplifier £300-£500, Awards 2010. Its user-friendly sound makes this a very wise buy	2 2
Meridian Prime	1200	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A top-class headphone amp and a talented preamp to boot	2 4
Musical Fidelity V-CAN II	120	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Does enough right to be worth serious consideration	1 3
Pathos Aurium	850	08.13/FT	★★★★★	This amplifier is a top class choice	4 2



Phono amps

Dedicated units tend to sound better than the circuits integrated into amplifiers. Higher priced options usually allow for electrical optimisation for your cartridge, thus producing better results.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	MM	MC	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £3000							
Cambridge Audio 651P	120	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	1	2.5x8x11
Creek Audio OBH-15	240	02.09/GT	★★★★★	●	●	1	6x10x15
Graham Slee Gr- Amp 2 Comm.	160	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	1	7x10x25
Leema Elements	495	03.10/FT	★★★★★	●	●	2	5x11x10
Lehmann Black Cube	325	02.09/GT	★★★★★	●	●	1	5x11x11
Pro-Ject Phono Box S	120	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	2	7x10x14
Musical Fidelity V-LPS II	160	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	1	5x11x11
Rega Fono Mini A2D	85	03.12/FT	★★★★★	●	●	1	6x18x25
Rega Fono MM MK2	200	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	2	7x43x33



Cartridges

Moving magnet (MM) These produce a higher output, giving your phono stage an easier time
Moving coil (MC) Can produce more detail, but is more demanding of your phono stage

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	MM/MC	Tracking weight (g)
Up to £500					
Goldring 2100	92	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.7
Goldring 2500	224	03.09/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.7
Grado Prestige Silver	115	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.5
Nagaoka MP110	89	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.8
Ortofon 2M Black	460	04.11/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.5
Ortofon 2M Bronze	275	03.09/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.5
Ortofon 2M Red	80	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.8
Rega Exact	195	03.09/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.75
Roksan Corus Silver	400	01.11/FT	★★★★★	MM	1.9



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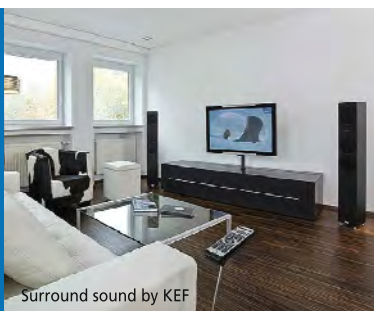
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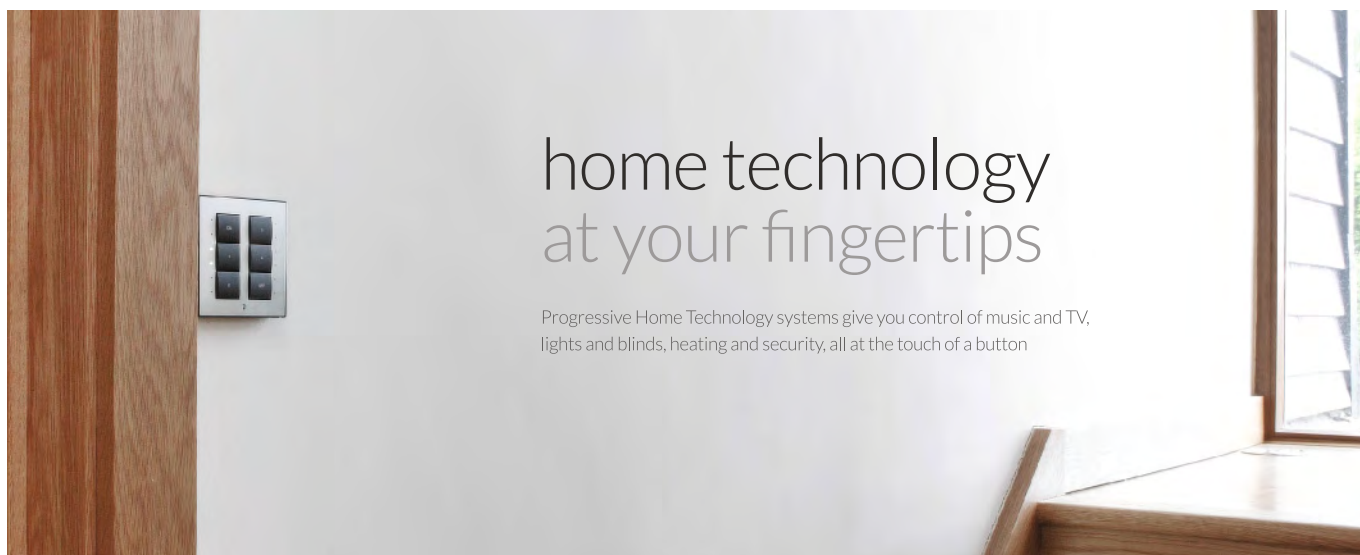


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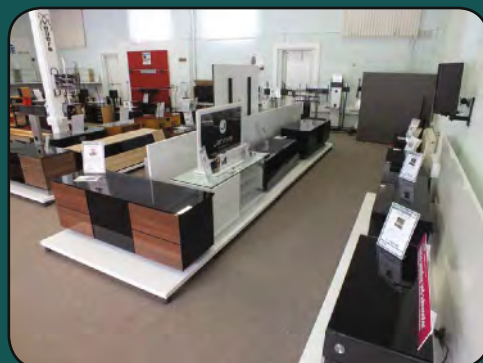


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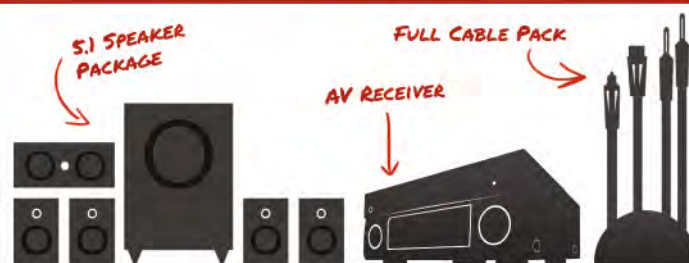
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doing. Stereo information was particularly vivid, and the Planar 3 scored heavily in its ability to lucidly present instruments over a wide arc and keep everything in place. Whereas the AR turntable tended to become slightly muddled as the music grew in complexity, the Rega always retained its focus.

In terms of dynamics the Rega was equally good, and the sound always had plenty of projection and presence. This dynamic quality, coupled with its vivid stereo

quickly, and the sheer analysis on complex material was outstanding for a deck of this price.

With performance this good it seems almost churlish to look for points to criticise, but there is an aspect of the Rega in its latest guise that may concern some. As I've indicated, the basic sound produced is impressively clean and very detailed, yet I sometimes got the impression that the music was being taken apart or over-separated. The constituent parts were rendered with exceptional clarity without coming together as a meaningful whole.

This is a very subjective aspect, and if you were to hear a Rega and disagree I'd raise no objection. But try it on a flowing piece of music with a light, easy beat. At its worst the Rega can lack swing so that musical phrases fail to follow on from one to the next in a natural, coherent manner.

The Logic Tempo suffers slightly when compared with the Rega, specifically in areas like stereo presentation, dynamics and clarity.

this being very noticeable if the Tempo is listened to after it.

But are they really 'faults'? In the sense that the Logic loses information slightly, yes. The Rega is definitely more precise and has superior clarity. Yet, whereas the Rega produces an end result that is slightly less than the sum of its parts, the Tempo is, arguably, just the opposite.

Having had this deck at home before, the quality I've always liked has been its easy-to-get-along-with combination of sharpness and clarity coupled with warmth and naturalness. Leaving aside comparisons, I find myself able to accept the sound of this deck very quickly. Its faults (for my ears at least) are very easy to come to terms with and somehow I find myself accepting it with little or no difficulty.

Speaking from the standpoint of someone who spends most of his time with costlier turntables than the Rega and Logic, I feel that the former apes many of the qualities to be found in the best designs without



The Rega — sound with plenty of projection and presence



The new RB-300 arm: improves the Planar 3

Rega	
Construction	■ ■ ■ ■
Ease of use	■ ■ ■ ■
Sound quality	■ ■ ■ ■ □
VALUE FOR MONEY	■ ■ ■ ■
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RB-300 arm's engineering; value, sound quality <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Can sound slightly charmless but that's all	

When Rega introduced its Planar 3 turntable back in 1977 few would have predicted it would be around almost four decades later. Yet it is, and it's arguably more competitive than ever.

Compare the original with the current-generation RP3 and they look pretty much the same. Don't be fooled, though; Rega hasn't just been twiddling its corporate thumbs all these years.

The most obvious change was the introduction of the (then) revolutionary RB300 tone arm in 1983. This arm sent a shock wave through the turntable world with its one-piece arm tube design and aggressively competitive price.

Although less obviously, pretty much every aspect of the turntable has been upgraded over the years. We've seen a lighter, more rigid plinth, improved motor and various tweaks to that arm.

Despite the raft of changes, the 3's appeal remains the same as ever — it's a great-sounding, superbly engineered package with a sensible price tag.

The turntable's simplicity makes it a breeze to set-up and use, though the lack of proper isolation (bar a trio of rubber feet) means you have to take a great deal of care over positioning.

It's worth taking the trouble though. Once it's up and running the latest Rega 3 remains a class leader. It delivers a combination of detail, dynamics and rhythmic precision the competition still struggles to match.

The current 3 has won our Product of the Year Award three years running. The previous version picked up a further four awards. Can this turntable be considered one of hi-fi's true greats? We think so.



Visually, it's changed little, but the '3' has had many upgrades

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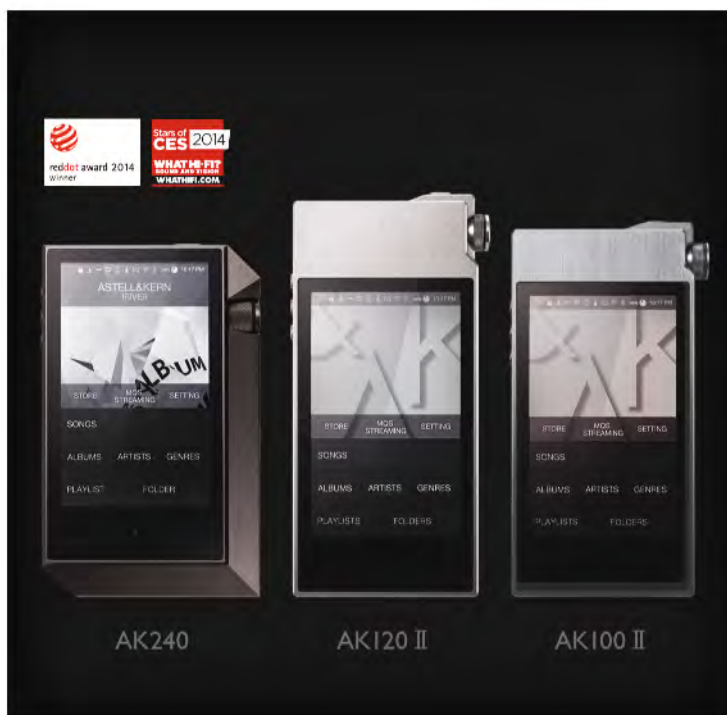
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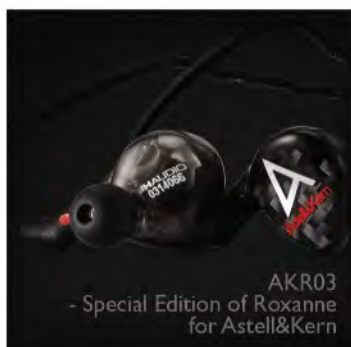
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