

# WHAT HI-FI?

## SOUND AND VISION

THE MOST TRUSTED TECH REVIEWS IN THE WORLD

AUGUST 2015

# HI-FI PHONES

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IS ABOUT TO  
CHANGE  
EVERYTHING.  
AGAIN**



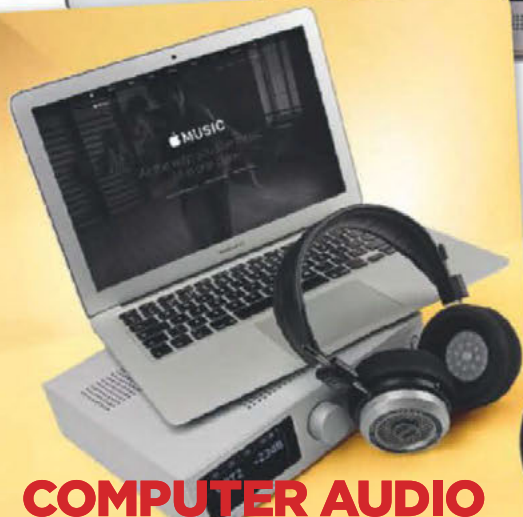
### MOVIE MAGIC

From £6k projectors  
to £100 Blu-ray players



### COMPUTER AUDIO MADE SIMPLE

Your easy set-up guide



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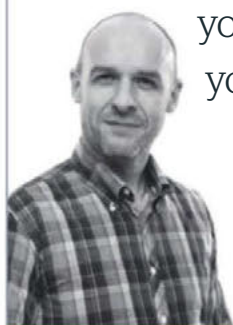
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# We know just how to face the future

Canute couldn't hold back the tide, and you've as much chance of holding back Tidal, or Spotify, or Apple Music, Qobuz, Deezer or any streaming service you care to mention. Music, the music industry and everything around it has changed - there's no reason to dismiss that as a Bad Thing, because getting your fix of digital convenience needn't mean the end of proper sound quality. That's what a lot of this issue is about.

Take a look at the **supertest of eight smartphones (p30)**, for instance - there's some great high-res audio performance to be found. Then flick forward to the **what, why and where of DACS (p67)** to find out how best to maximise your sound. Then peruse our **brilliant guide to computer-based audio (p55)** to fully explore your digital music options. And then you'll be ready to dive right in.



*Simon*

Simon Lucas, editor

## My products of the month



### Cambridge CXA60

First test p14

The new range of Cambridge stereo kit continues the cat/pigeons interface



### Sony VPL-VW300ES

Head-to-head p43

Huge 4K images for a huge £6k outlay. I would if I could, though

# WHAT HI-FI?

## Reviews you can trust

### Experience & heritage



We've been hard at work helping the world discover the best in hi-fi and home cinema for more than 37 years, and have getting on for 100 years of reviewing

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

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## NEXT MONTH

### SUPERTEST TELEVISIONS

The right brands, the right size, and all at the right price

### GROUP TESTS TURNTABLES

Affordable record players for your inner hipster

### AV AMPLIFIERS

Thrilling surround-sound for £500. Or even less

### THE LOWDOWN HEADPHONES

How to choose them, what to spend

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"4K has made its way  
onto projectors and  
is alive and kicking"



## Our products of the month



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**First test p24**

"Living proof that 4K looks  
superb on a small screen.  
You heard it here first"

Becky Roberts Staff writer



**Tannoy Kensington GR**

**Temptation p70**

"Huge speakers with retro  
styling and plenty of  
sonic charm"

Ketan Bharadia Technical editor



**Samsung Galaxy S6**

**Supertest p41**

"A host of great multimedia  
features makes this phone  
from Samsung easily one  
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Ced Yuen News editor



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Kashfia Kabir First Tests editor



**Sony STR-DN860**

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keep going from strength to  
strength, and this £400 amp  
is certainly proof of that"

Verity Burns Multimedia editor



**Burmester MC151**

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"Where high-end meets  
high-tech: the Burmester  
is a seriously covetable  
piece of kit"

Andy Madden Content editor

## Supertest Smartphones

"No matter which phone you go  
for, one thing is for sure: sound  
and vision on the go is about to  
get a lot better"



## What's in this issue...

**06 First Tests** Cambridge returns to the test rooms with its exciting CXA60 stereo amplifier, Chord's 2Qute is a chunky DAC wonder and we get our hands on Sony's first AV receiver of 2015, the STR-DN860.

**30 Supertest: smartphones** Phones are better and faster than ever with a wealth of multimedia features at their disposal. The eight phones we've gathered fulfil that remit, but to be the best smartphone on the market we need one that's a master of all trades.

**44 Blu-ray players** Ultra HD players are on the way, but for those who can't justify the expense there are bargains to be had in the budget area as these efforts from LG, Panasonic, Samsung and Sony attest.

**55 How to...** tune your audio network system. We take pride in our CD collection but hi-fi is on a steady march towards digital. We guide you through the what, why and how of creating a networked system.



**First tests**  
"This is an amplifier  
that puts musical  
enjoyment high on  
its list of priorities"



## Insider Apple Music p26

We assess Apple's move into the music streaming sector and how it intends to shake the market up

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Save up to 50% on the shop price  
Subscribe to *What Hi-Fi?* Sound and Vision and get the second year free

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A glimpse into *What Hi-Fi?* past  
Samsung has come along way since the days of its SGH-i900 smartphone

### Test Blu-ray players

"With a Blu-ray player around every corner, picking out the better buy is no easy task"



**60 Projectors** It's a head-to-head between Epson and Sony. At £6000 they're not cheap, but for the ultimate home cinema experience, look no further.

**67 DACs** Everything you always wanted to know about DACs but were afraid to ask. We cover the ins-and-outs of what's become a crucial piece of hi-fi.

**70 Temptations** This month features a retro pair of floorstanders from Tannoy while Burmester drops by with its very appealing Musiccenter 151 CD streamer.

**76 Playlist** The Wachowskis' *Jupiter Ascending* spreads its wings on Blu-ray, Everything Everything want to *Get To Heaven* with their third album and *True Detective* returns with a clean slate for series two.



### Features

"The way we listen to music is evolving, and it's about time you evolved with it"



**Temptation**  
"Something of a gentle giant, balancing finesse with force in a mighty appealing way"

## New Buyer's Guide... two mags in one!

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1500 products rated p83

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

### Find out...

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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? TEST WINNER

If it's one of our winners, you know it's top quality

For a full list of specifications and other useful info, visit [whathifi.com](http://whathifi.com)

# Exclusive reviews of the latest kit

# FIRST TESTS

**MORE  
FIRST TESTS**



**Jamo C103**  
**£850 Page 11**  
Eye-catching design and immaculate build from these speakers



**Chord 2Qute**  
**£995 Page 23**  
Another standalone DAC from Chord – another winner



**Panasonic TX-40CX680**  
**£700 Page 24**  
4K finds its way onto a 40in screen – and looks at home there

**Want more?**  
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Those twin antennae signal an obvious upgrade, but there's also an upgraded power supply



**EXCLUSIVE**

## High-quality, low-price AV amp is a sonic boon

**Sony STR-DN860 | AV amplifier | £400**

Sony's UK AV amplifier offering has had a more focused approach than many of its competitors over the past few years.

Concentrating on two key price points – £400 and £500 – it's done away with big, complicated line-ups to focus on the mainstream, and what a triumph it's been.

In a few short years, it has become the king of affordable home cinema amps, turning the tables on a rather hit-and-miss few years before to pick up five-star reviews and Product of the Year Awards with ease.

Can that momentum continue with the STR-DN860? You bet.

### Beneath the surface

While things may all look very familiar on the outside, things on the inside have seen some tweaks in an attempt to improve on last year's performance.

For a start there's an upgraded power supply to minimise noise, and a new pre-amp chip that sees the input level, volume control and pre-amplifier stages individually grounded in order to minimise interference and stabilise the amplification process. Surface-level changes include the dual antenna on the back panel, which offer support for both Bluetooth and wi-fi (2.4GHz and 5GHz) simultaneously, while high-resolution music playback is much

more inclusive now compared with that of the DN850. DSD 5.6MHz (2ch) and FLAC 24-bit/192kHz (5ch) files get USB and network support, while DSD 2.8MHz (5ch) and WAV 24-bit/192kHz (7ch) files get the full house – playable via USB, HDMI and over your home network.

As with last year, the STR-DN860 is a 7.1-channel amp, offering 95W per channel (into 6 ohms, 2ch driven) with five HDMI ins and one HDMI out. Two of the inputs are optimised for audio, for getting the best from CD or Blu-ray players for example, while another offers 4K upscaling and passthrough with HDCP 2.2, meaning it'll work all the way up to 4K/60fps. The single HDMI out packs HDCP 2.2 too.

As with last year, legacy connections are covered by four sets of inputs for analogue audio and two for composite video plus one composite out, while digital inputs are made up of one coaxial and two optical ins. There's a single USB input on the front panel as well as a headphone output.

### Simple set-up

Getting the amp set up is as easy as ever, with Sony's graphical user interface clear and easy to understand. The built-in wi-fi picks up our network with no issue and, once the included set-up mic is connected,

the speaker test tones take no more than a few seconds to sound. We'd always recommend checking your measurements look correct at this stage before moving on, and we find Sony's results to be pretty accurate. Within a few minutes, we're up and running.

We put on *The Amazing Spiderman 2* and skip to the Times Square showdown between Spiderman and Electro. The STR-DN860 wastes no time jumping straight into the action.

It's a hugely authoritative sound, with plenty of

controlled rumble in the low end, balanced out with a superb level of clarity throughout the midrange and treble. This makes for a wonderfully engaging presentation – one that pumps excitement into any action scene, but that also has a softer touch for taking on the quieter scenes too.

Voices are direct and full of nuance, cutting through even the busiest of scenes, and every strand of audio in such complex montages takes its place without being lost or forgotten in the mix. We even compare it to our 2014 Product of the Year Award winner, last year's DN1050, and find the DN860 tops it for transparency, with more subtle detail up for grabs.

While not quite as spacious in its soundfield as the DN1050, the DN860 is nevertheless able to stretch its sound impressively wide, and passes effects from speaker to speaker with smoothness, precision and natural agility.





**It's a hugely authoritative sound. Gunshots are backed by a decent thud, while the zing of metal buckling and glass smashing is clean and clear without any harshness**



## The app



### £free - iOS, Android

Sony's Songpal app is a great companion to the DN860, as it allows you to use your phone or

tablet to select your source, make setting adjustments and easily stream music from all manner of streaming services.

A new feature this year is Songpal Link, which basically makes all of Sony's audio products - from wireless speakers to AV receivers - part of a multi-room system that can be easily controlled within the app.

You can connect to the DN860 over Bluetooth or wi-fi, but be aware you'll have to use wi-fi if you want to be able to access networked content on NAS drives for example. A well designed, easy-to-use app that's well worth a download.

For example, as Electro fills himself with electricity from the mains power source, you hear the electrical charge surge past you from either side of the room, and as the voices in his head begin to swirl with anger, you hear them whispering all around you, placing you right in the middle of his mindset and immersing you in the scene.

### Smoother and more solid

Sony has done a good job of taking the bright edge off the treble that we noticed in last year's model, and the DN860 certainly sounds more solid than previous efforts.

Gunshots are backed by a decent thud, while the zing of metal buckling and glass smashing as the billboards around Times Square collapse under Electro's electricity-charged outrage, is clean and clear without any harshness.

We do think the big, muscular DN1050 has a little more impact in the explosions, but that doesn't mean the DN860 is at all

lacking. It manages to deliver enough punch to convincingly fill our sizeable listening room, while still remaining articulate enough to handle the more delicate elements of a soundtrack.


If there's one oversight here, it's that Sony has chosen not to put Atmos into the DN860, something many of its competitors will do - even at this price. But until those rivals arrive in our testing rooms, it's hard to tell if Atmos is a legitimate addition at this level of receiver, and whether Sony has made the right decision to concentrate on the traditional 7.1ch without compromise, at least this year. For now, at least, that's not reason enough for us to dock it big marks, but it is something to consider if Atmos is what you're looking for.

Musical performance from Sony's AV receivers is among the best available, in part because they are tuned in stereo first before they are tuned for surround. It really shows. Rhythmically the DN860 shows up

**If it ain't broke... on the outside the Sony looks reassuringly familiar, yet there have been advances**



### Round the back



1

2

3

4

**1** The STR-DN860 packs dual antenna that allow wi-fi and Bluetooth to work simultaneously, without interference. Both 2.4GHz and 5GHz wi-fi spectrums are supported, while Bluetooth offers NFC connectivity for one-touch pairing.

**2** Two of the five HDMI input ports are labelled 'Audio' and, as suggested, have been optimised for their audio performance. To get the most from them, hook up your Blu-ray player to one of these. The central HDMI input is for 4K.

**3** This year, Sony has included the HDCP 2.2 codec on the DN850, which means the inclusion of full 4K upscaling and passthrough up to 60fps. This is available via one HDMI in and one HDMI out, which should serve most set-ups.

**4** This is a regular 7.1ch amp, with no Atmos on board this year. This is something to consider if Atmos interests you, as we don't know whether many of its yet-to-be released rivals are planning to include the feature.

the areas in which a lot of AV receivers fall down, timing well and with precision.

It's a cohesive presentation that does well dynamically, rising and falling in tempo, stopping and starting as it should do, showing off a musical know-how that we don't always expect from home cinema amps at this price.

Get yourself in a good mode

We'd certainly recommend putting the amp in Pure Direct mode for the best sound, extracting a touch more clarity in the midrange with it on compared with when it's off - we preferred to keep this on with movies during our test too.

Bluetooth pairs quickly (even quicker if you have an NFC-compatible device) and allows you to stream music from your tablet or smartphone, with Spotify Connect on board for streaming directly from the service too.

Together, but independent

This means that your device merely acts as a remote for choosing songs, and should it go out of range or be turned off, the receiver is connected directly with Spotify and will continue playing from your playlist independently of your device.

For video content from a portable device, Sony has included Miracast, a feature that will mirror the content on your device,

The standard remote is very clear, but the Songpal app is great with smart devices



pushing it through the receiver and delivering up to a 1080p picture and two-channel stereo sound. Made possible through a direct peer-to-peer connection, it doesn't even require wi-fi to work.

A feature-packed amp then, and one with a fantastic performance to boot. Only time will tell if Sony's decision to leave Atmos on the shelf this year was a clever one or not, but for now this is a superb budget amp that is eager to entertain.

TECH SPECS

**Claimed power** 95W per channel • **Inputs** HDMI x5, optical x2, RCA x3; composite video x2, coaxial, USB • **Outputs** HDMI, composite, headphone jack • **Decoding** Dolby TruHD, DTS HD Master Audio; Dolby Digital+ • **4K/60fps upscaling** Yes • **Wi-fi** Yes • **Bluetooth** Yes • **Remote control** Yes • **Dimensions (hwd)** 16 x 43 x 33cm • **Weight** 8.3kg

Rating ★★★★★


**FOR** Big, wide soundstage; excellent midrange clarity; lots of subtle detail; easy to set up; great user interface; musical stereo performance

**AGAINST** No Dolby Atmos


**VERDICT** A stellar budget amp that offers a huge performance at an excellent price

### SYSTEM BUILDER


Get these three and you'll be fully prepared to get the most out of the Sony



**Projectore**  
**BenQW1400 £1000 ★★★★★**  
Add a big picture to that big sound. This BenQ gives a sharp, punchy picture and great detail



**Speaker package**  
**QAcoustics3000Series5.1 £700 ★★★★★**  
As exciting as it is refined, this new speaker package offers a superbly insightful listen



**Blu-ray player**  
**SonyBDP-S7200 £190 ★★★★★**  
An Award-winning Blu-ray player that delivers superb pictures with depth and realism

**Total build £2290**

REVIEWER'S NOTES... GETTING TO KNOW THE SONY STR-DN860

- 1** Sony's design is clean and familiar. It has not strayed from the tried-and-tested look for a few years now - and for good reason.

**2** All AV receivers could take cues from Sony's set-up procedure and user interface. Quick, simple and easy to use - full marks here.

**3** Wow, this amp really knows its way around an explosion. Our listening room is filled with powerful, clear, dynamic sound.

**4** Oh, no Atmos. That's a shame, but not a huge letdown. The 7.1 performance certainly makes up for it, but won't futureproof it.

**5** The DN860 is a masterclass in how an AV receiver at this price should handle music. Great timing and precision.



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**LG OLED TV**

  
**REFERENCE  
STATUS**  
AWARD

LG 55EG960V  
APRIL 2015

**Stuff**  
★★★★★  
LG 55EG960V  
JUNE 2015

**WHAT HI-FI?**  
★★★★★  
LG 55EG960V  
MAY 2015



**Jamo C103 | Stereo speakers | £850**

# Jamo muscles in on the act

Like a nightclub bouncer in a tailor-made suit, the Jamo C103s are really packed in there. Each cabinet is big and burly, with a power-bulge around the 18cm mid/bass driver and a lot of overall presence - if ever a speaker looked like it wasn't to be trifled with, the Jamo C103 is it. There are three finishes: gloss black, gloss white and the walnut veneer of our review pair, and they are all smooth and high-quality, but they give the impression of barely containing the latent threat inside.

## Pear-shaped cabinet

Above the mid/bass driver is a 25mm silk dome tweeter, decoupled and waveguide-equipped. Around the back there are hefty biwire cable terminals and a gaping reflex port big enough for other, more modestly sized, speakers to hide in. In between, the walnut veneer is expertly applied around the vaguely pear-shaped cabinet exterior. Chrome-effect accents around each driver add a little more visual pizzazz.

Integrated directly into our reference system, the C103s sound diffused (a little) and hard (a lot). All speakers benefit from an extended running-in period, though, and after 72 hours of uninterrupted playing, the C103s are singing with their authentic voice.

## Lacking a little substance

Initial impressions are of a large-scale, open sound. Given a WAV file of The Flaming Lips' *Waitin' For A Superman* to deal with, the Jamos reproduction is wide and tall, with an even-handed approach to the frequency range from top to bottom.

The top end is absolutely as assertive as it wants to be (and we reckon reasonable careful system-matching is required to make sure the C103s don't overplay their hand where treble sounds are concerned), the midrange is decently detailed, although perhaps lacking a little substance, and the low frequencies are speedy and tonally varied. However, they are not as out-and-out punchy as the look of the Jamos initially leads us to expect. If they are indeed a nightclub bouncer, the C103s are altogether politer and more reasonable than is perhaps usual.

## Bottom-end muscle

Timing is decent, dynamic range is more than adequate, and overall the Jamos are an organised, if somewhat reticent, listen. We



The cabinet is burly, with a bulge around the midriff and a lot of overall presence



back the C103s closer to the rear wall of our listening room and switch to another WAV file, this time Mos Def's *Hip Hop*, and while there's a noticeable increase in bottom-end muscle, it's not disproportionate.

## A more confident character

A bigger improvement is realised by biwiring them. Many biwireable speakers exhibit pretty subtle changes when biwired, but the Jamos improve decisively.

There's greater substance to low frequencies, more positivity about the midrange, and an altogether more confident character emerges. There's no fundamental change to the Jamos' tonal balance - it remains on the lean side of neutral - but the C103s are a better, more convincing listen this way.

There are already a couple of extremely strong standmounting contenders at this sort of price, but clearly the C103s are a



Biwire the Jamo C103s and an altogether more confident character emerges

diverting option. They have the looks and finish to justify their pricetag, they are unfussy about room position (although the fact they're pretty big boys to start with limits your options a little) and are a detailed, energetic and pleasingly subtle listen. With a bit more overall substance to their sound and a tweeter on less of a knife's-edge, they could go places.

## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Imposing looks; detailed, organised and wide-screen sound; fine finish; suit biwiring well

**AGAINST** Top end needs consideration when system-matching; don't really punch with the authority the looks suggest

**VERDICT** Competition is stiff, but the C103s deserve consideration

## Also consider

**KEF LS50**  
**£800 ★★★★★**

Good looking, manageably sized and serve up a great performance at the price



**The Jamo C103s are not as out-and-out punchy as their look initially leads us to expect. If they are indeed a nightclub bouncer, they are politer and more reasonable than usual**



Pure Evoke D6 with Bluetooth | Radio | £180

# Time to turn on the wireless

The Evoke range has been part of Pure's furniture ever since the Evoke-1 was launched back in 2002. It's a range that has expanded over the years to include models of varying sizes, colours and features culminating, for now, in this Evoke D6 with Bluetooth.

## It does what it says on the tin

The top Evoke combines DAB, FM and, as you've probably deduced by now, Bluetooth connectivity. The real-oak veneer and white front panel give the radio a light, fresh look, although it doesn't perhaps have the luxury appearance of a Ruark Audio R1 Mk3.

Once you've powered up the Pure, the autotuning sequence kicks into action. It's a smooth, painless process and it's not long before you've got a thorough complement of stations to choose from.

You can store 15 presets each for DAB and FM, and your choices can be accessed through the corresponding buttons on the remote control - an unusually classy (for this level) credit card-sized affair that's ergonomic and nice to use.

## Multi-function control

When you're up close and personal with the Pure, your main points of contact are the volume and select dials on the front. With the latter, you turn it to scroll through menus and push it inwards to select.

It's simple and straightforward, and the radio responds quickly enough. It's a shame, though, that you can't switch inputs via the remote. If you want to make the jump from streaming over Bluetooth to Planet Rock, you'll need to leave your comfy seat.

The screen is a decent size and easy to read. The brightness adjusts manually or

automatically, depending on the amount of ambient light in the room.

Other features include twin alarms, which can be set to a station of your choosing, and the touch-sensitive Snoozehandle which sits on top of the radio. There's no internet radio - for that you'll need to investigate the Evoke F4 or rival radios such as the Roberts Stream 93i.

Out of the box, the Evoke is mains powered, but there's always the option of going portable. For this, you'll need to buy Pure's £35 ChargePak, which delivers up to 65 hours of listening and slots neatly into the rear panel.

The D6 features custom drive units and a 20W digital amplifier behind the front grilles. Pure offers some of its products in a mono configuration, but the D6 fires sound out in stereo, and it's all the better (and louder) for it. There's a much bigger sense of scale than you get with one of its smaller siblings such as the D4.

To go with the quantity of sound, there's a decent level of quality too. Detail levels are fine for the money and the general



The carrying handle on the top doubles as a touch-sensitive snooze button

For portable use, add the £35 ChargePak, which slots into the unit's rear panel

balance isn't bass or treble heavy. Push the Pure hard and its balanced approach stops everything from descending into a crashy, brash affair.

Dialogue heard through the studio of Radio 5 Live sounds warm and detailed. It's easy to latch onto what people are saying.

Stream Daft Punk's *Around The World* over Bluetooth (via an iPhone 6 Plus) and the Pure does a decent job of satisfying the demands of the track's meaty, punchy bassline and sparkly highs.

## Rival radios

Despite these qualities, rivals offer greater clarity and insight, and do a better job of communicating dynamic shifts. Spend £30 extra on the Ruark M1 Mk3 and although you jump down from stereo to mono, the benefit is a clear improvement in clarity, detail and dynamics across the board.

The Evoke D6 with Bluetooth isn't going to revolutionise the DAB radio market, but it reinforces the Evoke range's reputation for being solid and dependable.

## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Pleasant looks; nice to use; decent features; rich, relatively balanced presentation

**AGAINST** A number of rivals deliver a clearer, more detailed sound

**VERDICT** This latest Evoke is a good radio, but we wouldn't consider it class-leading

## Also consider

Pure Evoke F4 £170 ★★★★★

It's mono, but it has Bluetooth and internet radio - a solid all-rounder





P5 Wireless.  
We've taken  
away the wires  
but kept the  
sound quality.



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Cambridge CXA60 | Stereo amplifier | £500

# This amp bridges the gap

There's a gap in the market for a good £500 integrated stereo amplifier. Or rather, there used to be. The highly accomplished Cambridge CXA60 now fills this space.

Part of the new Cambridge CX series, the CXA60 integrated stereo amplifier boasts digital inputs, high-resolution audio support and a smart design that is certainly pleasing to the eye.

Oh, and it sounds great.

### Poignant and arresting

The Cambridge CXA60 is immediately likeable. It's fluid, snappy and packed with enthusiasm. This is an amplifier that puts musical enjoyment high on its list of priorities. That doesn't mean it leaves things like detail, dynamics or rhythmic precision trailing behind though - the amplifier skilfully handles complex arrangements and is capable of delivering subtle, accurate detail.

Stream The White Stripes' *Seven Nation Army* and that iconic bassline is bouncy, rumbling and has just the right amount of tautness to keep you hooked.

The CXA60's presentation is slightly forward, but it's not to the amp's detriment. The whine and crunch of the guitar riff sounds textured and has plenty of bite, while the strained, ragged nature of Jack White's voice is deftly conveyed. It's a gripping, entertaining listen.

The energetic performance happily doesn't cross the line into unruly, overzealous territory, with the Cambridge exercising plenty of control over a song's dynamics and rhythms. Hans Zimmer's compositions for *Inception* are appropriately brooding, and the tension is maintained throughout.

The strings in *Time* rise in slow-building intensity, while the drums lend a good helping of sombre weight. The dying piano notes at the end of the track have plenty of space to breathe in the open soundstage, sounding poignant and arresting.

### Capable listen

There are rival amplifiers, such as the £650 Arcam FMJ A19, that are able to dig a bit deeper, reveal a touch more detail and

reach higher, more open highs - but the Cambridge remains a hugely entertaining and capable listen, especially for its price.

It has a solid sound, and one that manages to be both exciting and easy to listen to in equal measure.

### Floating chassis design

The CXA60's sleek and modern design looks very smart indeed. It has a 'floating chassis' design, a sturdy aluminium build with finishes available in either black or silver, and a clean, uncluttered fascia. It's clear that Cambridge has given plenty of thought to every aspect of the design, as it feels and looks like a high-quality product.

The display is simple and elegant. Buttons are neatly laid out next to their corresponding input label, coloured clearly in blue, and which turn dark blue when selected. You'll notice that there's an input button with the Bluetooth icon: the CXA60 is capable of streaming music from smartphones over Bluetooth (using the higher quality aptX codec), but you'll need to buy a separate BT100 dongle (£70) to make it work. The air vent on top of the amplifier isn't just for looks, either. It helps

cool down the class AB amplifier powering the CXA60's 60W per channel.

Peek inside and you can clearly see the toroidal transformer - it's situated right in the middle of the chassis, a calculated positioning that Cambridge claims ensures low magnetic flux levels, so there's less interference on the signal path.

Other internal design highlights include separate and symmetrical circuit paths, to minimise crosstalk issues between left and right channels, and improve consistency.

### Smooth volume dial

The Cambridge amplifier is seamless in operation. The on-panel buttons click satisfyingly and they respond instantly, as does the smooth volume dial. The balance and tonal controls (indicated by the bass and treble clef icons) are nicely made and turn smoothly. The Direct mode feature is worth a go, as it diverts the signal from the tonal controls and aims to deliver the purest sound possible.

The included remote control is a sturdy, well laid-out design and quickly becomes second nature in use. You can

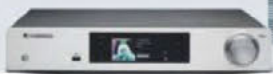


The remote is sturdy and well laid out, and it quickly becomes second nature in use

## System builder total build £1820

**Streamer**  
**Cambridge CXN £700 ★★★★★**

This enthusiastic, feature-packed model is a stonkingly good hi-res network streamer - and the perfect source for its matching amplifier



**Stereo speakers**  
**B&W 685 S2 £500 ★★★★★**

Big, bold and brawny, these Award-winning speakers' dynamic and rhythmically agile performance will suit the CXA60's sound



**Stands**  
**Atacama Moseco 6 £120 ★★★★★**

You'll need a decent pair of stands to get the most out of your bookshelf speakers, and these Atacamas provide the best support at this price






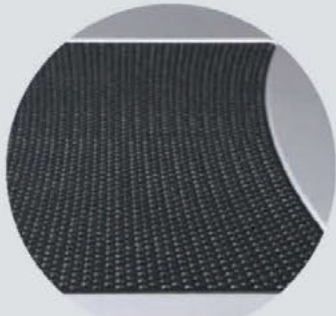


The 'floating chassis' design comes in black or silver finishes and has a clean fascia


### In detail



**Buttons** Neatly laid out next to their corresponding input, which turn a darker shade of blue when selected



**Air vent** The vent on top of the amplifier serves a practical purpose. The class AB amplifier can throw out some heat



**Bluetooth** The CXA60 is capable of streaming music from smartphones over Bluetooth, but you'll need a BT100 dongle

use the same remote across all of the CX series products, too.

There's a decent spread of analogue and digital connections, with four line level inputs and two speaker terminals (so you can biwire or run a second pair of speakers) available on the back panel.

**Helpful labelling**

Inside, there's a 24-bit/192kHz DAC that supports playback of high-resolution audio files across its two optical and single coaxial inputs. Incidentally, it's the same Wolfson DAC chip used in the DacMagic Plus (four stars at £350 in 2012). Those hoping for a USB input will have to look towards the CXA80 (£750), which sits right above the CXA60 in this CX range.

A 3.5mm auxiliary input is placed on the front panel for plugging in MP3 players or smart devices, alongside a 3.5mm headphone jack. There's also scope to use

The CXA60 features a decent spread of connections on its back panel

the CXA60 as a preamplifier, or to plug in a subwoofer if you want to extend the low-end heft of its performance. Cambridge continues its helpful policy of labelling all inputs both ways, making it easier to read the labels when leaning over the product.

**Exciting and competitive package**

We're impressed with the Cambridge CXA60. It's an amplifier that delivers in every aspect. It looks smart, it has a wide spread of connections, and its enthusiastic, detailed and rhythmically cohesive performance is a joy to listen to. We like using it, too.

Its closest rival is the Award-winning Arcam A19, which admittedly has a more refined and mature sound. However, it's pricier at £650 and doesn't have any digital inputs. At £500, the CXA60 offers a exciting and competitive package for less money. We think you'll like it - maybe even love it.

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Deep bass and gripping highs; excellent build; good connectivity; expressive dynamics

**AGAINST** Bluetooth dongle not supplied; needs careful partnering


**VERDICT** A great £500 amplifier that looks and sounds the part - this is a big success

### Also consider

#### Arcam FMJ A19

**£650 ★★★★★**

The lack of digital inputs may be a deal breaker for some buyers, but the Arcam's mature and insightful sound still leads the pack at this price



Sony KDL-65W855C | Televisions | £1500

# Hit the big time for less

It's easy to get lost in the hubbub surrounding the future of television. OLED, UHD and HDR: impressive and exciting acronyms, but we shouldn't forget that existing TV tech is still very good. After all, Full HD has been the standard for years. Both quality and price have been thoroughly honed.

## Quality in the mid-range

Take the Sony KDL-65W855C. It's a midrange model in Sony's 2015 range. It 'only' has an 1080p LED display, but it's rather good. The video performance is impressive enough to hold your attention.

We begin in Full HD with a Blu-ray of *Birdman*, where Michael Keaton is levitating in his dressing room. It's a clean, sharp picture. The clutter and brickwork in the room are solidly defined, and there's little noise to speak of. We'd like more in the way of fine textures, but this is more a tiny niggle than a full-blown fault.

LED panels don't have the best reputation when it comes to contrast, but this Sony puts in an admirable effort. Whites are bright enough to occasionally



When it comes to connectivity, this Sony punches well above its weight

***Birdman* is a colourful film, and the Sony really laps it up. The reds, blues and yellows that permeate the Broadway theatre are deep and vibrant, yet balanced and natural with it**

dazzle. Dark scenes are capable of looking much closer to black than grey.

*Birdman* is a colourful film, and the KDL-65W855C really laps it up. The reds, blues and yellows that permeate the Broadway theatre are deep and vibrant, yet balanced and natural with it.

A note on 3D: this set supports active-shutter glasses, but they're not included in the box as standard. You'd have to order them separately at £50 a pair.

Step down to standard definition with a DVD, and the quality holds strong. There is an inevitable increase in picture noise, but even then we see the same traits: balanced colours, good contrast and solid edges. Freeview and Freeview HD performance is similar, only with the inherent fuzz of terrestrial broadcast added.

## Necessary adjustment

Fresh out of the box, the TV will need a bit of tinkering. The default settings are not ideal, so we used a THX Optimization disc to tweak the picture. Much of it is down to personal taste, but we'd suggest starting with Dynamic Contrast Enhancement turned off - that will give you more accurate control over brightness and black levels.

Noise reduction is effective, but it trades a little definition. Keep motion processing on the 'standard' setting - the effect is subtle and won't make your films overly glossy.

## It's all about angles

Sadly no amount of adjustment can solve the one big issue here: viewing angles. We find the viewing angle to be quite narrow. If you have a room with varied seating positions, those on the side may have issues with washed-out contrast.

The TV's sound is fine. There's enough detail and definition, and a reasonable amount of weight on offer.

The KDL-65W855C isn't just a pretty picture - it has smarts too. Sony is among the first to adopt Google's new Android TV platform, which is nice but not without fault. The nice bit: it's pretty, clear, and intuitive. Google's clean-cut Material Design philosophy has been copied over from the mobile world, and looks lovely on the big screen. What needs fixing is the lack of content compared with the likes of Samsung and LG TVs. For streaming, you'll mainly be looking at Netflix, Amazon Instant Video and Google Play. There's no Now TV, and the UK's main catch-up services haven't appeared yet.

The bundled remote control is fine, but the best way to navigate is to use the TV SideView app. This gives you more comprehensive control than the standard remote control. It also shows you the TV guide. Handy.

The hardware side is a bit more comprehensive, and is up there with pricier sets. There are four HDMI sockets, three USB ports, a component-composite hybrid, Scart, and optical digital output.

The Sony KDL-65W855C is a tempting proposition. It's not class-leading stuff, but we're impressed with its blend of quality, features and price. If you're not fussed about the latest bells and whistles - maybe you're happy to wait until the dust settles on the latest format war - this is a great way to get a 65in screen for less than you might expect.

## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Balanced colours; strong contrast; sharpness; size-price ratio

**AGAINST** Narrow viewing angles; could do with more apps

**VERDICT** The clean picture and tempting price make a strong argument for sticking with Full HD

## Also consider

**Samsung UE65HU7500**  
**£2300 ★★★★★**

Last year's Award-winner in the 60in+ screen size category is still available, still very good and has recently had its price slashed.



Fine, if you don't mind your buttons packed in tight; better to use the SideView app though





# LG MUSICflow

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Wireless Multi-Room

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LG's MUSICflow H4 Smart Hi-Fi Audio Speaker allows you to play music all over the home. A multi-room speaker, you can select songs easily thanks to the intuitive LG MUSICflow Player app\*. Whilst with up to 8 hours of battery life\*\* you can now take your favourite music to your best moments - hands-free, wirelessly.

Innovation For A Better Life

[lg.com/uk/musicflow](http://lg.com/uk/musicflow)



Currys PC World

\*Available for Android, iOS and PC.  
\*\*Battery life usage varies

 **LG**  
Life's Good

**Optoma NuForce DDA-120 | Stereo amplifier and DAC | £600**

# Neat amp/DAC combo just lacks kick



The NuForce DDA-120 is a neat looking offering from the Californian hi-fi company purchased towards the end of 2014 by projector giant Optoma. An integrated stereo amplifier and digital-to-analogue converter in one nicely finished, discreet aluminium box, the DDA-120 will accept both digital and analogue signals to act as a hub for your digital music.

When you consider the diminutive size of its case, the DDA-120 will accept an impressive number of sources: two digital optical inputs jostle for position alongside one coaxial, a USB and an 'expansion slot' intended for the bundled NuForce BTR-01 Bluetooth dongle.

To go with those five digital inputs, the DDA-120 also has one set of RCA analogue inputs for any old-school legacy kit you may want to use in your system. The neatly laid out, if inevitably rather packed, back panel is also home to the stereo speaker outputs and the power socket and switch.

To round off the package there is a small, plastic remote control that, frankly, is not in keeping with the £600 price or the standard of finish of the DDA-120 itself.

## Presenting a clean face

In contrast to that cluttered rear is the rather stark-looking front. At first glance, it's a plain sheet of metal with a single knob adorning the right-hand side. That knob acts as the on/off switch, input select and volume control. It's nicely machined, and quite in keeping with the money NuForce is asking for the DDA-120.

On closer inspection, things are not quite as stark as they first appear. The front panel has a display that shows input selected and volume levels. It's all very understated - almost too understated: the display can be awkward to read from an angle.

This box will sit as the hub of a stereo system without taking up too much shelf space, and all the while able to handle an impressive number of sources, whether they be from a streamer, smartphone, TV or CD player - or even a turntable.

## High-resolution playback

After leaving the NuForce to run in for a weekend, we connect the DDA-120 to our Naim streamer and a pair of Q Acoustics Concept 20 speakers. The unit will handle files up to 24-bit/96kHz, so we get stuck in to some high-resolution audio.

The midrange in particular stands out. Clear, precise vocals stand forward in the mix, and this unit leans a touch to the mid and upper registers, favouring them over low bass. The treble can tend towards brightness, so you should take care with partnering speakers to prevent this from entering into the realms of stridency - the

The rotary dial is multifunctional, and controls power, input selection and volume

Concept 20s are good partners in that respect. That care having been taken, there is no denying the precision of the NuForce. Notes start and stop crisply, and instruments are clearly placed in the soundstage.

It's the lower registers that concern us, however. The bass is there, as fast-moving as the rest of the sound, but there's no real depth to notes - it's all a bit insubstantial.

It's a little lacklustre dynamically as well, the shift between loud and quiet passages being less dramatic than we'd expect. The same sonic characteristics are true of the NuForce no matter which input we use.

## More oomph required

This lack of welly becomes all the more apparent when we compare the DDA-120 to the Cambridge Audio CXA60 (£500). While it is a much bigger unit, the Cambridge offers similar specification and a far more well-rounded and enjoyable sound.

The 120's supplied BTR-01 Bluetooth dongle accepts the higher-quality apt-X codec and is easy to set up - we're sending music from our phone and tablet in seconds.

The NuForce DDA-120 has a lot going for it. It's a neat package, nicely built, and with a host of connections. We just can't ignore the fact that your £600 (indeed less) will buy you better, more involving and enjoyable sound elsewhere.

The NuForce accepts an impressive number of sources - analogue as well as digital



## System builder total build £1450

### Streamer

**Pioneer N50-A £500 ★★★★★**

Its forebear was a two-time Award winner. This next version is better still



### Speakers

**Q Acoustics Concept 20 £350 ★★★★★**

Terrific little speakers that punch far above their weight



## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Neat, well-built unit; good number of inputs; clean, clear midrange

**AGAINST** Lacks the bass oomph we'd like; plasticky remote; display can be hard to see

**VERDICT** It may suit some, but the DDA-120 can't compete with price rivals sonically

## Also consider

**NAD D3020 £400 ★★★★★**

Similar size, same specification, cheaper, and a more entertaining sound than the NuForce



# Revolution XT



## Revolution in design. Revolution in sound.

Revolution XT lives up to its name, marking a major leap forward in loudspeaker design and the realisation of some of Tannoy's most radical and forward thinking technologies.

Retaining the classic trapezoid shape from its multi award-winning predecessor, the new Revolution XT cabinets now feature an ingenious reflex-coupled dual-cavity design. This optimises performance of the all-new Omnimagnet™ Dual Concentric™ driver across extremely low to mid-bass frequencies. The complex internal design is further perfected with an integrated plinth that provides a uniform and predictable low frequency interface to the listening environment, delivering the deepest bass notes with ease.

Dynamic, engaging and articulate, yet incredibly easy to set-up and place in any room, Tannoy's Revolution XT is a true revolution in sound. Find out more at [tannoy.com](http://tannoy.com)

# TANNOY

Tannoy Revolution XT6F



What Hi-Fi website March 2015

Tannoy Revolution XT6F



What Hi-Fi May 2015

Tannoy Revolution XT8F



What Hi-Fi July 2015



**Panasonic**

# MASTERING THE MAGIC OF LIGHT



## REALISING THE DIRECTOR'S VISION IN 4K

We believe that light is magic. And our passion is mastering its power to create a 4K range with the widest, most vivid colour spectrum imaginable. Our CX802 series televisions with 4K Pro Studio Master technology can recreate the most nuanced shades from light to dark – delivering the incredible detail the film-maker intended.

[panasonic.co.uk/4KPro](http://panasonic.co.uk/4KPro)



**4K** PRO  
STUDIO MASTER UHD



**Pro-ject RPM1 Carbon | Turntable | £325**

# Carbon lacks vital element

The first Pro-ject RPM1 Genie appeared five years ago and wowed us with its adventurous styling, strong value and fine sound quality. Four generations on, Pro-ject has developed the original into a high-tech package, still selling for sensible money.

## Desirable qualities

The big news is the inclusion of an 'S' shaped carbon fibre arm, with an effective length of 21.8cm. Such technology is rare, even at high-end prices, so it's astonishing to find it included here. The benefits of carbon fibre are low mass, high rigidity and good internal damping - all desirable qualities in a tonearm.

This isn't the first time Pro-ject has included this material on a record player at this level though. It already makes the Debut Carbon, but the straight tube arm included in that package looks a completely different design, right down to the bearing housing and bias arrangement.

## A strong style statement

Pro-ject supplies the RPM1 with cartridge fitted. Here, it's an Ortofon 2M Red moving magnet item, which would cost around £80 if bought separately. It's a proven performer that makes a fine partner for this deck.

Other engineering highlights include the use of a stand-alone motor unit that sits separately from the main chassis to minimise any unwanted mechanical energy being fed into the main turntable structure, and an inverted main platter bearing that uses a ceramic ball to reduce rumble noise.

The RPM1 comes in a choice of three colours (black, red or white) and makes a strong style statement. We like its minimalist appearance, though the finish on our sample showed up dust pretty quickly. We have no issue with the cosmetic quality, but there are areas that concern us.



Available in red, white or black, its minimalist look makes a strong style statement

On initial start up, the motor emitted a low-level clunking sound every few seconds, but this went away after a weekend of running. The arm bearing showed a bit of free play, which, along with an insubstantial feel to the lift/lower lever, reduces the quality feel.

Set-up is easy. The cartridge is already fitted and aligned, leaving just the counterweight and bias to be adjusted. Place the turntable somewhere level and rigid, ideally far away from the speakers. This is a simple deck with little in the way of isolation from its environment, so this kind of care will pay dividends.

## Impressive detail

Play something demanding such as Holst's *Mars* and this package does a good job. We're happy with the Pro-ject's balanced tonality and refinement. There's an impressive amount of detail on show, and it's rendered with a pleasing degree of

precision. The deck's agility and ability to convey nuances are commendable. We also like the RPM1's clean presentation and on simpler music the clarity is terrific.

## Sense of composure falters

It's not all good news, though. The sonic presentation isn't as composed when things become complex. The package also lacks some authority when it comes to delivering large-scale dynamic shifts, making the music sound gentler and less exciting than it should.

REM's *Automatic for the People* reinforces this impression. The turntable delivers a wealth of information, though the sense of composure falters as the music's complexity rises. High frequencies are incisive and articulate, while bass is delivered with a decent amount of power. Yet we could do with more drive and attack. There's drama in the music, but this Pro-ject doesn't quite manage to access it.

Pro-ject has a brilliant track record when it comes to sub-£500 record players. The RPM1 is less rounded in ability than we hoped, but still has enough in the way of sonic talent to earn consideration. If the style appeals it's worth a listen.

## In detail



**The arm** The Ortofon 2M Red moving magnet is a proven performer that makes a fine partner for this deck



**Counterweight** Setting up the RPM1 is easy. The cartridge is fitted, leaving the counterweight and bias to be adjusted



**Motor** Simply move the drive belt between pulley steps to change the speed of the turntable

## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Good resolution; pleasing agility; minimalist appearance; use of carbon fibre

**AGAINST** Presentation needs more punch; shortfall of composure; lacks quality feel

**VERDICT** The RPM1 is strong style statement, but lacks the all-round sonic talent to wow us

## Also consider

**Rega RP1 Performance pack £300 ★★★★★**

This upgraded RP1 turntable puts in one hell of a performance and consequently sets the standard at this price

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say What Hi-Fi? Dec 2014

Access thousands of internet radio stations  
from around the world or stream your favourite playlists



Revival iStream2 Wi-Fi Internet Radio with DAB and Spotify Connect\*

\*Spotify Premium account on smartphone or tablet required, see [www.robertsradio.co.uk](http://www.robertsradio.co.uk) for more details



ROBERTS

*Revival*





**Chord2Qute | Digital to analogue converter | £995**

# Chord strikes the right notes

**What happens when** you combine two Award-winning products into one? You get the brand new Chord 2Qute - a standalone DAC that's the latest in Chord Electronics' hugely successful Chordette range.

The Chord 2Qute replaces the 2014 Award-winning Qute EX (£990), with upgraded spec taken from the Chord Hugo - yet another winner from last year.

## A formidable combination

Chord claims that its use of bespoke, programmable chips enables it to get a better performance out of its DACs compared with rivals that use off-the-shelf solutions.

In the 2Qute, Chord goes a step further by inserting the latest FPGA (field programmable gate array) technology - the one used in the exemplary £1400 Hugo - inside the compact Chordette chassis.

It's a formidable combination, and results in an incredibly organised and detailed musical performance, no matter what song is being played.

Prince's *Love* (in 16-bit/44.1kHz) sounds funky and punchy, with the DAC's remarkable precision etching out every note with clarity and cohesion. A snappy, fun sound, it never lets the rhythm go flat. Stream *Earth* from the *Gladiator* soundtrack (in 16-bit/44.1kHz) and it's clear the 2Qute outperforms the former Qute EX. The new 2Qute is just more definite with the way it delivers notes. It digs deeper to reveal even more layers of subtlety, and the edges of notes are more accurate.

Switch up to a 24-bit/176kHz recording of Alison Krauss and Union Station's *Bright Sunny South*, and the twanging guitars are beautifully conveyed. Each pluck is taut, has rich layers of detail surrounding each strum, and almost feels tactile. The vocals are full of character and nuance.

## Window in the chassis

The 2Qute looks identical to its predecessors, with the build quality up to Chord's usual high standards. The aluminium chassis is solid, beautifully machined, and comes in two finishes: silver or black. There's a comfortable heft to it despite its relatively petite dimensions.



The coaxial input and asynchronous USB type B input play hi-res audio to 32-bit/384kHz

The build quality of the machined aluminium chassis is up to Chord's usual high standards

One of our favourite things about Chord products is the window in the chassis, which lets you peep into the circuitry. It changes colour depending on the sample rate being played, but it doesn't really matter if you can't remember what the colours represent - they just look fantastic.

The 2Qute's three digital inputs are the same ones found on the Qute EX. There's a coaxial input and an asynchronous USB type-B input, both of which can play high-resolution audio files all the way up to 32-bit/384kHz. Meanwhile, the optical input supports up to 24-bit/192kHz files.

## Admirable performance

Along with most popular file formats, all three digital inputs support DSD64. If you want to play DSD128, you'll have to use either the coaxial or USB input.

There's also a single pair of line level outputs, through which you can connect the 2Qute DAC to your hi-fi separates.

The only new addition to the back panel is a switch that lets you click between the three inputs, replacing the former auto-sensing feature. It's a nice touch, though you'll need to remember the inputs by their colour (also in the circuit window).



The lighting of the window changes colour depending on the sample rate

The 2Qute is another success story for the Chordette range. The DAC's unerring accuracy, insight and rhythmic drive are impressive, and it's a joy to listen to. Pair it with the right components, and you'll have a hi-fi system that delivers an admirable performance. We already want it.

## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Superb detail resolution, dynamics and rhythmic precision; clear, solid, and weighty sound; excellent build and finish

**AGAINST** Nothing of note

**VERDICT** Chord's latest standalone DAC is better than ever - and that's some achievement

## Needs to beat

**Naim DAC-V1**  
**£1250 ★★★★★**

Naim's entry level DAC has more features than the Chord, and is worth investigating



## System builder total build £6745

### Laptop

**Apple MacBook Air 13in £1000**

We love the sleek and intuitive interface, but the ability to play a variety of file types makes it an ideal source for the Chord DAC



### Stereo amplifier

**Naim Supernait 2 £2750 ★★★★★**

A premium DAC deserves a premium amplifier, and this superb Naim amp only gets better with the Chord alongside it



### Stereo speakers

**ATC SCM19 £2000 ★★★★★**

An incredibly revealing, composed and precise pair of speakers that wow you with a dynamic, detailed and rhythmic sound



Panasonic TX-40CX680B | 4K Television | £700

# Panasonic redefines the small screen

It's not just the prices of 4K TVs that have plummeted in recent times – so have their screen sizes. Last year, sets below 55in were few and far between, but 40in seems to be the popular starting point in the 2015 line-up of 4K TVs.

There's an argument that a higher resolution on a smaller screen is unnecessary, but it does mean you can sit a fair bit closer. Even nose-to-the-screen close, a 4K TV should look clean and noise-free – provided you're playing well-recorded 4K content, of course. Ideal, then, for smaller living rooms where space might be tight. Or even bedrooms, if you can dare think about having a second 4K screen in the house already.

This 40in Panasonic TX-40CX680B is the baby screen in the company's one-above-entry-level 4K LED range. It can be yours for just £700 – not much more than a brand-new Full HD model of the same size.

## The basic principle

The TX-40CX680B doesn't have all the bells and whistles of Panasonic's flagship models, such as the 4K Studio Master Processor (the brainpower behind the company's new colour, contrast and brightness technology).

You have to jump a range higher (to the CX700) for 3D too, and the absence of a smart remote means users only have the vanilla remote that seems like it has been part of the Panasonic TV package for years.

Still, there's plenty for the TX-40CX680B to shout about. It claims to combine new backlight technology and a new colour filter system to produce subtler, more realistic colours. And it also introduces the new (2.0) iteration of Panasonic's My Home Screen interface, now powered by Firefox.

It's gone under the knife a bit since last year, ditching the full-page portal and

edging nearer LG and Samsung's line of sight with pop-up menus and colourful graphics. The upshot is a speedier, more user-friendly and customisable interface, and one we like very much.

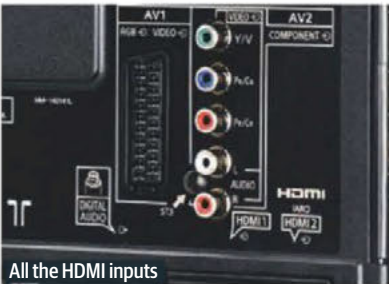
## Playing with bubbles

The home menu is simply a line of bubbles – or 'decks' as Panasonic calls them. 'Live TV', 'apps' and 'devices' come as default, but almost anything – whether it's your favourite TV channel, app or web page, even a media streamer over DLNA – can be pinned to the menu in two button presses.

It's not quite the fancy affair of LG's WebOS, but it gets the priorities right by nailing simplicity and convenience – and who can argue with that?

Settings are clear and straightforward, and we like how you can scoot through them without having to go back and forth into individual tabs – handy when giving settings the once-over on initial set-up.

Wi-fi is onboard but, as usual, using the LAN socket is the most stable way to get online, where there's plenty of choice (see panel). That LAN socket shares space at the back with three HDMI and USB inputs apiece. All HDMI 2.0 inputs are HDCP 2.2 compatible, so should be ready to play ball with Ultra HD Blu-ray players (and other 4K hardware) when they blow in later this year.



All the HDMI inputs will be compatible with the coming Ultra HD Blu-ray players



## Expanding network



The TX-40CX680B will offer Freeview Play – a rebranded and renovated Freeview – when it launches later this year. For now, Netflix, Amazon Instant Video and YouTube provide hours of 4K material and, of course, endless amounts of regular-resolution programming. You'll also find that stacks of apps – Deezer, TuneIn Radio and Eurosport Player among them – can be installed via the app market.

Another new feature is Info Frame, which sparks up navigation bars to access local weather, recommended content, notifications, and channels so you can scroll through them without disrupting what you're watching.

Netflix is one of the best streaming services to satisfy your 4K craving now, so we tuck into comedy *Grace And Frankie* and are drawn in by the screen's knifelike edges, astute detail and buttery-smooth motion. Each questionable pattern on the cast's dodgy wardrobe choice is laid bare, and individual strands of Jane Fonda's finely combed hair are distinct.

## Smooth and natural

Characters glide across rooms without a blip, but not so much that it looks unnatural. And whether we're sitting one foot or one metre away, the picture looks squeaky clean.

But tweaking the out-of-the-box brightness and over-keen colouration is a must. We use a trusty THX Optimizer disc, and find ourselves dialling down the colour settings. Even then, colours are rather on the obvious side. In true Panasonic fashion they are admirably bright and punchy, if not quite as subtle as we'd like.

Panasonic's local-dimming technology reduces backlighting behind dark areas of the image to enhance black levels, and pays off a treat. Blacks are gorgeous – so potent, indeed, that the black bars almost disappear into the TV's (ultra thin) bezel. Clean whites don't let the side down either.

## Dark matter in detail

Dark detail is a little subdued in return – seams in t-shirts and strands in hair get eaten up – which no amount of settings-fiddling can improve.

We reluctantly tear ourselves away from 4K to feed the TX-40CX680B *Unbroken* on Blu-ray. And we don't feel too hard done by. Switching the '24p Smooth Film' mode to 'mid' counters any unwelcome blurring, so

As the smallest, most affordable quality 4K screen we've tested, it's a standard-bearer



#### CONTENT CALL

Original 4K content is still pretty thin on the ground, so until more material emerges it's important to ensure that any 4K screen you buy excels with 'ordinary' high-def too. Luckily, this Panasonic passes that test.

Characters glide across rooms without a blip, but not so it looks unnatural. No matter how close we are the picture looks squeaky clean



when our Olympian war hero takes to the track, both he and the crowd remain stable.

The Panasonic is a good upscaler with high-definition material, holding up well next to one of our favourite Full HD sets from last year in terms of sharpness.

The same can't quite be said for standard definition. While the picture isn't too noisy, DVD owners should be prepared for slightly softer lines than they might be used to with a decent Full HD screen.

You can expect only so much, sound-wise, from a wafer-thin TV and the 40CX680B can't perform miracles. The sound through its twin speakers (powered by 10W of amplification) is clear and fairly

#### USE IT WITH

#### 4K Netflix

£9/month

★★★★★

You'll be wanting to see some 4K content – and this is where to start finding it



detailed, but a decent bargain-basement soundbar or 'base will grant you more substance and solidity. You can't go wrong with Cambridge Audio's TV5 soundbase (£250). Or even a Yamaha RX-V377 home cinema amp (£250) paired with a Tannoy HTS-101 surround package (£350).

The TX-40CX680B is the first 40in TV we've seen this year, and it happens to be very good. Whether it will hold its own against the coming competition remains to be seen. Until then, we're more than happy vouching for the Panasonic. It's a good-value set that flies the flag for 4K, offering a fine picture and a good stack of features with it. In our minds, that's £700 well spent.

#### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Strong 4K performance; bright, punchy colours; smooth motion; user-friendly interface

**AGAINST** Standard-definition picture is not great; Freeview Play not available yet

**VERDICT** A great start for Panasonic's 2015 TVs, and a good advert for small 4K screens

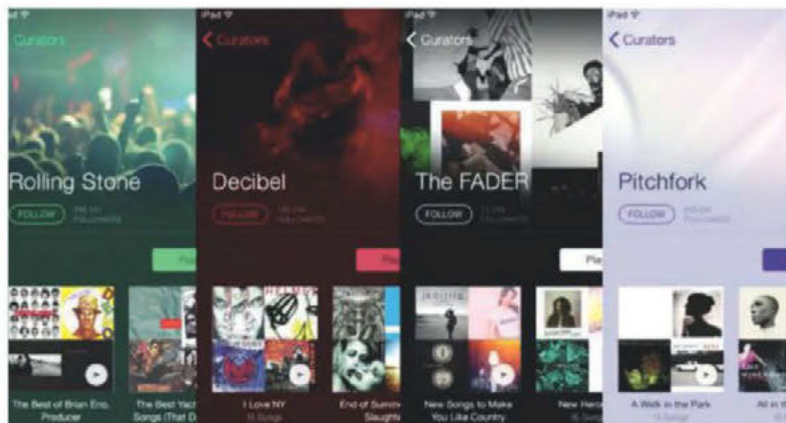
#### Also consider

**Samsung**  
**UE40F6400**  
**£480 ★★★★★**

Not fussed about 4K? One of our favourite Full HD screens from last year is a real bargain.



## Apple Music



### 1 DISCOVER

The most forthright aspect of Apple Music is the straight-up streaming service. You'll be able to stream from a library of over 30 million songs, plus anything you have in iTunes, whether purchased or ripped from CD.



### 2 RADIO

Who said radio was dead? Not Apple, because the company is bringing it back in a big way. Beats 1 is Apple's radio station, kept pumping 24/7 by celebrity DJs: Zane Lowe in Los Angeles, Ebro Darden in New York and Julie Adenuga in London. They promise an eclectic mix of the latest music, along with exclusive interviews and guest hosts.

You also get Apple Music Radio, which gives you a mix of curated music. The new stations range in genres from indie rock and classical to folk and funk. You can skip as often as you like, and personalise stations to your taste.

It's based on the Beats Music interface and offers HD music videos as well as offline playback.

## Apple Music enters the fray

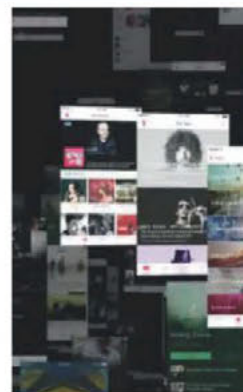
Apple may be late to streaming, but does it have what it takes to shake up the market? Possibly. Here's how it intends to do it...



### APPLE MUSIC FACTS

**Price/packages** It will cost \$10 per month for a standard subscription - or \$15 per month for a family plan, serving six people. In the UK, it is likely to be a straight conversion of £10 and £15. Not sure you want in? Get a free three-month trial. Just make sure to cancel if you want to stop - if you stay, you pay.

**Sound quality** Apple does not pass up a chance to show off, so its silence on the matter of sound quality speaks volumes. It seems likely at this stage that Apple will offer music streaming in 256kbps quality, as it currently does with iTunes Premium downloads.



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**\*Optical phono comes to UK**  
DS Audio is to bring its optical phono cartridge to the UK, after an initial launch in Japan. The DS-W1 uses a beam of light to detect the vibrations from the stylus.

**\*Linn calls time on preamps**  
Scottish hi-fi specialist Linn is ending production of its pre-amplifier range, claiming its DSM players are "set to supersede the standalone preamp".



### 3 CONNECT

Social media interaction in streaming services has been around for a long time, but Apple's approach is more than just spamming your friends with what you've listened to. This is a platform for artists to share exclusive content: candid photos from backstage, in-progress lyrics, and rough cuts of new videos.

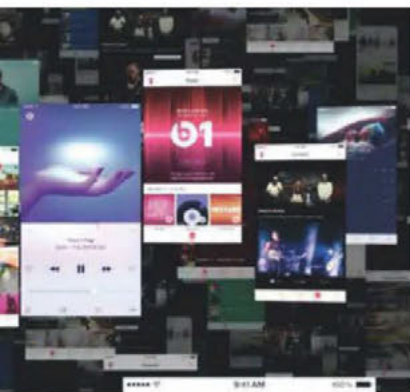
Is it essential? No. But it's a more direct way for artists and fans to communicate beyond simple tweeting. Music may get a bit more personal. Or narcissistic.



iTunes Spotify Deezer Qobuz Rdio Tidal

### 4 COMPETITION

Apple has 800m iTunes users ready to stream. But with Tidal and Spotify's recent updates, and Deezer and Qobuz offering CD-quality streaming, the competition is tough.



**Platform support** From day one, Apple Music will be available on Windows and Mac computers running the latest version of iTunes.

On the portables front, Apple Music will also run on iPods, iPhones and iPads running iOS 8.4 and beyond. Support for Apple TV and Android devices will come in autumn 2015.

**Third party support** This has yet to be confirmed, although Sonos has said it will be on board when Apple is ready. But if Apple really wants to take over streaming, it will need to be platform-agnostic - or risk death by alienation.

## Analysis

# It's nothing new, but Apple Music will raise the stakes



News editor Ced Yuen



In the immediate aftermath of the Apple Music announcement, the internet was awash with negativity - equal parts indifference, disappointment and ridicule.

The commentators have a point - very little about Apple Music is genuinely fresh. And yet, it might just revolutionise the industry. Apple's greatest strength is not its inventions, rather its capacity to rework existing ideas before using its considerable resources to maximise reach.

It's a strategy that worked with MP3 players, tablets and smartphones, which all went stratospheric after the Apple treatment. Now history looks set to repeat itself with music.

User engagement will be the easy part. As of April 2014, Apple boasted 800 million iTunes accounts, all with

**Apple's approach may not chime with audiophiles, but by entering the fray, it means music streaming will no longer be a niche concern**

immediate access to Apple Music. iTunes could be the most effective Trojan Horse ever.

As for the features (see page opposite), they're nothing new, but nobody has yet managed to combine these disparate elements into a singularly digestible offering.

But what of audio quality? Well, Apple has previously drawn the line at 256kbps, and seemingly has no interest in an arms race of sampling rates and bit depths. It is content leaving that to the likes of Tidal and Qobuz.

This approach may not chime with audiophiles, but in the end it's almost inconsequential if Apple succeeds. The very fact that the company has entered the fray means music streaming is no longer a niche concern.

If nothing else, competition will heat up and standards will improve. As Sony Music CEO Doug Morris put it: "A rising tide lifts all ships." Whatever happens, one thing is certain: music consumption has just entered a new phase.





## 1 Marantz AV products 2015 from £330

Marantz has announced a range of new AV products, including five AV receivers: two slimline and three full-size. Features include DTS:X and Dolby Atmos on some models, such as the SR7010 (pictured). <http://whf.cm/MarantzAV2015>. Also new are updates to the Melody Media Systems: the M-CR611 and M-CR511 feature DLNA and AirPlay streaming, high-res audio playback, and support for a wide variety of file formats. <http://whf.cm/MarantzMelody2015>



## 2 B&W Sound System €1million

B&W's Sound System has been designed for the live music scene. It comprises 32 bass drivers, 32 lower midrange drivers, 16 midrange drivers and 64 tweeters and delivers a staggering 120,000W of power. Decoupled tweeters aim to improve resolution and the brand's famous FST midrange drivers are present, complete with yellow Kevlar cone. We heard the system live at Primavera Sound festival in Barcelona. Read our thoughts here <http://whf.cm/BandWSoundSystem>



# TOP 5 New launches

## 3 Yamaha AV products 2015 from £300

Yamaha's 2015 AV offering includes five AV receivers, the A-S1100 stereo amp and an updated CD-S1000 CD player. All new AV amps will have wireless capabilities, either in the form of Bluetooth, or with the addition of a wi-fi dongle. None of the amps will have Dolby Atmos support. The A-S1100 uses MOSFET technology, intended to produce a similar sound to valve amps, and the CD-S1000 arrives with a new colour option and some minor performance tweaks. <http://whf.cm/YamahaAV2015>



## 4 Denon AV products 2015 from £200

Denon's five new AV amps will all support Dolby Atmos and DTS:X <http://whf.cm/DenonAV2015>. Other new products include a micro-system (comprising the DCD-50 CD player and PMA-50 stereo amplifier), and the DRA-100 network amplifier <http://whf.cm/DenonDesign>. The HomeCinema soundbar is added to its HEOS range of multi-room products, which promise "true hi-fi sound". <http://whf.cm/HEOSSoundbar>

## 5 Monitor Audio Bronze from £230

Monitor Audio's new Bronze range of speakers comprises two standmount models, two floorstanding models, a centre, a subwoofer and Bronze FX surround speakers. The last three can be used to create a home cinema speaker system. The range benefits from new C-CAM drivers. A new C-CAM gold-dome tweeter also claims to extend each speaker's frequency response to 30KHz. For more information, head to <http://whf.cm/MonitorAudioBronze2015>

5







beauty is so much more than skin deep.

Cyrus Audio Systems are high-end hi-fi components of truly extraordinary sonic capabilities. Inside every unique hand-built Cyrus chassis beats the heart of a real musical soul.

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CYRUS

**SPECIAL SYSTEMS OFFER (UK)** Buy a 6 DAC or 8<sub>2</sub> DAC with a CD t or Stream X Signature from only £1,500 until 31.08.15.  
SEE WEBSITE FOR DETAILS OR CONTACT YOUR DEALER. Model shown: 8<sub>2</sub> DAC Stereo Integrated Amplifier with on-board DAC.

# High-res, high-def, high summer

More than just a phone, it's also a movie player, music streamer, camera and web browser. We test eight of the best smartphones, all competing to be the essential holiday item you can't be without

## Tested



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**A**nother year, another batch of smartphones on the market, which raises the question... why do we persist in calling them smartphones? They're not just phones any more, they're powerful multimedia players, more clever and more capable than the full-sized desktop computers of just a few years ago. Smartphones are one alarming example of how rapidly technology can progress. One thing's for sure - we're a long way from Discmans and portable DVD players.

In our test, we've put eight of the best newcomers through their paces, ranging from the shiniest, priciest flagship phones from Apple, HTC, LG and Samsung to smaller, more cheerful budget models from Acer, Alcatel, Huawei and Honor (the last two being the same Chinese company aiming to crack the western market on two fronts), which could offer excellent value for money.

That's good news for anyone with an inclination to take their movies, music, games, social media and internet connections with them on the go, including on their annual summer holidays.



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buying advice, visit [whathifi.com](http://whathifi.com)





# Acer Liquid Jade Z **£150**

(or free on contract) ★★★★★

**Sometimes you just** don't need the latest flagship smartphone with lasers and fingerprint scanners crammed into gleaming bodies of aluminium and ion-strengthened glass. Sometimes you'd be prepared to settle for something simpler.

That's especially the case if somebody promises you much of the good stuff for very little money. We're talking about the Acer Liquid Jade Z, which offers some fancy electronics for just £150. Is it too good to be true?

## Slippery texture

Unfortunately, yes it is. Despite being able to boast a 5in 720p screen and a 13-megapixel camera, this budget model is a bit disappointing.

First impressions are not good. It's a mess of a design, with a brushed effect on the plastic back that will convince nobody it is made of metal. It doesn't feel great to hold, thanks to a slippery texture that works against the slim profile, not to mention a power button that's got no business being at the top of the device.

Then there's the build quality: its mildly flexible nature does little to reassure us that this smartphone is built to last. But to hell with the design - at this price we'd settle for a Toblerone-shaped phone if the picture and sound quality were up to scratch.

## Good viewing angles

Sadly, the picture quality isn't. The size (5in) and resolution (720p) of the screen appeals, and it does a fine job with sharpness and contrast. Viewing angles are good for an LCD screen, but the white balance is a bit off. To our eyes (and especially when compared with the competition) it seems a bit green.

General operation is erratic. Navigation between apps and menus is smooth enough, but during our test it occasionally slowed to a crawl. We wish the interface (Acer's own, on top of Android 4.4 KitKat) were a little cleaner. There is a lot of bloatware, much of which is not removable and ends up taking space unnecessarily.

## False economy

The Liquid Jade Z offers decent spec for little cash, but ultimately looks and performs like a budget phone



## Brushed off

The back of the Liquid Jade Z has an unconvincing brushed metal effect, making the phone slippery to hold

## Sluggish camera

Can the 13-megapixel camera save the day? Not really. On paper, the spec sounds promising, especially with that f/1.8 lens putting it on par with the Samsung Galaxy S6. But in reality it doesn't even come close. For a start, the software is sluggish, and even once it's loaded, details are lacking. It's not sharp enough to really etch those textures.

## Not to be scoffed at

Yes, it's cheap. And for the money, you get a 5in 720p screen, which is not to be scoffed at. But that's not enough to outweigh the Acer Liquid Jade Z's many other flaws. It's as frustrating as it is disappointing, especially when similar money could buy you a surprisingly good Alcatel OneTouch Idol 3 (4.7). If you're looking to save cash it might be worth looking at the Acer - but for just a little more you could do a lot better.

## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Decent screen; low price; promising camera specification

**AGAINST** Brash, messy sound; poor design; erratic performance

**VERDICT** Proof that good specification and a low price don't always add up

The Acer Liquid Jade Z offers some fancy electronics for just £150, but is it too good to be true? Unfortunately, yes it is



# Alcatel OneTouch Idol 3 (4.7) £210

(or free on contract) ★★★★★☆

**Alcatel may not** often make as much noise as its American or Korean rivals, but when it does it's worth taking notice. If the OneTouch Idol 3 is anything to go by, this company is going places.

The Alcatel OneTouch Idol 3 comes in two sizes, with 5.5in and 4.7 screens. The former has bumped-up specs, but the 4.7, our test model, is aimed squarely at the midrange market. It might not have Apple or Samsung quaking in their boots but, for a third of the price of flagship models, the Idol 3 does many things very well indeed.

## Screen rotation

The Idol 3 doesn't look spectacular - in fact it's rather nondescript. The front is black, symmetrical and unbranded; the back, plastic with a light brushed-metal effect. It won't fool your hands, but eyes are easily deceived. The same goes for the chrome-effect edges.

It feels good to hold. The plastic build is light, but solid enough, and it fits nicely in the palm. We're not overly keen on the button placement of power on the left, volume on the right, though the Idol 3 also knows LG's shortcut of double-tapping to turn the screen on. And if that's not enough, get ready for Alcatel's party trick - the screen automatically rotates to stay upstanding, and there are speakers and microphones on both ends of the device.

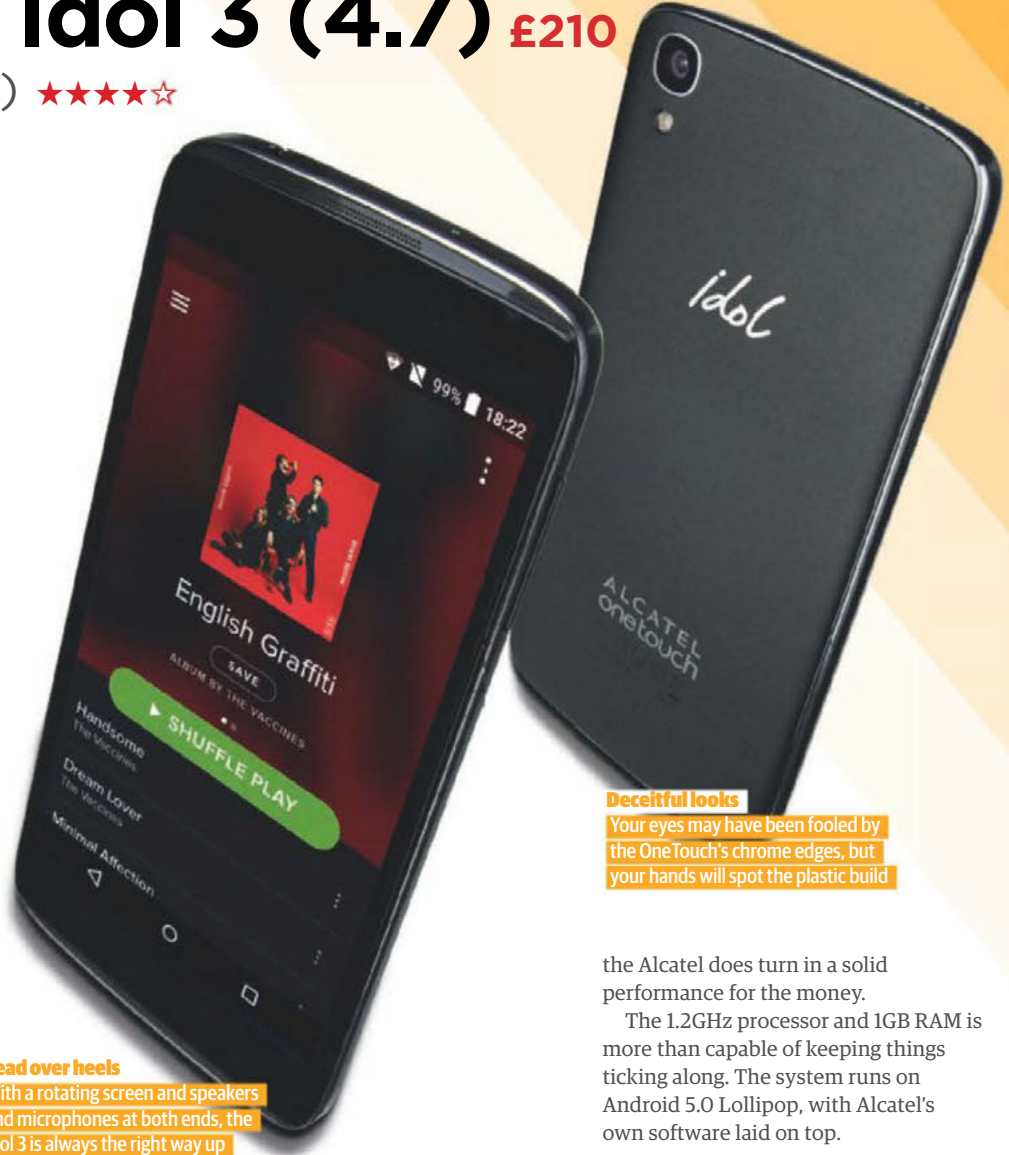
Say goodbye to taking your phone out of your pocket and finding it upside down - this Alcatel doesn't know the meaning of those words. Is it necessary? Probably not, but it is useful.

## DJ station

Once the novelty of flipping the screen over wears off (it takes a while), we set it in a horizontal position and load up a video. The 4.7in screen is a pleasant surprise. The Apple iPhone 6 shows that top specs aren't everything, and the Alcatel's 720p screen reaffirms this.

Colours are dynamic. Contrast is good. Skin tones are convincing. Even the viewing angles are generous. It doesn't have the Samsung Galaxy S6's level of

**Head over heels**  
With a rotating screen and speakers and microphones at both ends, the Idol 3 is always the right way up



**Deceitful looks**  
Your eyes may have been fooled by the OneTouch's chrome edges, but your hands will spot the plastic build

detail, but at this price the Idol 3 is definitely punching above its weight.

It's a theme that continues as we put it through its paces on sound. It isn't as loud as it could be, but thanks to collaboration with American audio company JBL it is clear, coherent and coordinated. It doesn't quite match the Apple iPhone 6's level of musicality, but it's still a good listen.

The front-facing stereo speakers give HTC's Boomsound speakers a run for their money. The built-in music app doesn't just play tunes - you can try mixing in Music Centre mode, turning your Idol 3 into a bona fide DJ station.

## Solid 13-megapixel camera

Even the camera has a surprising amount to offer. It's a good 13-megapixel snapper, capable of shooting vivid colours and a decent level of detail. We wouldn't expect it to match the stunning performance of the LG G4's camera, but

the Alcatel does turn in a solid performance for the money.

The 1.2GHz processor and 1GB RAM is more than capable of keeping things ticking along. The system runs on Android 5.0 Lollipop, with Alcatel's own software laid on top.

## Bells and whistles

Battery life is about average for a midrange phone: no problem getting through a normal day, but loop a 720p video and it will last about seven hours. Internal storage is 8GB, but you can (and should) add a microSD card.

Overall, we're impressed with the Alcatel OneTouch Idol 3, a midrange phone that punches above its weight. At this price, the big flagship models have cause for concern. If you're not after a premium phone with all the bells and whistles, this is worth your attention.

## Rating ★★★★★☆

**FOR** Great video and sound for the money; impressive camera; always the right way up

**AGAINST** Good for the price, but not up to flagship standards

**VERDICT** A strong budget alternative to premium rivals

**Say goodbye to taking your phone out of your pocket and finding it upside down - this Alcatel doesn't know the meaning of those words**

# Apple iPhone 6 £540

(or free on contract) ★★★★★

If there's one thing to be said about Apple, it's that the company dances to its own tune. It certainly doesn't bother with the petty business of seeing what everybody else is doing.

For its latest smartphone, the Apple iPhone 6, that means there is no Full HD screen, even when key rivals have adopted Quad HD. There is no 16-megapixel camera with laser focusing and image stabilisation, and no high-res audio support. You might have written your own wishlist containing all the possible tech out there, but Apple couldn't care less what you think.

## New curves

Why? Because Apple focuses on performance over specs, a strategy that has served it extremely well. What its products lack in grunt, they make up for in finesse. The Apple iPhone 6's performance and user experience is hard to beat, which makes it easily one of the best smartphones around.

Apple makes shiny things and the iPhone 6 is no exception. The design has been reworked with the addition of some new curves, doing away with the straight edges first introduced by the iPhone 4. It's not just pretty, it makes handling a little easier, which is necessary because of the increased size.

## Apple's screen size is growing

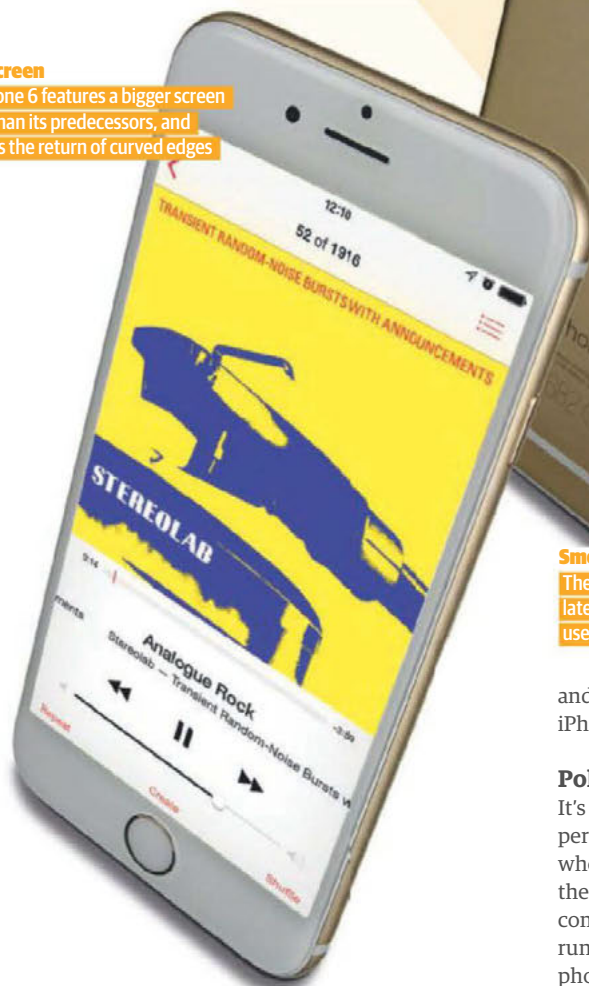
Yes, Apple has started to make larger phones after years of ignoring the trend and sticking with screens 4in or under. The iPhone 6's screen measures 4.7in, which is still below average but a notable increase on its predecessors.

The screen has a resolution of just 1334x750, which on paper is a little low, especially with Full HD 1080p screens being the norm and Quad HD on the rise. But resolution isn't everything and the iPhone's pixels work very hard to hold off the competition.

Edges are accurately drawn and fine details are nicely etched. Colours are on the cool side of neutral, but there's vibrancy where needed. Across the colour spectrum, tones are convincing.

### Some screen

The iPhone 6 features a bigger screen (4.7in) than its predecessors, and also sees the return of curved edges



### Smooth operation

The iPhone 6 may not have all the latest tech, but the performance and user experience are second to none

and there's music that engages. On the iPhone 6, it's the latter.

## Polished performance

It's not just about the audiovisual performance, of course. With Apple, the whole package is polished - including the operating system. The iPhone 6 comes with iOS 8 out of the box, and it runs like a dream. Even the best Android phones stutter on occasion, but iOS sails through any task you throw at it.

We're similarly impressed with the camera. It's not top-spec like the LG or Samsung. But those eight megapixels are put to good use. Images are sharp, with excellent colour reproduction. Autofocus is fast, and there's little noise unless you're shooting in dim light.

Draw up a list of everything you want from a smartphone and it's unlikely your wishes will be granted. Apple doesn't swing that way. Rather than spreading itself thin, the company does the key things really well. If you already buy into Apple's way of doing things, you'll be very happy indeed.

Contrast is strong, too - the blacks aren't AMOLED dark but they're impressively deep, while whites are strong without being dazzling. The likes of the Samsung Galaxy S6 and LG G4 have the edge when it comes to outright detail and contrast, but the Apple won't attract many complaints on its own.

## A foot-tapping sound

Audio has always been one of Apple's greatest strengths and the iPhone 6 maintains that tradition. The absence of high-res audio support is disappointing, but easy to ignore when the CD-quality 44.1kHz performance is this good.

The rich, full-bodied character remains, but a little extra clarity makes it more detailed and dynamic than ever. It's a balanced listen, expressive in the midrange and sparkly in the treble.

We're also attracted to the iPhone's sense of enthusiasm. It's a snappy, energetic sound that encourages your foot to tap. There's background music

**The Apple iPhone 6's performance and user experience is hard to beat, which makes it easily one of the best smartphones around**

## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Excellent sound; great screen; smooth operation; gorgeous build

**AGAINST** No high-res audio; the screen could be a touch sharper

**VERDICT** Apple still refuses to enter the arms race, and is none the worse for it



Honor

**6+ £300**

(or free on contract) ★★★★★

**If you want** a lot of tech for not a huge amount of money, this smartphone could be the one. Honor - basically Huawei operating under a more Eurocentric label - seems to have designed a smartphone based entirely on a checklist.

With a big screen, capacious battery, fancy camera and powerful processor, the Honor 6+ should be right at the top of the pile. But chasing specification is a dangerous game, and this is an example of how plenty of ticked boxes don't always amount to a great product.

### A nod to the iPhone

They say imitation is the most sincere form of flattery. In that case, Apple should be blushing severely right now, because the Honor 6+ is clearly a big fan.

The design looks essentially like a larger version of the iPhone 4. Only it's not as nice. Unlike its stabledmate the Huawei P8, which could conceivably pass for an iPhone 5, the Honor 6+ feels a little tacky. The glass-like back and metal-like bumper are both just plastic.

Even the software is Apple-centric. The Honor 6+ actually runs on last year's Android interface (version 4.4 KitKat), but it's almost entirely painted over to resemble iOS. Apps appear in static grids, because the Android app drawer is nowhere to be seen.

At least one core Android feature remains: expandable memory. The Honor 6+ has two SIM trays, but one of them doubles as a microSD slot, compatible with cards up to 128GB.

### Entering into brash territory

Video quality is impressive, and on par with the Huawei P8. The Full HD screen is sharp and colours are vivid. The contrast levels are good for an LCD screen, although the LG G4's output is more dynamic and the Samsung Galaxy S6's AMOLED screen is miles in front. Still, we appreciate the little things, like being able to tweak the white balance.

When it comes to sound, we're disappointed. We were half expecting the Huawei P8's standard - competent

#### Outside the box

The Honor 6+ smartphone ticks a lot of boxes for its tech spec, but is let down by its audiovisual performance



#### Apple of its eye

The Honor 6+ bears more than a passing resemblance to the iPhone 4, even down to the iOS-like software

but in need of subtlety. But the Honor is one step down, overstepping the mark into brash territory. It's not particularly engaging or well defined, and often sounds rough around the edges.

### Mimic human sight

The camera here is a curious beast. There are two 8-megapixel sensors at the back, which work together to give you 13-megapixel photos. Why? According to Honor, this will mimic human sight and improve focusing. Incidentally, there's a fancy mode that lets you tinker with a picture's focus after you take the shot.

The two lenses are also supposed to help with high dynamic range photos, which combine multiple photos of different light exposures. It all seems to work because the results are pretty good. Focusing is fast, which means it's easy to get sharp shots, but it's still some way behind the LG G4 on detail and dynamism though.

Battery life is good. The 3600mAh battery will easily see you through a

couple of days. Loop a 720p video with half brightness and wi-fi connected, and it will last about 12 hours.

The processor is a bit more erratic. With eight cores you'd expect the thing to zoom along, but it doesn't. It's fast enough most of the time, but we encountered the occasional stutter. Even with lighter tasks (checking emails, browsing photos) we felt the device heat up quite quickly.

### Laundry list

Specs and features aren't everything. Just look at the Apple iPhone 6: its relatively paltry specifications belie a top-class performance. Clearly the folks at Cupertino know how to maximise their resources.

Sadly it's not the same story with Honor/Huawei. Despite ticking quite a few boxes, the Honor 6+ doesn't blow us away. By all means, check it out for its laundry list of features - but not for its audio-visual talent.

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Big, sharp screen; good camera; reasonable price

**AGAINST** Poor sound quality; plastic build feels a little tacky

**VERDICT** You get a lot of technology on your phone, but it's not all good

**If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, Apple should be blushing right now, because the Honor 6+ is clearly a big fan**

# HTC

## One M9 £500

(or free on contract) ★★★★★☆

**When the first** HTC One came along it stood out from the crowd. Not only was it an Android phone that dared to wear a full metal jacket, it also performed well enough to butt heads with the standard-setting iPhone and come away with only superficial injuries.

Now we have the HTC One M9, the third generation of this successful series. But the landscape has changed. While the latest HTC sticks to its comfort zone, the likes of Samsung and LG have undergone radical changes.

Did HTC get complacent, or was it wise not to mess with a winning formula? It's a bit of both: the HTC One M9 is a lovely device, but its relevance is put in question by the latest rivals.

### Best loudspeakers

When it comes to design, it's business as usual. Samsung and LG have experimented by adopting glass, metal and leather, but HTC is clearly keen to keep one foot in charted territory.

The screen is again topped and tailed by a large amount of bezel space, used for the front-facing 'Boomsound' speakers - still the best loudspeakers we've heard on a smartphone.

The machined aluminium body returns, along with angled sides that take us back to the original HTC One. The right side now has the power and volume buttons, but the drawback here is that they are too close together and could be confused for one another.

Our review sample is a two-tone light silver with gold trim, but the M9 also comes in gun-metal grey and gold.

### Super-sharp screen

Rather than jumping on the Quad HD bandwagon, HTC has stuck with a 5in Full HD display. That's not necessarily a bad thing - a QHD screen doesn't guarantee better results.

There are no discernible pixels. The screen is super-sharp whether you watch videos or read emails. Outlines are cleanly drawn, and textures are well realised. The palette is on the cool side of neutral, but never feels lifeless or dull.



**Evolutionary**  
HTC has opted to stick to its comfort zone with the One M9, the third generation of the successful series

### Back to square One

The M9 has a machined aluminium body and angled sides that take us right back to the original HTC One

Samsung Galaxy S6 for refinement, but the HTC One M9 holds its own.

Battery life lets the HTC One M9 down though. Medium usage would see you through 9-10 hours, but our standard test yielded just 7 hours 26 minutes.

### High-spec, inconsistent camera

Then there is the camera. The 20.7-megapixel snapper with an f/2.2 lens sounds tempting, but the results are inconsistent. In good light you get well-judged colours, minimum noise and plenty of detail. But you'll find exposure issues in tricky conditions, even with High Dynamic Range mode activated. As far as snappers go, the M9 trails the LG G4's stunning offering.

The HTC One M9 is a solid effort and there is plenty to like about it. The problem is that the competition has moved on significantly and now outclasses the HTC in most respects. It's good - but there are better smartphones for the money.

### Rating ★★★★★☆

**FOR** Good picture; good sound; nice build, but not groundbreaking

**AGAINST** Picture needs more contrast; sound needs more refinement; relatively poor camera

**VERDICT** The HTC is still a pleasing phone, but it no longer leads the pack

Contrast is the one weak point here - it's not as dynamic as the Samsung Galaxy S6, LG G4 or Apple iPhone 6. Blacks are suitably dark but whites don't penetrate with as much gusto.

Overall the One M9 is a fine option for movies on the go, even if it doesn't push the boundaries of mobile screen tech.

### High-resolution music support

HTC has made a more obvious effort on the audio front. The M9 introduces hi-res music support to the range, up to 24-bit/192kHz, along with a brand new equaliser with Dolby Audio sound processing. With headphones, the equaliser helps to make the M9 an enthusiastic listen. Timing and detail levels are pretty good, although the result is not as effortless as the iPhone 6.

Feed the M9 a well-mastered high-res track and the difference is apparent. Everything tightens up and there is more in the way of coordination and subtlety. We'd still pick the iPhone 6 or the

**The landscape has changed. While the latest HTC sticks to its comfort zone, the likes of Samsung and LG have undergone radical changes**





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# Huawei P8 £360

(or free on contract) ★★★★★☆

**You may not** have heard of Huawei (that's 'hwah-way', not Hawaii), but the Chinese company is actually the world's largest telecommunications company, having overtaken Sweden's Ericsson in 2012. Its most common products are wireless routers and mobile internet dongles, but now it is heading west with a mission to break into the highly competitive smartphone market.

Huawei has made attempts before, with little success. Now it's having another go with its latest flagship model, the Huawei P8. But how do you take on a market that's never heard of you and can't pronounce your name? Simple: do what Apple does, but sell for less.

## Inspired by Apple

Nearly everything about the Huawei P8 has been, let's just say, 'inspired' by Apple. Which is a little odd, seeing as it's an Android phone deep down. The result is a delightful curiosity.

The influences are so evident that the P8 might have grown up with a poster of the iPhone 5 on its wall. It's a slender slab of glass and aluminium with a luxurious vibe. If you want to save some money but still own a respectable-looking phone, this will do nicely.

The software, EmotionUI, tweaks Android Lollipop 5.0 to within an inch of its life. Huawei has tried its best to replicate the look and feel of an Apple iPhone, to the extent of removing the Android app drawer. Here all your apps must be on the main screen, in a grid.

And yet it's not an iPhone. The closed-off unibody design means there's no way to remove the back and change the battery, but Huawei has followed the Android tradition of including a microSD card slot. That lets you expand the internal memory by an extra 128GB.

The more expensive versions of the Huawei P8 allow the microSD card slot to double up as a second SIM slot.

## Vibrant, eye-catching picture

We have the standard model, so we insert a memory card full of music and movies. For the money, the picture performance

### Grid locked

The Huawei's Android software has been tweaked so that apps appear on a grid resembling that of an iPhone



### Slim pickings

The P8 is a slender slab of glass and aluminium with a luxurious vibe, but available for a reasonable price

The camera is one of the phone's strong points, and the quality of its 13-megapixel snapper with an f/2 lens and optical image stabilisation comes as a nice surprise. The trick up Huawei's sleeve is the world's first (they say) RGBW sensor, where red, green and blue sub-pixels are joined by a white one, meaning the camera takes in more light. Again, the LG G4 is a step ahead in detail and subtlety, but the Huawei takes good shots with little effort.

## Looks, features and performance

Powering all of this is Huawei's own 64-bit, 2GHz octa-core Kirin 930 CPU, along with 3GB of RAM. It's fast and stable enough, but not quite capable of the Galaxy S6's lightning loading speeds. The built-in 2690mAh lasted seven hours on our 720p video loop test, but normal usage saw us through a day.

For the money, the Huawei P8 is a success. You get looks, features and a performance which is just about comparable with some of the big names. It's not perfect but if you're looking for a good multimedia device that can save you some cash, it's worth investigating.

## Rating ★★★★★☆

**FOR** Vibrant colours; supports hi-res audio; strong camera; good build

**AGAINST** Picture needs better contrast; sound needs more refinement

**VERDICT** A more affordable way to get the premium experience

is good. The 5.2in screen is Full HD and not Quad HD, but it's sharp enough that you won't care. Colours are vibrant, going for eye-catching over realistic, but accurate enough to be convincing. You can also tweak the balance a bit, thanks to a temperature slider in Settings.

Contrast is the one area that keeps the Huawei from reaching the same level as the class-leading Samsung Galaxy S6 or LG G4. Blacks aren't as dark as we'd like, and whites fall short of brilliant. It's perfectly watchable, however.

## Decent sound, and high-def too

The sound also falls just short of its rivals, but it's good enough to keep us from being disappointed. Timing is decent, as is detail definition. It gets loud enough, and also accepts hi-res tracks. Not that they make much of a difference, however - high-res or not, the Samsung Galaxy S6 offers more detail and refinement, while the Apple iPhone 6 slams harder.

How do you take on a market that has never heard of you and can't pronounce your name? Simple: do what Apple does, but sell for less



# LG G4 **£500**

(or free on contract) ★★★★★

**What does it take** for a flagship smartphone to stand out these days? A fast processor, a high-resolution screen and a powerful camera are all on the shopping list, but if you want to be really noticed you have to do something special. The LG G4 is special because its blend of features and design is unique. It has a leather back - genuine, vegetable-tanned, full-grain leather, not the imitation stuff we saw from Samsung.

## Fancy wallet

The result is not unlike fondling a fancy wallet, and the vibe is premium enough to make us forget the plastic edges. Don't want cowhide on your phone? That's fine - you can pay a little less and get the device in ceramic (white) or metallic plastic (silver or gold).

Another unusual design quirk is a curved body. It's a very slight bend, not as pronounced as those on LG's TVs or the LG G Flex 2. Handling is a more pleasant and ergonomic experience, and a happy side effect is that the screen is slightly protected when face down.

You can remove the back to swap the battery, or supplement the built-in 32GB storage with a microSD card up to 2TB. That's a lot of content, but you'll make use of the flexible battery and storage arrangement, because the LG G4 is good at handling movies and music.

## Wallops your eyeballs

The LG G4 has a marvellous picture. The G4 uses a 5.5in screen with a Quad HD (2560x1440) resolution. Now there is an IPS Quantum Display, which promises 25 per cent greater brightness, 20 per cent wider colour gamut, and 50 per cent better contrast than before.

LG says it is the closest smartphone screen to the Digital Cinema Initiative's DCI-P3 colour space - ie. better colour accuracy. In reality, it's one of the best smartphone pictures we've seen.

It's sharp. It's clear. It's bright. Viewing angles are good. Contrast is excellent, with blacks so deep it's hard to believe this is an LCD panel. The LG's biggest threat here is the Samsung Galaxy S6,

### Picture perfect

The LG G4's 5.5in Quad HD screen has IPS Quantum Display, which promises 25 per cent greater brightness



### Hide and seek

The genuine leather back may not be to everyone's taste, but it does stand out and makes for a premium product

whose AMOLED screen offers greater contrast and wallops your eyeballs a little harder. The LG, meanwhile, is more nuanced in shading and gradation.

## An attacking, rhythmic sound

There was a time when LG smartphones sounded a little lifeless, but what you get now is a fine amount of attack and the rhythmic precision to match. The G4 isn't up there with the Galaxy S6 or the iPhone 6 in terms of bite and dynamism, but this is a sound we'd happily listen to.

The G4 regains solid footing when it comes to photography. This may be the best and most advanced camera we've ever seen on a smartphone. The 16-megapixel snapper has an f/1.8 lens for good low-light scenarios, a laser for fast focusing, and three-axis optical image stabilisation for shaky hands.

Even on automatic, the results are splendid. Pictures are sharp and clear, with a good colour balance. It's a fast snapper too, launching in 0.6 seconds.

The most exciting new feature is a full-manual shooting mode, which will appeal to anyone frustrated with the LG G3's simplified camera controls. Now you can adjust white balance, focus, exposure, ISO and shutter speed - and save your results in RAW format for better photoshopping.

## Stands out from the crowd

Battery life is good, but not the best. The G4 lasted 10 hours looping 720p video at 50 per cent brightness, with wi-fi on. That is only average for a smartphone, but you do have the option of changing batteries. Few flagship rivals can boast that these days.

That leather back may not be to everyone's taste, but we admire LG for making the G4 phone stand out. The audio quality may not be up there with the class leaders, but this is more than compensated for by the brilliant camera and the ability to tinker with batteries and memory cards. Overall, this is a device which fills us with glee.

## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Excellent screen; stunning camera; leather back; expandable memory

**AGAINST** Not the final word in audio excitement

**VERDICT** Brains, brawn and beauty too - an excellent smartphone performance

**The LG G4 is special because its design is unique. It has a leather back - genuine, vegetable-tanned, full-grain leather**



# The best soundbar?

## The experts think so...



Home Cinema Choice 'Best Buy',  
July 2014



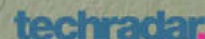
Trusted Reviews 'Recommended',  
October 2014



What Hi-Fi? Awards 2014,  
'Product of the Year'



AV Forums 'Highly Recommended',  
July 2014



Tech Radar '1st in Tech Radars  
Top 10 soundbars', March 2015



## Media 4 The real hi-fi soundbar

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# Samsung Galaxy S6

£530  
(or free on contract) ★★★★★

We've been fairly critical of Samsung's smartphones in the past. Regardless of impressive specification, their plastic construction left us cold, especially when the likes of Apple, Sony and HTC offered gleaming slabs of glass and metal. With the Samsung Galaxy S6 series, this is no longer an issue.

Samsung has two flagship models for 2015, the Galaxy S6 and the Galaxy S6 Edge – essentially the same phone, but the S6 Edge sports a more sculpted body and a screen with curved edges.

We love the S6 Edge, so we have high hopes for the 'regular' S6. But there is nothing regular about the S6. This is an extraordinary device.

## It's a looker

Samsung has at last created something of a looker. The plastic is gone, now it's all metal edges and glass on the front and back. Though the design has taken its inspiration from Apple's iPhone 6, the S6 is arguably even prettier.

Power up and things get even better. The screen is a 5.1in AMOLED display with a QHD (2560x1440) resolution, and it is gorgeous. Want a great picture on the go? Look no further.

With just under 580 pixels per inch, it's super-sharp. We are momentarily dazed at the level of contrast on offer, which is an inherent strength of AMOLED panels. Whites are scintillating, while at the other end the darks are black as night, and colours are vivid and attractive. As is traditional with Samsung, there are different picture modes for you to finesse the palette. We settle on Adaptive Display, which offers a good balance of vibrancy.

Samsung's biggest threat here is the LG G4, which has size on its side (5.5in), and also demonstrates greater nuance in shading. The Samsung counters with greater contrast and dynamism.

## Detail and dynamism

When it comes to audio quality, the Samsung is a step ahead. It's an engaging listen, thanks to tight timing, a reservoir of power and the readiness to use both.

**We loved the S6 Edge and have high hopes for the 'regular' S6. But there is nothing regular about the S6. This is an extraordinary device**

## Moving pictures

The screen is a 5.1in AMOLED display with a Quad HD resolution. For a great picture on the go, look no further

The S6 happily handles high-resolution audio too. We load up a few tracks, up to 24-bit/192kHz, and are greeted with detail and dynamism. Samsung smartphones have not always been the most insightful or refined, but the sound on the S6 is a job well done. The iPhone 6 still edges ahead in rhythm and snap, but the Samsung has enough going for it to be a welcome alternative.

## None of the lag from before

The S6's operation shows no signs of the lag that plagued previous generations. And Samsung has toned down its interface, which sits on top of Android's 5.0 Lollipop operating system.

That 64-bit octa-core Exynos processor and 3GB RAM is a powerful combination. Our commands are never met with hesitation, and the Samsung has no problems juggling a full HD video with high-res tracks and a 3D game.

Even the camera is fast, loading up in just 0.7 seconds. The pictures are impressive too. You get a 16-megapixel

## Hey good looking

Samsung has replaced the plastic of previous models with glass and metal, and the result is something of a looker

snapper with an aperture of f/1.9 (good for low-light shots).

Results are among the best we've seen this year, even on the basic Auto mode. There is plenty of detail and colours are convincing. The sharpness may lose out to the LG G4, but there's very little in it.

## A seriously tempting proposition

Our only misgiving about the Samsung Galaxy S6 is that you can't remove the back to swap batteries or add memory cards. The standard 32GB will be eaten up quickly if you're big on full-resolution photos and high-res tracks (though Samsung also offers 64GB and 128GB models). The battery charges at a ridiculously fast speed. Ten minutes gets you four hours of juice.

Bravo, Samsung! The restrictions on memory and battery may drive heavy users into the hands of LG, but the Galaxy S6 is a great achievement. Its extraordinary multimedia capabilities make it a seriously tempting proposition for anyone wanting top-quality picture and sound on the go. This is easily one of the best smartphones of 2015.

## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Excellent screen; excellent sound; hi-res audio support; great camera; premium build

**AGAINST** Battery and memory are no longer upgradable

**VERDICT** Finally, a Samsung smartphone to be thoroughly proud of



# TEST VERDICT



## THE WINNER

### Samsung Galaxy S6

£500 ★★★★★

Neck and neck with Samsung was the LG G4, but ultimately we seek entertainment and the S6 was ahead in the sound department - it fully deserves its five stars

Samsung steps up its game with a sophisticated glass 'n' metal look and an impressive range of features. All this means the gorgeous **Samsung Galaxy S6** is a smartphone to be proud of

**A**nd the winner is... Samsung Galaxy S6. Yes, we're surprised too. It's been a while since Samsung produced a smartphone to be truly proud of. Yet here we have a model that shines in many respects.

The company has clearly heeded the negative feedback towards its earlier, cheaper-looking models. But now we have a gorgeous design that takes the fight to Apple. It's not just a pretty face - Samsung has really stepped up its game in the audiovisual department. It's a beautiful screen and a hugely entertaining listen. All is forgiven.

#### Seeking entertainment

Neck and neck with Samsung is the LG G4. We love the screen, we admire the bold step of going for leather, and we appreciate the ability to tinker with batteries and memory cards.

But ultimately we seek entertainment, and the Samsung edges ahead in the sound department. If you prefer the practicality of

expandable storage, you're sure to be pleased with the LG G4 - it's thoroughly deserving of its full five stars.

#### Chasing specs

In third place we have the Apple iPhone 6. Its spec sheet looks entirely lacklustre, well behind its Android rivals. But chasing specs is a dangerous, deceptive thing to do - it's clear that Apple put a lot of effort into making these resources work. The result is a user experience and a musical performance that's hard to beat.

Four stars have been awarded to the HTC One M9, the Huawei P8 and the Alcatel OneTouch Idol 3 (4.7). They're all very good phones in their own right, but for one reason or another, just not in the same league as the top three. The HTC One M9 offered nice metal design, but we wanted more from its sound, picture, camera and battery.

The Huawei P8 is a very different proposition. It's a step down from the class

leaders, but it does enough right and has the right price tag to make it a worthy proposition.

Alcatel's OneTouch Idol 3 is a pleasant surprise. It is definitely pitched at the middle-low end of the market, but its performance and list of features mean it punches well above its weight. Anyone who wants a good smartphone for less would do well to pause and investigate.

#### Something for everyone

The Honor 6+ and Acer Liquid Jade Z both get three stars, because they just don't offer the value for money we're looking for. On paper the Honor ticks a lot of boxes, but its performance in the real world lets it down. The Acer, affordable though it is, was put to shame by the similarly priced Alcatel.

There's something for everyone here. No matter which one you go for, one thing is for sure: sound and vision on the go is about to get a whole lot better.





**Acer Liquid Jade Z**

**£150 ★★★★★**

**Dimensions** 143.5 x 69.8 x 8mm  
**Weight** 110g  
**Camera** 13MP  
**Screen size** 5  
**Resolution** 1280x720  
**Removable battery** no  
**Expandable memory** yes



**Alcatel OneTouch Idol 3 (4.7)**

**£210 ★★★★★**

**Dimensions** 135x66x7.6mm  
**Weight** 110g  
**Camera** 13MP  
**Screen size** 4.7  
**Resolution** 1280x720  
**Removable battery** no  
**Expandable memory** yes



**Apple iPhone 6**

**£540 ★★★★★**

**Dimensions** 138x67x6.9mm  
**Weight** 129g  
**Camera** 8MP  
**Screen size** 4.7  
**Resolution** 1334x750  
**Removable battery** no  
**Expandable memory** no



**Honor 6+**

**£300 ★★★★★**

**Dimensions** 150x76x7.5  
**Weight** 165g  
**Camera** 13MP  
**Screen size** 5.5  
**Resolution** 1920x1080  
**Removable battery** no  
**Expandable memory** yes



**HTC One M9**

**£500 ★★★★★**

**Dimensions** 145x70x9.6mm  
**Weight** 157g  
**Camera** 20MP  
**Screen size** 5  
**Resolution** 1920x1080  
**Removable battery** no  
**Expandable memory** yes



**Huawei P8**

**£360 ★★★★★**

**Dimensions** 145x72x6.4mm  
**Weight** 144g  
**Camera** 13MP  
**Screen size** 5.2  
**Resolution** 1920x1080  
**Removable battery** no  
**Expandable memory** yes



**LG G4**

**£500 ★★★★★**

**Dimensions** 149x76x9.8mm  
**Weight** 155g  
**Camera** 16MP  
**Screen size** 5.5  
**Resolution** 2560x1440  
**Removable battery** yes  
**Expandable memory** yes



**Samsung Galaxy S6**

**£530 ★★★★★**

**Dimensions** 143x71x6.8mm  
**Weight** 138g  
**Camera** 16MP  
**Screen size** 5.1  
**Resolution** 2560x1440  
**Removable battery** no  
**Expandable memory** no



**WHAT HI-FI?**  
**TEST WINNER**

**SYSTEM BUILDER**



**Musicstreaming**  
**Tidal £10 per month**  
**★★★★★**

A lovely interface, strong catalogue and excellent sound quality make Tidal the top streaming service right now



**Wireless speakers**  
**Geneva Model S £330 ★★★★★**  
 Bluetooth, 3.5mm, DAB+, and stunning sound. An excellent speaker

**Total build £950**



**Headphones**  
**AKG Y50 £80**  
**★★★★★**

Funky design and great sound - perfect for music on the go

# The Story of the **BLU**s

4K Blu-ray may be the next big thing on the horizon, but now is the time to grab yourself a bargain Blu-ray player

**U**ltra HD Blu-ray players are the talk of the town now their spec has been confirmed, but we shouldn't forget the trusty originals just yet. After all, 4K Blu-ray discs won't appear in their thousands overnight, so these machines will still be playing the majority of movies on our shelves for some time to come.

With plenty of Blu-ray players available for around £100, picking out the best buys is no easy task. But fear not, we are here to help your quest to find the best audio-visual set-up on a tight budget.

Sony ruled the roost at the sub-£100 price point in 2014, but a new year brings new models from all the usual suspects. Do Samsung, LG or Panasonic have what it takes to wrestle the prize from Sony's hands?

#### WHAT'S ON TEST:

**LG BP350**

**Panasonic DMP-BDT170**

**Samsung BD-J5500**

**Sony BDP-S4500**



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# LG BP350

## £80 ★★★★★

The LG's shimmery diamond-effect chassis makes it ideal for anyone with style in mind, and you'll need some willpower not to stroke the textured plastic



**The BP350** is one of four new Blu-ray players joining LG's MUSICflow multi-room family, capable of streaming music from CDs and USBs to any of the five-strong range's wireless speakers.

### Shimmery diamond effect

Those who haven't bought into LG's 'smart hi-fi audio' can use it as a regular Blu-ray player, and to that end it's a decent option. Feature-wise, DLNA support and a throng of smarts are there for the taking. There's built-in wifi, but no ethernet port for a wired connection.

Design is a conversation starter. Its shimmery diamond-effect chassis makes the LG ideal for anyone with style in mind, and you'll need some willpower not to stroke the textured plastic. The solid black power and eject buttons stand out well against it. Our only gripe is that the disc tray cover feels a bit wobbly as we put a disc on it.

You may be disappointed to learn that LG's beloved webOS interface doesn't feature on the BP350, but its other smart platform (appearing on its lowest-ranging TVs) is almost as pleasant.

Greeting you upon start-up (it takes around seven seconds) is a home screen featuring a series of tabs across a colourful background. This is where you can locate files on a server or connected USB, and get your teeth into its generous

app offering: Now TV, Netflix, BBC iPlayer, and Amazon Instant Video, as well as rarer ones like Blinkbox, Spotify and Deezer, all make an appearance.

The apps are located in the tab labelled 'Premium'. Hover over it and they pop-up along the bottom of the screen, so are handily within reach without having to enter another page.

The LG AV Remote 5 app can be downloaded (free on iOS and Android) and used as a basic controller. It's as snazzy and responsive as mobile apps come, and it helps that the interface looks and works similarly to the player's.

### Pinhead-sized buttons

You might prefer it to the remote. Some may not get on with the handset's distinctly ridged back - designed for your index finger to lie on - and the majority of its buttons are tiny.

Everything you'd expect is present and correct, though, and we find the numerical keys handy for jumping to specific tracks on CDs.

Music replay is clear and upbeat, the LG's sonic presentation detailed, fast and agile. Even an average quality recording, like the Eurythmics' *Greatest Hits*, sounds clean enough through the BP350. The synthesised beats are communicated with fervour. With music and movies, though, it's not as precise or

spacious as some of its rivals. It could be more ponderous, too, when big explosions dictate the soundfield.

### Fast-moving action

But picture performance nips any carping in the bud. It's a punchy and crisp picture, the pin-sharp lines and bold, lush colours making for a compelling watch with both Blu-ray and DVD.

Clean and controlled, it isn't ruffled by fast-moving action. And contrast is impressive too: whites are pure and blacks profound. It dissects Blu-rays with rigour and scrambles after the detail in standard definition too.

It's not the last word in subtlety (that accolade belongs to the Sony BDP-S4500) and has a harder time with reds and greens than the top seeds. But for the money, it gets a lot right. For its pictures and features, the BP350 is very competitive. If the sound were better, it might not be settling for four stars.

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Bold colours; pin-sharp outlines; decent upscaler; attractive design

**AGAINST** Sound lacks absolute precision and weight; small remote buttons

**VERDICT** Strong picture and features, but needs better sound for a fifth star



# Panasonic DMP-BDT170 £90 ★★★★★

When it comes to the Panasonic's design, there isn't much to say - it's a straight-laced box with a glossy front. Thankfully, there's plenty to say about performance



**Panasonic has carried** its top-tier models from last year (the DMP-BDT460 and DMP-BDT700) into 2015 - that's good news considering the latter is even an Award winner. The company's entry-level range has been refreshed, though. There are five new models and the DMP-BDT170 is the middle child.

## Straight-laced box

It's not often we're lost for words, but when it comes to the Panasonic's design there isn't much to say. It's simply a straight-laced box with a glossy front - but rather refreshing after last year's fad for quirky designs.

Thankfully, there's plenty to say about performance. 'Normal' is our go-to picture mode, although 'User' lets you adjust brightness, contrast, sharpness and colour to your liking. Not much fiddling is necessary - out of the box, the Panasonic puts in quite a performance.

It's a stickler for detail. Watch *Edge of Tomorrow*, with Tom Cruise at his best, and you're given a wide window into the debacle of battle. Each grain of sand on Cruise's face is visible, and there's texture to crumbling mounds of mud.

Whites are impressive and inky blacks clutch onto detail. Colours are arresting: strong, well rooted, though perhaps a touch on the inflated side if we're being fussy. Red berets jump out from behind

the mesh of khakis and browns, as do yellow tabs on the soldier's exosuits.

It's a great asset to carry into DVD performance, especially with a splashy film like *Kill Bill: Vol 2*. Everything from cars and palm trees to Uma Thurman's leathers looks inviting and accurate.

The DMP-BDT170 disguises the drop in resolution well, with sharpness, detail and motion all admirable. Those entering the 4K foray may benefit from its 4K upscaling processing too, designed to bring greater detail and sharpness when used with a 4K telly.

## No time-waster

If picture is the Panasonic's strong suit, then sound isn't far behind. It's an exciting listen, delivering the scale and detail to handle the Blu-ray's dense soundtrack. Gunfire is solid and colliding metal has clunk, but the bass is slightly tubby; machinery crashing to the ground has less 'thud' than it should.

Over to stereo with The Cure's *Kiss Me, Kiss Me* album and it tears through the track listing with energy and drive - just not quite as much punch or precision as the Sony. It doesn't boast the split-second start-up of some of its rivals, but is hardly a time-waster, beating us to a count of five every time.

Elsewhere, speed isn't the Pana's forte. On the home menu, settings and content

(from a disc, USB or your network) can be entered by pressing the navigation buttons on the remote that correspond to the grid on screen. It's simple enough, but means steering through pages to reach them. You can, at least, prioritise those which appear on the first app page.

## Legibility on the remote

BBC iPlayer, Netflix, Amazon Instant Video and YouTube are on board, as well as an app market. But catch-up TV begins and ends with BBC iPlayer, which is a shame when rivals offer more.

Panasonic did think about legibility on the remote, though. While we'd always prefer backlit buttons, the main playback keys (play, pause, skip etc) are coloured blue, so are easier to make out when the lights go down.

If your new player must come with catch-up TV, then give this Panasonic a miss. Otherwise jump in, for this is one of the best budget boxes around.

## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Solid, arresting colours; strong contrast; decent upscaler; fast, energetic sound

**AGAINST** Not the strongest interface; tough competition from Sony

**VERDICT** A fine player that really excels in picture quality

# Samsung BD-J5500

£90 ★★★★★

It's not the curved shape that steals the design limelight; the entire body is deeply ribbed so could be played like a Guiro if you had a stick



**Samsung has got** curve fever. Just over a third of the company's TVs are curved this year, and that ratio is similar for its Blu-ray players. But while bendy TV panels are designed to offer a more immersive experience, for disc spinners it's simply a quirky aesthetic.

In the case of the entry-level BD-J5500 though, it's not the curved shape that steals the design limelight. The entire body, available in black or white, is deeply ribbed so could be played like a Guiro if you had a stick.

The absence of a display is becoming the norm at the budget end, but Samsung has taken things further by having no power light either. We miss the reassurance of one, but at least there are no distractions during movie-watching.

## Ergonomic handset

The remote is more matter-of-fact, but sensibly sized. It makes a nice change from the pokey handsets offered with rival players, and while the space-hogging numerical keys mean its face is fairly busy, its nice, big, well-labelled buttons make it easy to get along with.

The BD-J5500 is the lowest 2015 model with smart features, and to access them you'll need an internet connection via ethernet. Once hooked up, you'll have access to Amazon Instant Video, YouTube and Netflix, among others.

Although we find the multi-panel, graphic-heavy interface a little busy, it does allow for quick access to apps and media on your network over DLNA, on a disc or from a connected USB key.

## Neatly tucked away

The USB input is at the front of the unit, hidden under a well-camouflaged removable rubber flap. This gives the player's front a cleaner look but is a little fiddly to remove.

Like the Sony BDP-S4500, the menu flashes up instantly at start-up. The disc tray is very quiet and has an aura of sophistication about it as it smoothly slides back home. Blu-rays load in a pretty standard 10 seconds. The operational whirr during disc-play is very slightly noisier than usual so you wouldn't want it right next to your ear.

You might want it in your living room somewhere, though. Feed it *The Amazing Spiderman 2* on Blu-ray and the image is spick and span. Edges are cutting and detail delicately (but not overly) etched.

As Spidey swings through the city and the action comes thick and fast, motion is well controlled - an asset that makes it a tempting option for 3D playback too.

The Samsung's palette is invitingly radiant, and turning down colour levels a notch in the 'user' picture mode gives it a more preferable balance. It doesn't

quite have the natural colour delivery of Samsung's TVs, though, and yellow taxis, and the reds and blues of his suit, have more depth and accuracy through the Sony and Panasonic DMP-BDT170.

Contrast is generally good; the suit's black web of lines are solid and deep. That takes a small hit when we drop to DVD (as does crispness), but there's more than enough definition elsewhere to call the Samsung a decent upscaler.

## Nimble with sound

Sonically, it isn't too shabby. It seems on its toes in fast, action-packed scenes, with soundtracks pulling through with clarity, speed and agility. We'd like a bit more weight though.

You might find the BD-J5500 an aesthetic pull. You might not. Either way there's more to like than just design. It might not have the picture subtlety and precision to top your shortlist, but it does deserve a place on it.

## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Sharp, clean picture; well controlled motion; good with 3D; decent remote; design

**AGAINST** Rivals have more picture subtlety; disc-spinning whirr is a little noisy

**VERDICT** Not ahead of the curve performance-wise, but a decent disc player



Our Uniti range of all-in-one players combine the best Naim digital audio technology with a high-quality integrated amplifier. And with Spotify Connect and Bluetooth (aptX) added for 2015, they'll unleash your music from just about any source. Simply add speakers.



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Reference all-in-one player in the Uniti range.

Next-generation music systems,  
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Go Deeper



Polaroid P55D600 July 2015

# YOU WON'T BELIEVE YOUR EYES

Create a full-on home cinema with Polaroid's Series 6 Ultra HD TVs and soundbar

**D**o you remember the first time you saw DVD after years of flickering VHS tapes? Or the first time you watched a Blu-ray? Remember that leap in quality that made you get your other half and say "you've got to see this!"?

It's time for that again. Polaroid's Series 6 ultra-high-definition displays – exclusive to ASDA stores – have landed. Ultra HD TV lets you experience detail and colour like you've never seen before. It has four times as many pixels as a Full HD screen meaning super-sharp, super-fine detail; smooth colour gradients; slick motion; vivid lifelike action. And it's smart – which means access

to a ton of catch-up TV and on-demand content. It also uses passive 3D, so you can get truly immersed in your games and movies.

There's built-in Freeview HD, which gives up to 12 high-def channels and 60 standard-def stations. It's got Dolby Digital Plus sound, Bluetooth and built-in Wi-Fi for wireless connection and four HDMI ports along with four USB inputs for memory sticks or hard drives.

Best of all is the price: the 55in version costs just £699, while the whopping 65in model is only £1099. Your living room – and your viewing – will never be the same again...



## YOU'VE GOT THE PICTURE. NOW GET THE SOUND. COMING SOON...

Want more audio oomph? Beef up your TV's sound with the Polaroid 60W soundbar with subwoofer. It might be slim, but there's nothing slight about its sound – and with built-in

Bluetooth connectivity you can wirelessly listen to your music from your phone or tablet, making this soundbar the perfect all in one audio solution for your living room.



# Sony BDP-S4500

£75 ★★★★★

Sony hits the bull's-eye when it comes to colour reproduction. Whether it's orange hair, green crop fields or red life-jackets, hues are rich and robust



**Sony doesn't seem** capable of making a bad disc-spinner these days. 2014's models were magnets to five stars, and it took only one of its 2015 Blu-ray players (the BDP-S5500) to re-open the floodgates for praise.

Here is its little brother - no doubt one of the cheapest players we'll see this year - and again we reach for our word-bank of superlatives.

## Network access

The specification drops built-in wi-fi (a direct ethernet connection opens the door to its network features instead), but 3D, DLNA and smarts remain.

The XrossMediaBar has been ditched for a simple menu, although traces of it still hang around in the set-up pages. That means you don't have to faff with longwinded menus. Instead, apps and services are conveniently in one place.

The new players have adopted PlayStation Video - formerly Video Unlimited - where you can buy tons of TV shows and movies, while Amazon Instant Video, Netflix, BBC iPlayer, Demand5 and YouTube are all on board.

The half-size remote is identical to last year's, save for a new Netflix logo on the shortcut button, and is easy to use. Sony's slick and intuitive TV SideView app (free on Android and iOS) can step in as a controller for the BDP-S4500, too.

Like the BDP-S5500, it's the size of a photo album and takes a no-frills, square-box approach.

You still get a USB input on the front, and around the back is the usual HDMI output and a coaxial for alternative hook-up to your AV receiver.

Sony has worked hard to improve boot-up and loading times from last year's models with its Quick Start Mode. It claims you get a picture in "less than one second", and isn't bluffing. As soon as your finger leaves the power button there's barely time to blink before the home screen appears.

It doesn't dawdle loading discs either, giving a picture within 10 seconds. We pop in our *Interstellar* Blu-ray, a stonking disc for testing motion and contrast, and the Sony lays its talents bare.

## Quite a contrast

Black seatbelts against white spacesuits can be merely pixels apart yet both will look striking. The control panel lights are bright and sharp in the dimly lit cockpit. As the ship flies past extra-terrestrial landscapes, both remain clear and stable.

Sony hits the bull's-eye when it comes to colour reproduction. Whether it's orange hair, green crop fields, or the rare splashes of colour inside the spaceship - red life-jackets, panels on helmets - hues are rich and robust.

The picture is layered with fine detail, making the BDP-S4500 one of the most revealing sub-£100 players. Suits are textured, while intricate facial details are visible even through the helmet glass.

## DVD delivery

Even with *The Hobbit: Battle Of The Five Armies* on DVD, whether it's close-ups of bearded dwarves or panoramic sweeps of mountains, the Sony flags up the insight and crispness that rivals can't touch (though the Panasonic DMP-BDT170 comes close).

The Sony grants the film's thunderous score all the trepidation and drama that Hans Zimmer intended. It makes a very convincing case as a budget CD player too. Its musical presentation is full-bodied and cohesive, lathered with punch and rhythmic energy.

Nothing's perfect, but the BDP-S4500 comes very close at this money. Delivering on every count, it's a steal.

## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Solid, expressive colours; sharp, crisp images; pictures are lathered with subtlety; smooth motion; good smart selection

**AGAINST** Nothing

**VERDICT** At this price, the Sony can't currently be beaten



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iPhone 6  
& 6 PLUS**

# Stuff

## DIGITAL EDITION

AVAILABLE NOW FROM THE APP STORE



FULLY INTERACTIVE • EXCLUSIVE HANDS-ON VIDEOS  
360° PHOTOGRAPHY • ZOOMABLE IMAGES



# TEST VERDICT

## THE WINNER

**Sony BDP-S4500** £75 ★★★★★



This is getting to be a habit. The **Sony BDP-S4500** betters its rivals in every department – being the cheapest is just the icing

**S**pending big bucks on a Blu-ray player seems less and less justifiable when you have hoards of decent performers weighing in at under £100. Each of these four decks goes above and beyond to deliver your money's worth. Each gives you a great picture, as well as essential smarts and USB inputs for granting (or at least boosting) your TV's connection and feature count.

Though discrepancies in picture quality are discernible, the bigger differences are invariably in the sound department. And this is where the Sony BDP-S4500 wins. Its full-bodied presentation is full of panache and punch, making movies and music dramatic and engaging. It edges in front visually, too, revealing more subtlety than rivals with both Blu-ray and DVD. It's the cheapest model in the test and doesn't put a foot wrong.

Close on its heels is the Panasonic DMP-BDT170: competitive on performance

but less so with features, though if you already have catch-up TV services that's, perhaps, not an issue. Revelling in superb detail, super-sharp lines and beautifully judged colours, the Panasonic prioritises pure performance. It's not the most attractive player, but looks aren't everything.

If they were, the LG and Samsung would top the pile, but when it comes to performance, they don't quite live up to their peers. Both deliver sharp, clean and colourful pictures, but with slightly less punch and subtlety. Partner that with small missteps in sound and it's enough to drop a star. The LG lacks weight, and the Samsung dynamics.

In the end, we let out a sigh of relief: none of the big players is doing it wrong. Thing is, competition is fierce at the budget end and only one brand can prevail.

So it's hurrah for people who don't like change. Once again, it's Sony.

## SYSTEM BUILDER

Put your BDP-S4500 at the heart of this collection, then sit back and enjoy the results



### AV amplifier

**Yamaha RX-V377** £260 ★★★★★

Impressive levels of power and punchy surround sound combine with great subtlety and clarity. Bargain for the price.



### Speaker package

**QAcoustics Q2000i** £600 ★★★★★

A big, detailed and cohesive sound – this is our current favourite under £700.



### Television

**Panasonic TX-40CX680B** £700 ★★★★★

Fresh off the production line, this 4K telly has smooth motion, bright, punchy colours and a very user-friendly interface (see p12).

**Total build from £1635**



For a full list of specifications and other useful info visit [whathifi.com](http://whathifi.com)

## Facts & figures



### LG BP350

£80 ★★★★★

Plays Blu-ray, DVD, CD • **Outputs** HDMI, USB • **Inputs** Optical • **Decoding** DTS HD Master Audio, Dolby True HD, Dolby Digital Plus • **Dimensions (hwd)** 4 x 27 x 19cm • **Weight** 0.9kg

### Panasonic DMP-BDT170

£90 ★★★★★

Plays Blu-ray, DVD, CD, MP3, DVD-R/-RW • **Outputs** HDMI • **Inputs** USB • **Decoding** DTS HD Master Audio, Dolby True HD, Dolby Digital Plus • **Dimensions (hwd)** 4 x 29 x 22cm • **Weight** 1kg

### Samsung BD-J5500

£90 ★★★★★

Plays Blu-ray, DVD, CD, MP3, DVD-R/-RW • **Outputs** HDMI • **Inputs** USB • **Decoding** DTS HD Master Audio, Dolby True HD, Dolby Digital Plus • **Dimensions (hwd)** 4 x 21 x 18cm • **Weight** 1kg

### Sony BDP-S4500

£75 ★★★★★

Plays Blu-ray, DVD, CD, MP3, DVD-R/-RW • **Outputs** HDMI, coaxial • **Inputs** USB • **Decoding** DTS HD Master Audio, Dolby True HD, Dolby Digital Plus • **Dimensions (hwd)** 4 x 23 x 19cm • **Weight** 0.8kg



# ONE GREAT CONCEPT DESERVES 5.1 OTHERS



## Concept 5.1 cinema pack

With the introduction of the Concept Centre, we are proud to announce the Concept 5.1 cinema pack. Movie lovers can now experience soundtracks and dialogue with the same unparalleled level of sonic performance that audiophiles already enjoy from the award-winning Concept stereo models.

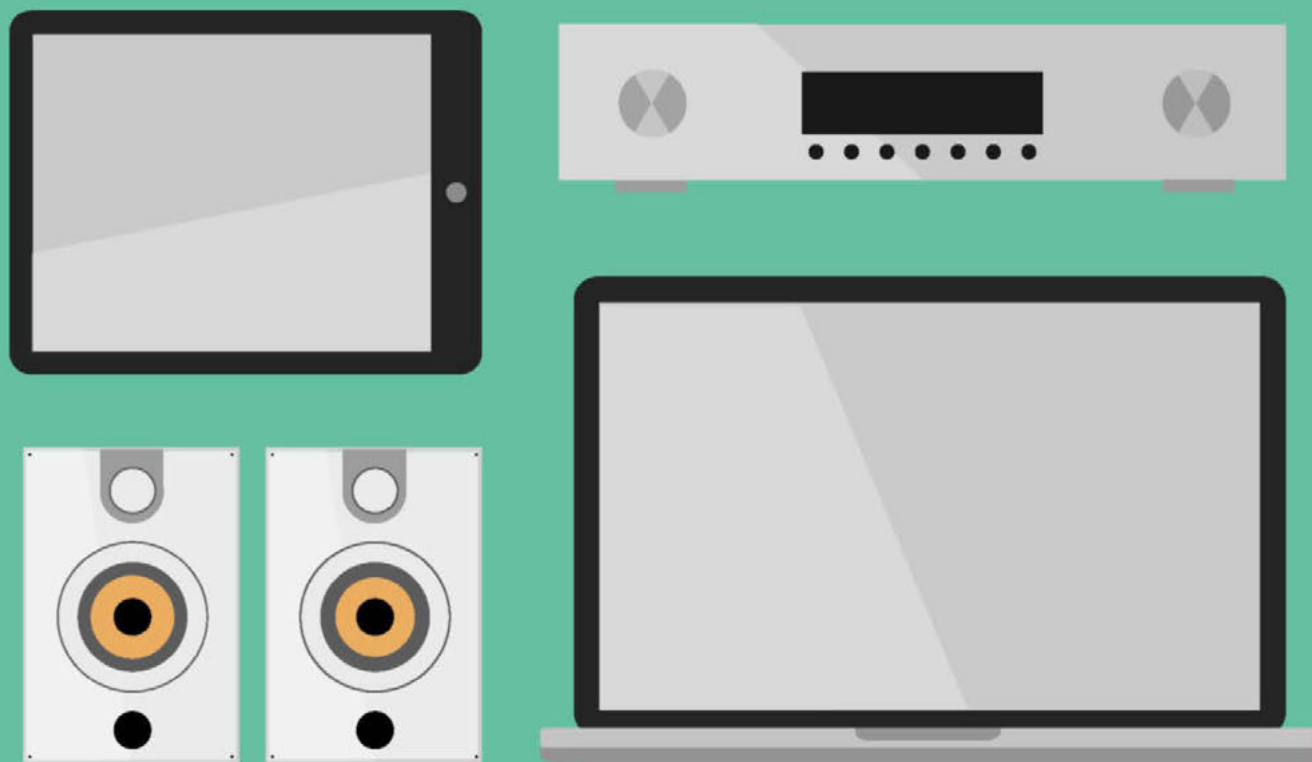
This outstanding level of performance is achieved because the 'Concept' models incorporate 'Gelcore™ Construction' loudspeaker cabinets; the ground breaking technology, developed by Q Acoustics, which almost totally eliminates loudspeaker cabinet resonance – a major factor limiting the sonic performance of modern loudspeakers.

Find out more at:  
[www.Qacoustics.co.uk/concept](http://www.Qacoustics.co.uk/concept)



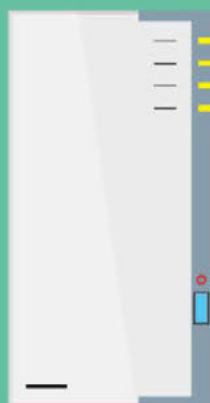
Available in Lacquered Gloss Black & Lacquered Gloss White  
All products also available separately: Concept 40 floorstanders,  
Concept 20 bookshelf, Concept Centre and 2070i Subwoofer.





# HOW TO

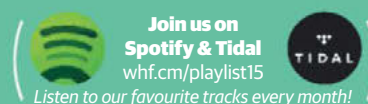
## BUILD YOUR AUDIO NETWORK



**H**ave you recently found yourself becoming the proud owner of a sprawling, burgeoning music collection that's all in digital files? Or perhaps you want to convert all your physical music from vinyl or CD into megabytes and store them in one place that's quick and easy to play from?

The way we listen to music is evolving, and so it's essential that you evolve with it too. But don't be afraid to take the plunge - if you've been testing the digital music waters with a handful of MP3s and ripped CD albums on your home computer, then you're already on your way towards creating a harmonious, all-digital source for your hi-fi system.

The next step is to get yourself a Network Attached Storage (NAS) device. Here, we take you through the who, what, why, and how of creating a vast, smart and networked system for your music collection.



For a full list of specifications and other useful info visit [whathifi.com](http://whathifi.com)

If you own a laptop or computer, the chances are you already listen to digital music in one way or another, whether it's via downloaded MP3s and ripped CD albums or using a streaming service like Spotify or Tidal. You may even be listening to a curated playlist through your headphones as you read this.

But can your computer or laptop be used as a dedicated source for your home's traditional hi-fi system? Of course it can. A computer's powerful processor, its intuitive interface and ability to play songs in a variety of formats and qualities makes it a natural medium for playing your ever-expanding music library.

**System 1**  
**Using a laptop or home PC**

For those embarking on a computer-based system, a laptop is the ideal starting point for collating your entire music library in one easy-to-access place. The advantages are that you can rip CDs straight in using the optical drive; you can download and buy files from numerous sites (such as Amazon, iTunes, HDTracks and others) and you can stream music from an expanding choice of online streaming services, from SoundCloud to AppleMusic.

It's easy to connect it to your hi-fi amplifier and speakers too. You can use either the USB or optical connection to hook up your computer or laptop to your stereo amplifier. Don't be deterred if your all-analogue amplifier is an older model and doesn't have digital inputs, as you can easily bridge that gap by using an outboard DAC (see p67 for more).

Using your home computer or laptop as a source, however, has its limitations. If you want the best possible sound quality, you'll want to dedicate your computer to doing just one job: playing music. This means not running any other apps or programs alongside, no Google tabs left open in the background, no checking Facebook every so often -

**For the best possible sound quality, you'll want to dedicate your home computer to playing music. This means not running any other apps or programs, no Google tabs left open, no checking Facebook**

absolutely nothing to distract the processor's attention away from the music. Of course, that is virtually impossible, as computers are designed for multi-tasking.

Also, despite having a great interface you're accustomed to, the storage space isn't vast. A MacBook Pro, for example, comes with 256GB or 512GB of flash storage. That will hold a few hundred albums, but that space will also be shared by documents, photos, videos, games and more. You'll find you're running out of space fairly quickly, especially if you've decided to venture into high-resolution audio downloads.

**External hard drive**

One way around the limited storage issue is to dump all your music files into an external hard disk drive (HDD), which you can easily buy from likes of Amazon. You can expand by buying more hard drives in various storage capacities, but it means you'll have lots of black boxes connected to your computer at all times. Your music library will also be divided up across these boxes, not all in one place. It's not the most elegant solution.

**System 2**  
**All about the NAS**

So what's the alternative? Network Attached Storage (NAS) devices. To put it simply, a NAS device is a glorified hard drive with software built in. It's a storage space with intelligence. And unlike a hard drive, which connects to a

computer, the NAS connects to your home network.

This means that you can use your laptop, smartphone, hi-fi streamer and even a multi-room system like Sonos to access and play any song stored on that NAS - as long as the devices are connected to the same network.

As it sits on your home network, filled with songs, the NAS's software is intelligent enough to know when a device connects to it, and provides songs to the right device with all the metadata attached, including track, artist and album name, album artwork and file sampling rates.

**NAS storage options**

The biggest advantage of using a NAS device is the huge storage space. We're talking terabytes here. Whereas we still think of 1TB as 'a lot of space', some NAS devices can support up to 12TB.

You can buy your NAS in two ways: an all-in-one NAS with a fixed storage capacity, or a NAS enclosure that lets you add multiple hard drives separately.

**Option 1**

With the first, you simply choose a NAS with a fixed amount of storage (usually ranging from several hundred GB to multiple TB). It'll have all the drives and software built in, and is easy to set up - perfect for users who want a fuss-free plug-in-and-play setup. You will be restricted to that finite amount of storage, though, so think ahead to how much you'll actually need. We'd recommend sizing up. It'll be pricier, but at least you won't run out of space easily.

**Option 2**

The second option gives you the chance to expand from the start. You get the NAS enclosure, but there are no hard drives inside: you get to add your own. This gives you the flexibility to buy your own hard drives (which, if you look at the variety online, can be cheaper in the long run) and in various sizes (500GB for now, 1TB for later, for instance).

Most NAS devices come with at least two docking bays (for two 1TB drives), but you can get some with up to eight bays. Each NAS enclosure will have an upper limit (eg. 12TB), and you simply keep adding more hard drives until you hit that limit. The advantages are obvious: you're not stuck on a finite

**How much space do different file formats take up?**

A five-minute music file at 256kbps or 16-bit/44.1kHz takes up around:

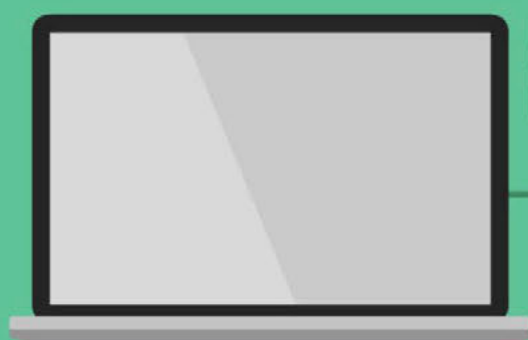
File Type	File size
<b>MP3</b> <sub>(256)</sub>	<b>9.8MB</b>
<b>WAV</b> <sub>(16-bit)</sub>	<b>50.4MB</b>
<b>FLAC</b> <sub>(16-bit)</sub>	<b>25.9MB</b>

A five-minute high-res music file at 24-bit/192kHz takes up around:

File Type	File size
<b>WAV</b>	<b>329MB</b>
<b>FLAC</b>	<b>195MB</b>
<b>DSD</b> (2.8mHz)	<b>202MB</b>

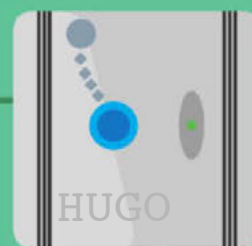


# LAPTOP SYSTEM

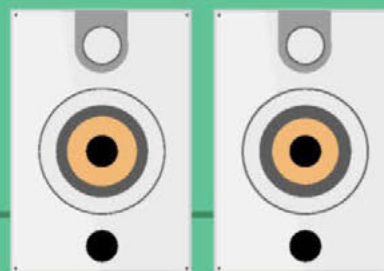


**Home computer / Laptop**  
Rip CDs to the hard drive,  
download music files or stream  
music from an online service

**Digital-to-Analogue Converter**  
If your amplifier is an older model  
and doesn't have digital inputs,  
bridge that gap by using a DAC



**Stereo amplifier**  
If your amp has digital inputs,  
you can bypass the DAC and go  
straight for a USB or optical in



**Loudspeakers**  
This part should be familiar:  
connect speakers to the amp,  
sit back and enjoy music

**The alternative is a Network Attached Storage (NAS) device, a glorified hard drive with intelligent software built in. Unlike a basic hard drive, the NAS device connects to your home network**

storage plan, you can expand whenever you wish, and save some money too.

You can buy NAS devices for as little as £100 or as much as £2000, depending on features and storage capacity. Synology and Buffalo are the main brands to look out for, and they offer a variety of options as well as guides to picking the right NAS for your needs. If you're after a high-end option, check out Naim's UnitiServe. Just remember: the bigger the storage number, the higher the price.

## What's a RAID?

Next, you need to think about backing up your files. After all, you don't want to risk losing your entire music collection

by storing it in just one place - that would be a potential disaster. In the NAS world, RAID (Redundant Array of Inexpensive Disks) provides the back-up. It's a system that decides how to back up your data in the most efficient way, as well as get a better performance out of your NAS.

Most NAS devices use two or more hard drives, and that affects what RAID configuration you'll need. Synology's website provides a RAID calculator featuring all the different combinations of storage options, so you can figure out what type of RAID is best for you.

There are various levels of RAID, but to keep things simple, we'll focus on the three main options.

## RAID 0

Offers the best operating performance, but zero back up. This configuration needs multiple hard drives over which to read and write data to give you the speediest performance, but if one disk fails, you've lost it all. Not the one we'd recommend for keeping your music safe.

## RAID 1

Duplicates your music simultaneously on to a separate hard drive, but halves the amount of storage space you have. It's the simplest form of back up as it makes an exact copy. So if one drive fails, the other survives - keeping all your music intact. So far so good - but on the flip side, your disk space is compromised. If you have two 1TB drives, you don't get the full 2TB for music storage, as half will be used up for back up.

## RAID 5

The best solution for your NAS, but it needs at least three separate drives to work. It's a cleverer system than the other two, offering good performance and the best back-up plan. Additional data used for recovery (called parity) is created and cleverly distributed across

all the drives so that when one drive fails, RAID 5 automatically recreates the lost data from the parity blocks. The only downside? A slight lag in performance.

**NAS software**

The bit that makes a NAS device different from (and superior to) HDDs is that it has intelligent software inside it, which recognises the data stored within. It also saves metadata, connects to your home network and acknowledges when a laptop or streamer system wants access to play files.

Most NAS devices will come with their own software embedded, although there are others that can be installed for more functions and a better, faster OS experience. For example, Logitech Media Server is used by Logitech, Synology has their own branded software, and there are third party ones like MinimServer and Plex that can be installed on your NAS and work across other smart devices, too.

Another thing to look out for on the NAS is the speed of transfer. How many kilobytes or megabytes are being transferred per second? As a general rule of thumb, the faster the rate of transfer the better. Look out for a NAS that offers USB ports, too. USB 2.0 is the standard port but rather slow, while USB 3.0 is faster in transferring files from a USB stick or flash drive.

**Getting your music onto a NAS**

Whether it's your vast CD collection, high-resolution FLAC downloads or those countless MP3s you have from the days of Napster - all your music can be transferred to your NAS device.

Some NAS devices have CD drives built in, which are mighty handy for ripping and transferring your entire CD collection into your new NAS - but they also tend to cost a lot more.

Instead, you can add an external optical drive for a much cheaper price (usually around £50). Just plug it into the NAS's USB port, and you'll be able to rip CDs straight in to the NAS, and keep all the metadata intact.

**NAS is superior to HDDs because it has intelligent software which recognises the data stored within. It also connects to the home network and acknowledges when a streamer system wants access to files**

The other way is to use your computer or laptop's CD drive to rip your CDs, and then drag and drop the songs into the NAS - this does take slightly longer though. For MacBook Air users, you'll need to buy the USB SuperDrive (£65).

**Transfer from computer to NAS**

If you've got music files stored on your computer, you can transfer them using a simple drag-and-drop method. Firstly, make sure the NAS and computer are connected to the same network. Then find the NAS on your computer's server list, and transfer your files over as you normally would. It's that easy.

For music stored on USB stick or flash drives, simply stick them into the NAS's USB port.

**Compatibility and file format**

Of course, you'll have to make sure that every device you use with the NAS is compatible. There are some checklists for the NAS: does it support UPnP? (universal plug and play - it should do exactly as its name suggests); does it have the latest DLNA certification to stream with laptops and smart devices? (it really should); does it support all the popular file formats?

Most smartphones will need an additional app to connect to and play from the NAS server, such as BubbleUPnP and DLNA Player for Android, or media.connect for Apple devices. The major NAS brands will have their own apps, too.

If you're using a computer as the primary source for your hi-fi system, you may find you'll have difficulty playing

every single type of file format. While MP3s and WAV files are universally compatible, you have to make sure other files (especially high-res ones) are supported by Windows Media Player or Apple's iTunes.

For instance, iTunes doesn't support playback of FLAC files (it has its own ALAC version) or DSD, nor does it innately play sample rates higher than 96kHz. You'll also need to download and pay for separate software (such as Pure Music) to play FLAC and DSD on a MacBook.

**Which format do I need?**

With a NAS device, you can pretty much play everything you've stored onto it. However, before you start you'll want to pay attention to the kind of format your music is stored in.

You should also consider whether you need to convert files into one format - it will make a difference to how smoothly your NAS system will run on a daily basis. You may want to configure it so that all your CDs rip into FLAC formats instead of WAV to save space. A five-minute song, for instance, takes up around 50MB in WAV; the same song in FLAC takes up 26MB.

You'll also want to ensure that all your files have their metadata intact. There's nothing more frustrating than seeing hundreds of 'unknown albums' by 'unknown artist' and not knowing what's playing. Some file formats save and present metadata better than others: FLAC and ALAC are considered the best, and are generally preferable to WAV or AIFF files.

**The different file formats**



Popular, compressed format ensures small file size, but not the best sound quality. Convenient for storing music on smartphones



An alternative to MP3, it's still lossy and compressed but sounds better. Used for iTunes downloads (at 256kbps) and YouTube streaming



The standard 16-bit/44.1kHz format all CDs are encoded in. Good quality, but huge, huge file sizes. Poor metadata support



Lossless compression format supports high-resolution sample rates, takes up much less space than WAV and stores metadata



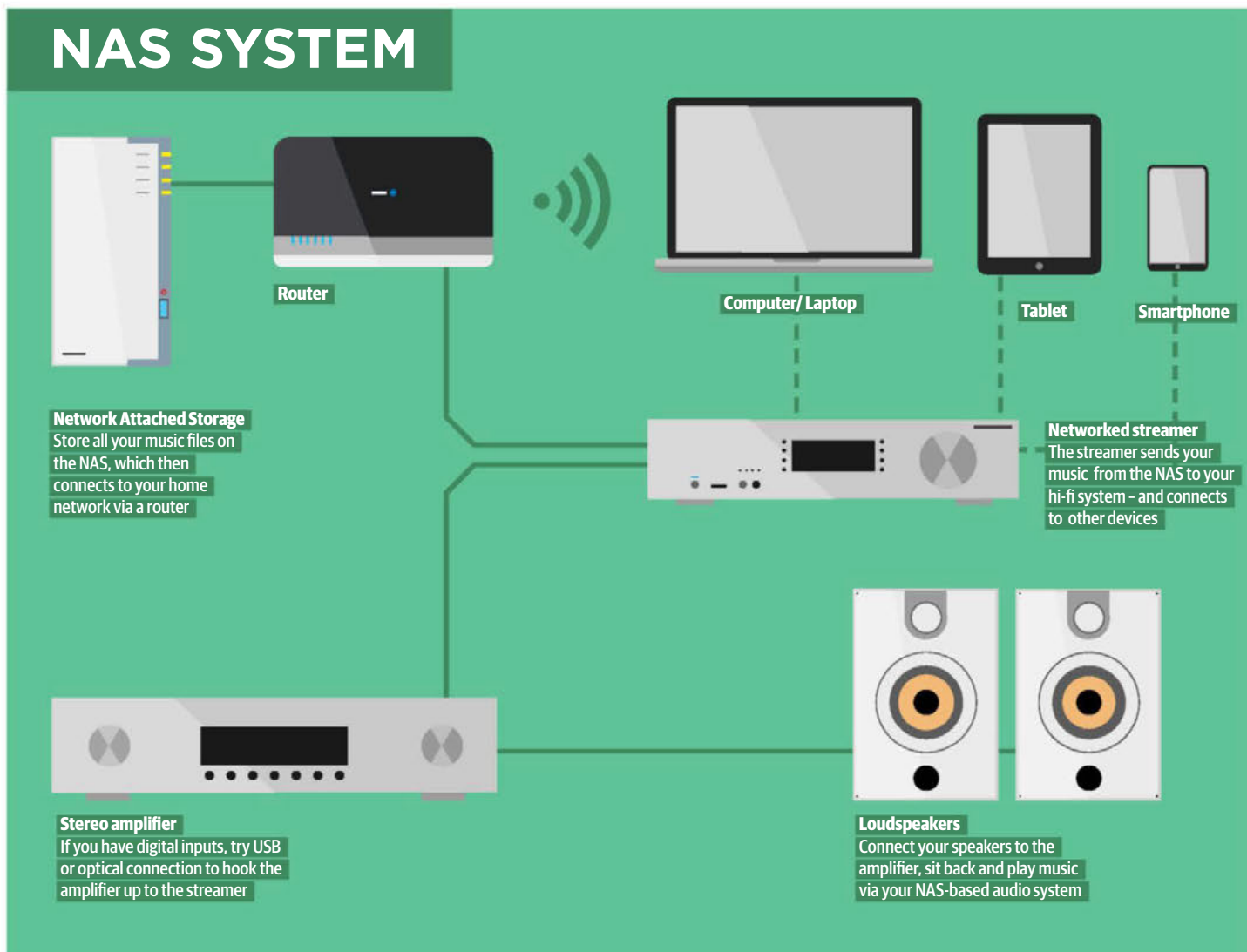
Apple's own lossless compression format does hi-res, stores metadata and takes up half the space of WAV. iTunes-friendly alternative to FLAC



The format used for Super Audio CDs. It comes in 2.8mHz and 5.6mHz varieties, but isn't widely supported elsewhere



# NAS SYSTEM



**Ensure your files have their metadata intact – there's nothing more frustrating than seeing 'unknown album'. Some formats save metadata better: FLAC and ALAC are preferable to WAV and AIFF**

## Connecting NAS to your network

Technically, your first step before you even venture into NAS shopping is to make sure you have a stable network set up at home.

You probably already have a connection set up with an internet service provider (such as BT, Virgin or Sky). These companies provide a box which combines a modem (the gateway to the internet) and a router (a connection hub that links all the network devices) in a single chassis.

Modern routers are wireless too, which lets you connect all your devices (from TV and set top boxes to laptop and smartphones) to your home network. Along with sharing and managing your

IP address across all connected devices and providing a layer of security called a firewall, a router also acts as a network switch. This lets devices within your network talk to each other. Without it, your smartphone wouldn't be able to stream songs from your NAS, nor would you be able to transfer files from your computer to the NAS.

Most routers come with a standard four ethernet ports, into which it's best to plug in fixed, stationary devices such as your home computer, TV and the NAS device. All your other portable devices can be connected wirelessly. While there are wireless NAS boxes, they're not always reliable – we prefer the security and stability of a wired connection.

Once you connect your NAS to the network, a web-based set up page will pop up on your computer, and it'll guide you through setting up the NAS. It's worth jotting down the IP address of the NAS, in case you need to find it on the server list of any connected devices. You can usually give your NAS a name, too.

## Connecting NAS to your hi-fi

And now for the final, most rewarding step: getting all that stored music to play through your hi-fi system.

Here, you will need a networked streamer to get your files from the NAS device over to your hi-fi system. Streamers can range from the Cambridge CXN (£700) or Pioneer N-50A (£500) to more high-end options like the Naim NDX at £3400.

The streamer, which is also connected to your network, is the device that communicates with the NAS and streams music through to your amplifier using analogue or digital connections. All you have to do now is select your favourite song, press play, and *voilà*: you've got your entire music library blasting through your speakers. Sit back and enjoy!

**HEAD TO HEAD**

15in black and white portable...  
28in CRT... 40in HD Ready  
plasma... 47in Full HD LCD...  
55in UHD OLED... what's next?

Epson  
EH-LS10000  
£6000  
p62







**Sony**  
**VPL-VW300ES**  
**£5850**  
p64

# The logical conclusion

From the first black and white portables to Ultra HD and OLED, your telly has come a long way in a short time. But could 4K projectors be the final word in big-screen video technology?

**I**t's the battle of the big guns, as projector giants Epson and Sony set out to bring the full cinema experience to the comfort of your home. They may be going for it in a big way, but with these tech-packed models priced at around £6000, this also requires some serious commitment.

That figure may be more expensive than extortionate in the projector world (we've seen some models selling for north of £30,000), but shelling out the equivalent of a mortgage deposit is a risky business and you'll want to get your precious money's worth - that kick-ass surround sound system of yours deserves an equally thrilling picture, after all.

4K has made its way onto projectors and is alive and kicking in Sony's mid-range VPL-VW300ES, while Epson's all-singing-all-dancing flagship, the LS10000, stands as the brand's first laser model.

The Epson is bigger in size (just), but which goes bigger on performance? It's time to find out.

HEAD TO HEAD



# EPSON EH-LS10000 £6000

**Time and time** again Epson has proven itself a frontrunner in the budget projector market. But can it provide the ultimate big-screen thrill to warrant serious spending too? The EH-LS10000, the company's flagship model, is out to try.

## First laser projector

It's a projector of firsts for the company. Sony and JVC entered the laser projector market some time ago, but this is Epson's first projector to use a laser light source. Epson claims the laser will last for 30,000 hours in Eco mode - that's a film per day for 41 years before it needs to be replaced.

It's also the first to feature the company's 4K Enhancement technology. But beware: the EH-LS10000 is pseudo-4K - a native Full HD (1920 x 1080) projector that can accept 4K material. The 'enhancement' technology claims to achieve 'better than Full HD' perceived-4K resolution by shifting each pixel diagonally by 0.5 pixels.

## Noise-free picture

Does it work? In some ways, yes. The 4K clips we play look impressively noise-free on our 96in screen. People and objects have distinct, lifelike outlines and colours look faithful. The giveaway - and perhaps the deal-breaker for 4K purists - is its level of insight.

The pure 4K Sony VPL-VW300ES retrieves greater detail, even when the Epson's 4K enhancement setting is at its most intense. The Epson's real talents lie in its Full HD performance and this is where your investment is best rewarded.

On the spec sheet 'Absolute Black' replaces a number next to 'contrast ratio', but it's not

### Setting standards

The chunky remote has a stack of buttons for altering settings - but there's also a push-in, pop-out panel at the back of the machine

misleading. Blacks really are some of the deepest we've seen. Put on the *Unbroken* Blu-ray and the whites in the Olympian-turned-

war-hero's running vest are as strong and dynamic as the blacks in his military attire. It's a great asset, but the compromise is less detail.

Bumping down colour and experimenting with colour temperature (we prefer 'Natural') can be done with a THX Optimizer disc, though turning 'Frame Interpolation' to 'Medium' is a must for getting rid of the disruptive motion instability.

Colours are generally convincing: rich and balanced. And everything from the red running track to the green warplanes and beige prisoner get-ups are nicely nuanced.

## Touch of class

The picture is beautifully bright and punchy thanks to the Epson's 1500 lumens, and myriad detail levels keep you transfixed by what you're watching. Under close scrutiny, however, the Sony edges ahead with insight by a whisker.

3D can be played in either 'Dynamic' or 'Cinema' mode. There's not much between the two - both produce an engaging and stable picture - but our preference goes to the latter for its subtler colour delivery. Two pairs of 3D glasses come supplied and extras can be purchased for £65 per pair.

Unlike its sibling in the company's Pro Cinema range, the LS9600e, it doesn't have built-in wireless connectivity. Connections include two HDMI ports - officially 1.4, but they support 4K in the higher 50Hz and 60Hz that was brought by HDMI 2.0 as part of its improved standard. Still, that doesn't detract from the fact it's a Full HD projector. Regardless, there's no commercial material out yet with that frame rate.

By projector standards the EH-LS10000 is big, but Epson's blueprint curves ensure it has beauty and not just bulk. You know you're dealing with state-of-the-art gear when an electric shutter opens upon start-up, giving you a warm, fuzzy feeling inside. It adds a touch of class that we can't help but admire. Save for the mechanism's momentary whirr, operation noise is largely

minimal. It shuts down instantly and starts up in a hurry, delivering a picture in well under the claimed 20 seconds nine times out of ten.

It's a doddle to set up too: the intuitive menus make flicking through the extensive settings manageable rather than off-putting.

## Chunky tool

On the left-hand side is a retractable push-in-pop-out panel revealing power, source, menu and lens adjustment buttons - handy if you've misplaced the remote.

We doubt you will, though. It's a chunky tool with a stack of buttons for playing around with lens set-up and picture settings. There are also shortcut keys to saved lens positions (it can store up to 10 in its memory).

Epson has some cracking projectors in its catalogue, and the EH-LS10000 is certainly worthy of its flagship title. It's not as subtle nor detailed as the Sony, but delivers the wow factor you'd expect for £6000.

We'd like to see native 4K, though: despite the 4K-enhancement technology doing its bit to surpass Full HD quality, those willing to hop on the 4K bandwagon might be better off opting for the real deal.

### Shutter service

When an electric shutter opens upon start-up, you know this is state-of-the-art gear. Mind you, at this price, it should be...

## TECH SPECS

**Type LCD • Resolution** 1920 x 1080  
**• 3D active • Claimed contrast ratio** absolute black • **Brightness** 1500 lumens  
**• Inputs** 2 x HDMI, 3 x Component, Composite, PC, LAN v  
**• Dimensions (hwd, cm)** 22 x 55 x 55  
**• Weight (kg)** 18

## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Striking contrast; rich, balanced colours; decent detail; accepts 4K material; clear, intuitive menus; plush design

**AGAINST** Competition has more subtlety; not truly 4K

**VERDICT** A thrilling watch, but 4K fans might want to look elsewhere



**Bulk buying**

At 55cm wide and 22cm tall, the EH-LS10000 is pretty big by projector standards. But Epson's blueprint curves ensure that it has beauty as well as bulk

**4K or not 4K**

The Epson doesn't have built-in wireless connectivity, but has two HDMI ports which Epson says support 4K. But essentially, it is a Full HD projector



HEAD TO HEAD



# SONY

## VPL-VW300ES £5850

**Most projector brands** would consider a near-£6000 model flagship territory. Not Sony. With the company's top-tier projector topping £19,000, this VPL-VW300ES is in fact a midrange model, sitting in esteemed company above the 2014 Award-winning VPL-HW55ES (£2800) and below the four-star VPL-VW500ES (£8500).

For the money you save over its bigger brother, you get a lower light output (1500 lumens as opposed to 1700), no lens memory function and the omission of a dynamic iris, meaning it doesn't boast its big brother's 200,000:1 contrast ratio. (The contrast ratio is absent altogether on the spec sheet).

### No compromise resolution

Still, the VPL-VW300ES has plenty going for it. Firstly, it's a native 4K projector with the full-blown, no-compromise 4096 x 2160 resolution (as opposed to the slightly shoehorned 3840 x 2160 4K resolution for TVs).

It uses Sony's household SXRD panels, which are claimed to produce a more stable image by minimising the space between pixels and aligning red, green and blue areas in every

frame at a response rate of 2.5 milliseconds. Another Sony proprietary, Triluminos display technology, also promises better colour reproduction and detail than standard projectors.

### Texture like sandpaper

It's called a 'compact 4K home projector' on Sony's online store, but don't take that literally. It leaves the same footprint as its big brother, the chassis about the size of a

small microwave and weighing 14kg. It certainly looks the part: its black body has a grainy texture, like well-worn sandpaper.

### Individual tastes

The remote has clearly labelled buttons with shortcuts to adjust settings and modes and fine-tune individual settings to your taste

If your set-up requires a projector to be near a rear wall, you're in luck. With just the power lead plugging into the unit's back, you'll find operation buttons on the right hand-side and connections on the left, which include two HDMI 2.0 inputs (one supports HDCP 2.2, so is kitted out for future 4K hardware releases) and a USB socket for firmware updates. An optional wireless HDMI receiver (£280) takes HDMI cables out the equation between the projector and source.

The remote is reassuringly big with clearly labelled buttons: shortcuts to bump up brightness, contrast, sharpness; adjust picture settings; switch picture modes. 'User' lets you fine-tune individual settings to your taste, though a THX Optimizer disc is the perfect aid here.

### Razor-sharp detail

The VPL-VW300ES's biggest selling point is its performance. We start with 4K, using a hard-drive supplied by Sony. Even the stock clips of cityscapes and flowers are enough to know the Sony is a great advert for 4K: razor-sharp and erupting with fine detail and eye-popping colour. Close to the screen, people and petals are astonishingly lifelike. It's this sort of 4K performance that has us itching for Ultra HD Blu-ray players and discs.

Sony's Reality Creation - a 'super resolution upscaler' - is designed to enhance Full HD material, and does a grand job. Play *Birdman* on Blu-ray and the VPL-VW300ES showboats its talent in the close-ups of Michael Keaton: his face bursts with expression and subtlety, and the *Birdman* costume is textured, the outline of each feather distinct.

### Swift movement

One of Sony's better processing modes, Motionflow, smooths out initial judder surprisingly well. However, the 'Smooth Low' level secures our vote for delivering a smooth yet natural look. 'Smooth High' goes one step further, but it makes the movie appear too artificially processed.

Playing out in one single shot, the film is a series of camera pans, quick jerks, and swift movement through corridors. Yet the Sony doesn't bat an eyelid, each transition steady and blur-free.

### It's a serious business

The assault of colour on Times Square billboards is bright, solid and well-judged, while the theatre's rich curtains and seats are blood-red - just right. Praise carries into contrast. Stage lights sparkle behind the darkened audience, each well-defined. Blacks aren't as inky as through the Epson, but in *The Hobbit: Battle of the Five Armies* on DVD, the lapels of Alfrid's black coat are more distinguishable.

Elsewhere, the Sony handles resolution drops well. The picture remains clean even in its densest moments. Active 3D completes the spec sheet, but you'll have to fork out £48 for a pair of glasses.

Even though the VPL-VW300ES isn't at the top end of Sony's line-up, shelling out £6000 for a projector is serious business. But rest assured, you'll see every penny of the price. At this level, you won't find many that pay more attention to detail. Or that can make movies look this good.

### Stable performance

The VPL-VW300ES' biggest selling point is performance: its SXRD panels produce a more stable image by minimising the space between pixels

### TECH SPECS

Type SXRD • Resolution 4096 x 2160  
• 3D active • Claimed contrast ratio n/a  
• Brightness 1500 lumens • Inputs 2x HDMI, LAN • Dimensions (hwd, cm) 20 x 50 x 46 • Weight (kg) 14 • Fan noise (db) 26 • Max image size (in) 300  
• HD Ready no

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Sharp, articulate picture; brimming with subtlety; easy set-up; 4K future-proofed; smart design

**AGAINST** At this price, we think the 3D glasses should be included

**VERDICT** Hugely revealing and subtle, it certainly lives up to its high asking price



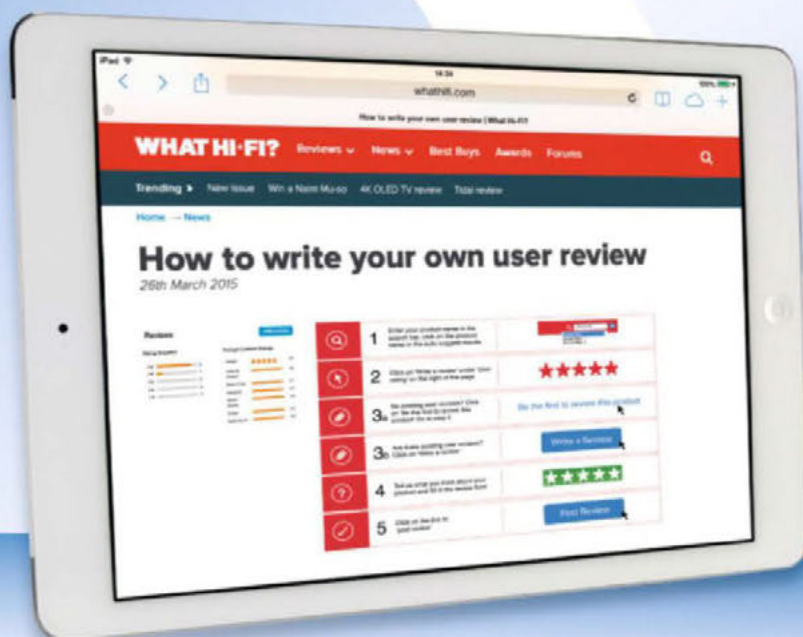
**Against the grain**

The Sony has the chassis of a small microwave and weighs in at 14kg. But it looks the part: its body has a grainy texture, like well-worn sandpaper

**HDMI connections**

Connections include two HDMI 2.0 inputs, one supporting HDCP 2.2, so the Sony is kitted out for future 4K hardware releases

# We need your product reviews!



## WHAT HI-FI?

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<http://www.whathifi.com/news/how-to-write-your-own-review>

## EXTREME?

IT IS NOW!







**Audioquest Dragonfly 1.2 £130**  
 The first Dragonfly pretty much kickstarted the USB DAC market. And v2 has upped its game: a perfect, portable companion.

# DAC EASY AS ABC

## Everything you need to know about DACs

No digital to analogue converter, no music – not if you’ve got your files stored digitally. In the next three pages we tell what you need to know about this once humble, now absolutely crucial, cog in your hi-fi system

**Y**ou may not have realised it, but most of us will make use of at least one digital to analogue converter, more commonly known as a DAC, every single day.

Built into the likes of computers, tablets and smartphones, the DAC is the fundamental key to unlocking the convenience of digital music, transforming it back into an analogue signal to make it audible to the human ear.

Any device that acts as a source of digital sound – be it CD or Blu-ray player, DAB radio, set-top box, games console or portable music player – will need a DAC to convert its audio back to an analogue signal before it is output.

Traditional amplifiers don’t amplify in digital, speakers don’t play in digital and our ears certainly don’t hear in digital – they all

### **Arcam irDAC £400**

A small black box of tricks, the irDAC delivers a punchy, rhythmic sound that blows away the competition at this price.



need an analogue waveform. Without a DAC, your digital music collection is nothing but a collection of "0s and 1s" (more on that shortly) that makes sense only within a digital device. In short, DACs play a large part in making digital music possible.

The biggest problem is that the DAC circuits used in many of these devices are just not good enough to do the original recording justice, so turning to a DAC upgrade can be the easiest way to transform your digital music and really get the most from your system – whatever your set up.

**The science of the DAC**

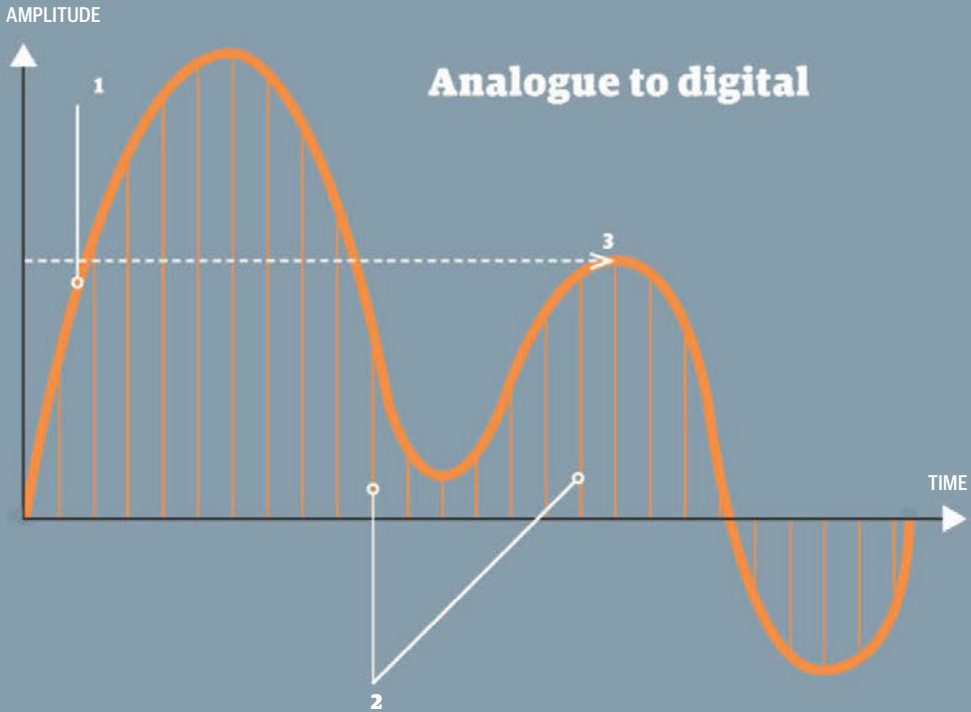
The sounds we hear on a day-to-day basis – traffic, instruments, that baby screaming on your otherwise peaceful commute – are transmitted in soundwaves, which travel through the air to our ears in a continuously varying analogue signal.

Analogue recordings were stored on the likes of vinyl records, and later cassette tapes, but the unwanted noise and fragility of these formats made way for something new. The CD was born, kickstarting the digital revolution in the process.

Digital audio is a very different beast to analogue. Digital music files are usually found in the form of Pulse Code

**Audioquest M-DAC £600**

The Audioquest is a versatile DAC that offers plenty of connectivity and a transparent, detailed sound that far belies its price tag.



In simplistic terms, a digital signal is created by taking the analogue sound waveform and taking precise measurement of it at highly regular intervals. The waveform is captured more faithfully the more accurate the amplitude measurement and the more often the measurements are taken. A good DAC is vital in reconvertng those digital readings to an accurate analogue wave, and so into the sound you hear.

- 1 The original analogue signal.
- 2 Samples of the waveform at fixed time intervals.
- 3 Value of the original waveform at the 17th sample point.

Modulation (PCM), and are created by measuring the amplitude of the analogue music signal at regular intervals.

The value of the amplitude is represented as a binary number (of 1s and 0s) and the length of this number is often referred to as bit depth. The timing of the measurement intervals is called the sampling rate.

When recording a standard CD, say, a sample is taken 44,100 times per second. Each of these samples is measured to an accuracy of 16 bits, storing the results in a 16-digit binary format.

**Upping the bit rate**

Record a high-resolution track, on the other hand, and you'll take a step up to 24 bits, with a sample rate taken 192,000 times per second.

Digital audio data can be stored in a variety of sample rates, bit depths,

encoding and compression formats – but no matter how it's done, it is the DAC's job to make sense of it all, translating it as accurately as possible from its binary format to return it as close to the original analogue recording as it can.

**So why do I need a separate DAC?**

While it's true just about every piece of digital kit features a DAC, it's just as apparent that not all DACs are created equal. Poor converters can introduce unwanted noise during playback due to poorly designed circuitry – and they might not support all file data rates, not to mention add extra distortion due to jitter.

Jitter is best defined as digital timing errors. The precise timing of a digital music stream is vital to high performance, and if that isn't done properly (usually because of poorly designed digital-clock circuitry) performance suffers.

Such jitter problems can arise every time a digital signal has to travel around a circuit board – and it's particularly troublesome when the signal is transferred between devices. In recent years we've seen the rise of the asynchronous DAC, which takes over timing duties from the computer it is connected to for just this reason. The digital clocks found in dedicated hi-fi DACs tend to be more accurate



**Chord Hugo £1400**

The best DAC we've heard at the price, the Hugo is stacked with features, offering plenty of inputs, Bluetooth connectivity and a rechargeable battery to make it portable.

**Chord 2 Qute £995**

This pint-sized DAC packs more punch than some bigger units. Connectivity isn't as varied as others but there's enough, with its bespoke DAC chip doing the work to make its performance very special.

**Just about every piece of digital kit features a DAC - but not all DACs are created equal. The digital clocks found in hi-fi DACs tend to be more accurate than those found in the average PC, so the sound will be correspondingly better**

than those used in the average PC, so usually the sound will be correspondingly better.

**The source material is all**

Of course, to get the most from a DAC you need to start out with good source material - don't expect miracles if all you're throwing at a converter is 128kbps MP3s. In fact, better decoding of such a compressed signal could make any sonic shortcomings more obvious.

You'll hear the optimum results with CD-quality content and above, which is best stored in FLAC, WAV or ALAC (Mac) lossless PCM formats, or alternatively DSD if you prefer.

**DSD and PCM**

DSD, or Direct Stream Digital, is an alternative to PCM, and was a format originally conceived for Super Audio CDs (SACDs), championed by Sony and Philips in the late '90s and into the '00s.

It's a much more niche format, differing from PCM by offering a bit depth of just one, but much higher sampling rates with DSD64 at 2.8 MHz and DSD128 at 5.6 MHz.

The arguments as to which encoding system is better continue to rage on. Suffice to say if you're someone firmly settled in the DSD camp, it's worth checking that the DAC you're considering supports it - not all do.

**The right DAC for you**

DACs come in all shapes and sizes, and offer varying levels of input options and functionality, so you'll need to think about how you want to use it, not to mention the budget you have to spend.

Compact USB DACs offer portability and convenience at a reasonable price. They vary in size between something no bigger than a standard USB stick to a pocket-sized unit that connects via a separate USB cable.

More often than not, they use the power from your computer, so there's no need for an extra power source. They largely keep connections simple, with just a headphone socket and possibly a line-level output for hooking up to powered speakers or a hi-fi system.

If you need more connectivity and are not bothered about taking your DAC around with you, a desktop USB unit might be more suitable. These are usually bigger and require their own power source, but often offer several additional digital or analogue audio inputs alongside a USB input for

connecting to your computer. Keep an eye out for a headphone amp if you'll be wanting to use headphones, as not all offer one as an option.

Finally, there are the DACs that are designed to work as part of a bigger home audio system. These will usually have even more inputs - particularly more niche ones such as AES/EBU - and potentially more features too, supporting the full range of high-resolution music formats for example, or offering Bluetooth connectivity for streaming wirelessly from your smartphone or tablet. Some will even come with volume control, so they can be used as a pre-amp too.

**A worthwhile investment**

Whether you're spending £100 or more than £1000 on a DAC, there's no doubt the change you will hear in your system makes choosing a good one at your budget a task worth investing some time in - dotted around these pages are some of our favourites. Then you can simply sit back and enjoy the music.

# The world's most desirable kit

# TEMPTATIONS

## “They're on the top rung of speakers at this price”

### ■ Tannoy Kensington GR Stereo speakers

■ £9950 ★★★★★

It's easy to dismiss Tannoy's Prestige series for being old-fashioned. While the range's traditional appearance may not suit the décor in many UK homes, it's a firm favourite in the Far East where the fine craftsmanship, retro details and sonic talent have brought huge success. We have one of the mid-sized models on test here, the Kensington GR, and even a quick listen proves there's more at work here than just nostalgia.

When we say mid-sized it's only in the context of the range. What we actually have here is a huge cabinet that's 105 litres in volume and 110cm tall. Packaged, these speakers weigh in at a hefty 49kg each, so make sure you have a willing (and strong) friend to help unpack them.

#### Attention to detail

Once you do that you'll find that the Kensington GRs are beautifully made, wider than they are deep and covered with loads of retro design details. Their cabinets are solid too, using a mixture of high-density birch ply for the front baffle and rear panel, combined with particle

**1 A solid, embossed key locks the weighty front grille in place**  
**2 The mid/bass driver is a paper pulp unit with a centrally positioned tweeter**  
**3 The fifth terminal is for grounding - which can improve sound**  
**4 You can fine-tune the treble via the under-grille panel**

board and solid wood for other sections. There are two standard finishes; the traditional-looking Walnut most Tannoy Prestige speakers come with, or the Black Oak of our review sample.

There are loads of neat cosmetic touches. We love the GR (Gold Reference) emblem on the front baffle and the engraved thick metal plate used for the treble adjustment section. The surprisingly heavy grille actually locks into place and there's a chunky key that

unlocks it for removal. Neat - our inner nerd loves such things.

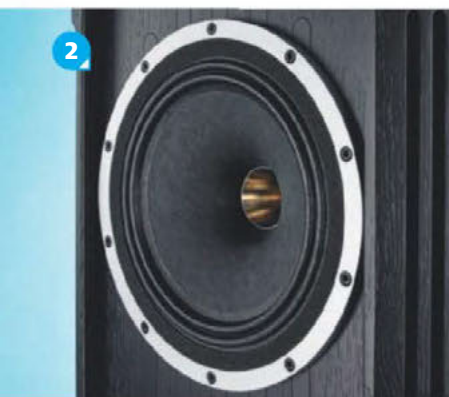
Items such as the beautifully finished wooden box that houses the biwire links, spikes and nicely produced manual help promote pride of ownership. It's details like this that really boost the feel-good factor.

#### Traditional approach

Despite all the fancy woodwork, the heart of these speakers is Tannoy's trademark Dual Concentric drive unit. The one used in the GR builds on decades of development. It has a 25cm paper pulp mid/bass cone with an impregnated twin roll fabric surround.

The tweeter - positioned in the heart of the mid/bass to help integration - is a 52mm aluminium/magnesium dome. It fires through a 'pepper pot' grating into a stainless steel horn - an arrangement said to help sensitivity and control directivity.

We don't normally talk about the magnet material used in a drive unit, but here we'll make an exception. The Dual Concentric driver uses an Alnico magnet



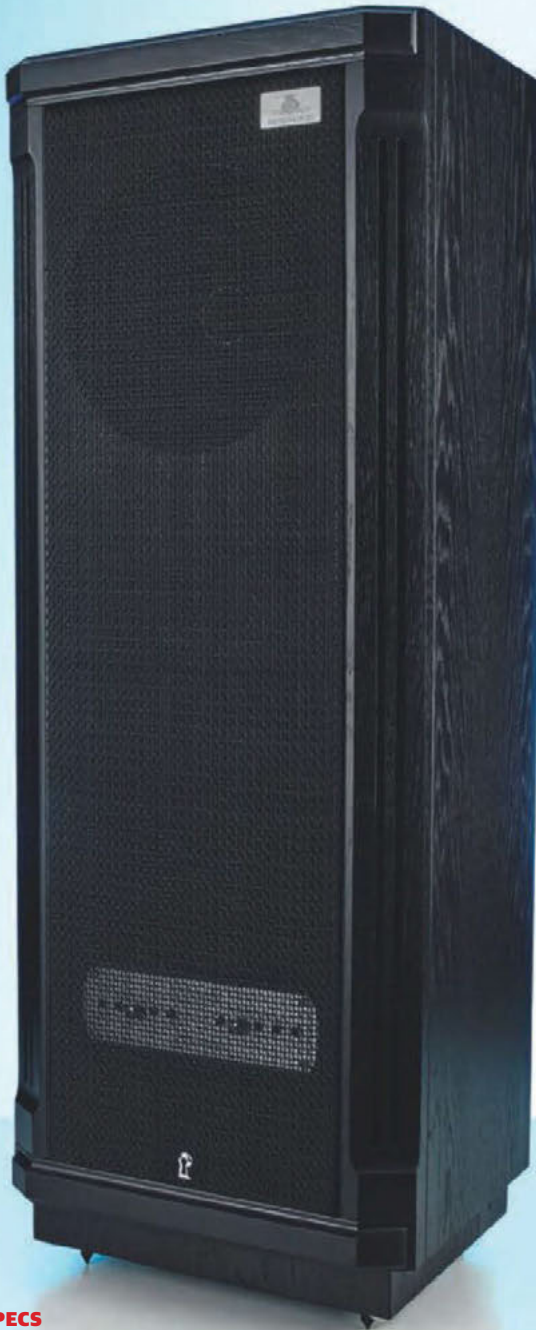


# TEMPTATIONS

Tannoy Kensington GR



A cutaway section of the drive unit reveals the complexity of the Dual Concentric speaker array



## TECH SPECS

Type Floorstander

Sensitivity 93 db/w/m

Impedance 8 ohms

Max power handling 125W

Biwireable Yes

Finishes 2

Dimensions (hwd)

110 x 41 x 34cm

# TEMPTATIONS

Tannoy Kensington GR

## In detail



### 1 The third cabinet

The speakers' accessories are housed in a beautifully made matching box

### 2 Manual operation

Inside, the key and handsome manual are presented as if they were valuable artefacts

### 3 The second level

Underneath are the links for biwiring and metal spike-holder 'feet' for use on a wooden floor



to provide the driving force for both the low- and high-frequency drivers. Tannoy claims the use of Alnico helps give the drive unit array a cleaner transient response and increased sensitivity.

### Think big

The sheer size of the Kensingtons means you'll need a big room. Around 20 square metres as a minimum, we'd say. Make sure you can place these floorstanders at least a metre out into the room to make the most of their stereo imaging.

Tannoy provides a good degree of flexibility in the treble. On the front baffle you'll find adjustments for treble energy and roll-off. These are subtle enough to be useful, so it's well worth experimenting to optimise performance.

The Kensington GRs can be biwired, and they benefit from that, sounding more precise and lucid when used this way. As with other Tannoys there's an additional terminal next to the two pairs of signal inputs, the use of which (wired to the ground-pin on your amplifier) results in a cleaner, crisper presentation.

### Comfortably accomplished

Effortless - that's our first impression of the Kensington GRs' sound. They'll deliver a piece of music such as Hans Zimmer's *Where We're Going* (from the *Interstellar* OST) with breathtaking composure. The large dynamic shifts of the track are rendered with impressive force and the scale of the presentation is just huge. Yet it's all done with an astonishing sense of ease. At no point do these speakers sound strained or close to their limits, even at high volumes.

There's none of the hardness of lesser speakers when pushed, nor the restrained dynamics often found with small drive units and compact cabinets.

Then there's the bass. While it comes as no surprise that a speaker this size produces lots of it, we're impressed by the Tannoys' quality here. They're subtle, textured and articulate. Rivals from the likes of B&W and Focal deliver more punch and grip, but sacrifice a little grace in the process. It's a trade-off we're happy to accept.

We're impressed with the Tannoys' stereo imaging too. Positioned with care



The sheer size of the cabinets and the high quality of engineering are key to the scale of the GRs' performance

these speakers set up a wide and deep soundstage populated by securely focused instruments.

We move on to Nina Simone's *Feeling Good* and the Kensingtons continue to shine. That Dual Concentric driver gives a seamless and direct delivery, rendering Simone's vocals with real passion and drive. Along with the power, we're reminded just how subtle and insightful these speakers are.

We give alt-J's *Hunger For The Pine* a listen and are struck by the Tannoy's rhythmic skill. The overall presentation is a little gentler than we're used to, but there's still enough energy to satisfy. The fine timing, strong dynamics and clarity are more than enough to win us over.

The Kensington GRs are speakers to love. While their retro appearance may not be to all tastes, there's enough sonic quality to place them on the top rung of speakers at this price. They're gentle giants, balancing finesse with force in a very appealing way. Consider us tempted.

**Consider if** you have a large listening room and value finesse as much as force  
**Highlight** The effortless delivery of large-scale dynamics and high volume levels

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Impressive scale, dynamics and finesse; rhythmic capability; articulate and insightful; sonic composure; retro appearance; fine build

**AGAINST** Some rivals have more bass punch

**VERDICT** Retro they might be, but there's real substance to the GRs' design and performance

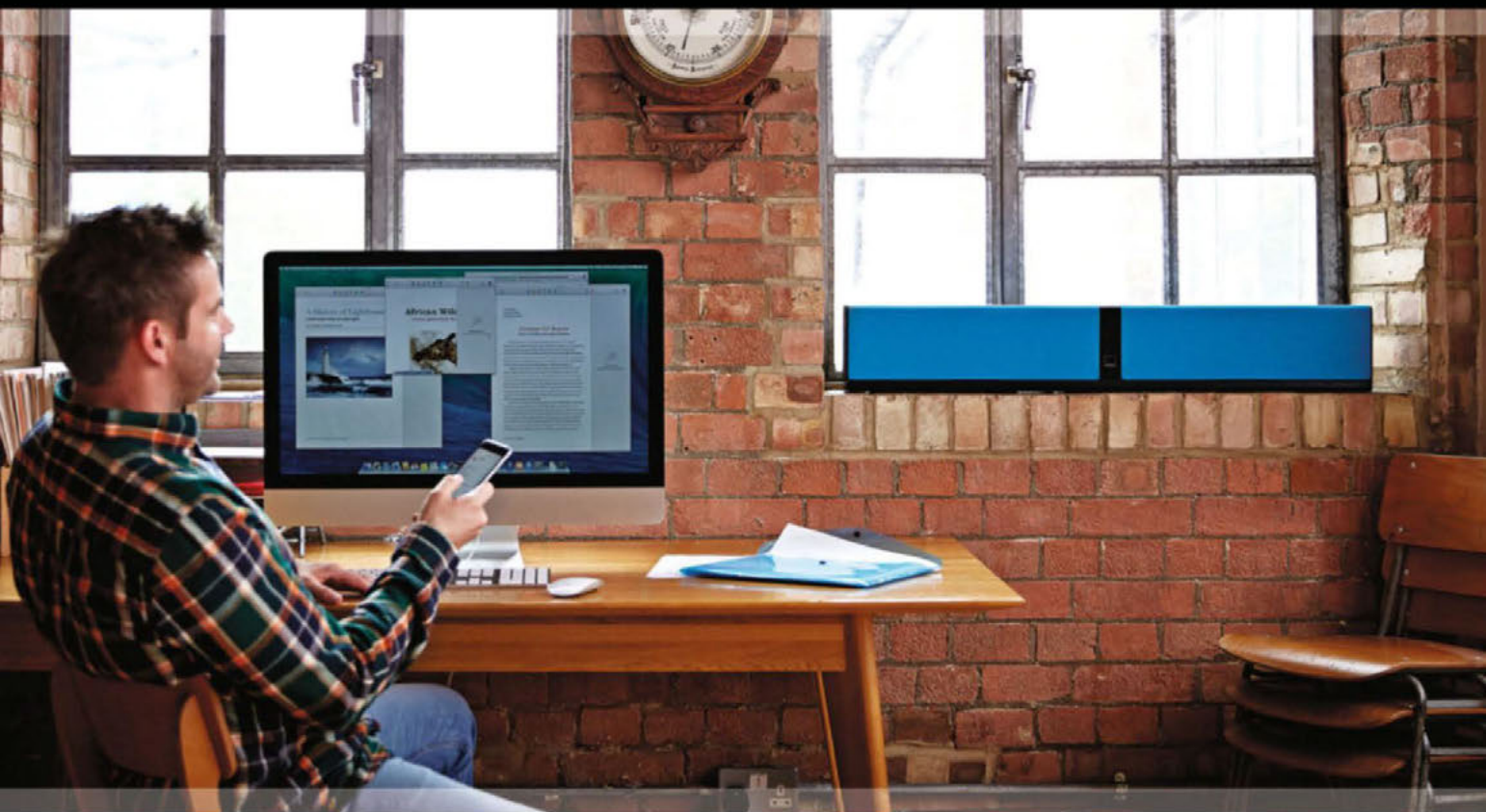




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# DALI KUBIK ONE

- Listen Your Way



The new DALI KUBIK ONE allows you to listen wirelessly to your music and movies at an incredible level of sonic detail. This sound system gives you a variety of choices to listen to anything, anywhere in your home, from any device. It combines DALI's outstanding loudspeaker heritage with state-of-the-art digital amplification - designed by people who have devoted their lives to the pursuit of audio excellence.



Learn more about the KUBIKs on [www.dalikubik.com](http://www.dalikubik.com)



The slot-loading disc drive makes ripping CDs easy, and the unit's quality of build and finish maintains Burmester's usual excellence in this area



The built-in slot-loading disc drive means that ripping CDs to the 2TB hard drive is easy. There's a choice of two quality levels - very thorough and obsessively thorough



# “The vicious dynamic swings are delivered with composure”

## ■ **Burmester Musiccenter 151** CD streamer

■ **£12,500** ★★★★★

**B**urmester's Musiccenter 151 is difficult to pigeonhole. It's a streamer, server, CD player and ripper wrapped in one superbly made chrome-laden box. That's a complex array of talents, but it's easy to see why the German high-end brand has taken such a comprehensive approach.

Most of the company's customers have built-up their systems over a number of years, and quite likely have large collections of CDs. For these people it's easy to simply replace their existing CD player with the 151, rather than add yet another box for streaming music.

The Musiccenter has two 2TB modules; one mirrors the data on the other, so there's always a back-up of your music if one of them goes wrong. The built-in slot-loading disc drive means that ripping CDs is easy. There's a choice of two quality levels - very thorough and obsessively thorough, the 151 happy to take more than 15 minutes to rip a disc. Scratched discs take longer, as the player re-reads the damaged sections until the maximum amount of data is recovered.

### Swimming with the Tidal

A recent firmware upgrade adds a Tidal app and also means the 151 will now work as a conventional (UPnP) music streamer too, able to render music stored on external NAS devices. It'll cope with files up to 24-bit/192kHz, though the lack of DSD replay might bother some. While the company provides a conventional remote, any streaming operations are best handled with the dedicated app. The company supplies an Apple iPad Mini, preloaded with the app, in the box - that's a nice touch.

The app isn't the only way to control the 151. You can do that with a web

### TECH SPECS

**Hard disc** 2TB • **Wireless capability** Yes • **Network integrated** Yes • **Tuner** Internet • **Built-in amp** No • **Formats** MP3 (max 320kbps), AAC, FLAC, uncompressed audio • **Audio inputs** 5 x USB, coaxial digital, optical digital, analogue stereo • **Dimensions (hwd)** 10 x 48 x 35cm • **Weight** 8kg

Connection is wired or wireless, and the five USB inputs should be more than enough

browser on computer too, and the web route is the way to go for configuring ripping quality or setting output voltage to match your partnering amplifier.

This Burmester's build quality is everything we've come to expect from the brand. The unit feels solid and is superbly finished, as the price demands.

### Dealing with a disc

We start off by using the Musiccenter as a CD player and are pleased with what we hear. Its presentation has the refined, creamy balance we've come to associate with Burmester. Play a hard-edged recording such as *Terry's Song* from Bruce Springsteen and the 151 delivers a sound full of finesse and subtlety. There's plenty of detail, from the coarse texture of Springsteen's passionate vocals to the precise rendering of the instrumental backdrop. The Musiccenter's refinement means that the hard edges of this demo-like recording aren't exaggerated. The music always takes the limelight.

A move to streaming a CD rip of Stravinsky's *The Rite Of Spring* allows the 151 to impress even more. The piece's vicious dynamic swings are delivered with force, composure and excitement. Its presentation has huge scale and authority. This is a massively demanding piece of music yet it remains easy to follow low-level instrumental strands.

We don't notice any great difference in quality between using the 151 as a CD player or streamer. At all times it remains informative but refined. The balance is tilted (slightly) towards richness at lower frequencies and smoothness at the top-end, but it's never taken too far. It means poorer recordings and lower-quality sources are kindly treated.

The 151 is expensive, but it's a fine high-end CD player and an equally pleasing music streamer. The decent app makes it a pleasure to use too, even if the unit's responses are a touch sluggish on occasion. If you want a high-end streamer plus the luxury of playing CDs to a very high level, look no further.

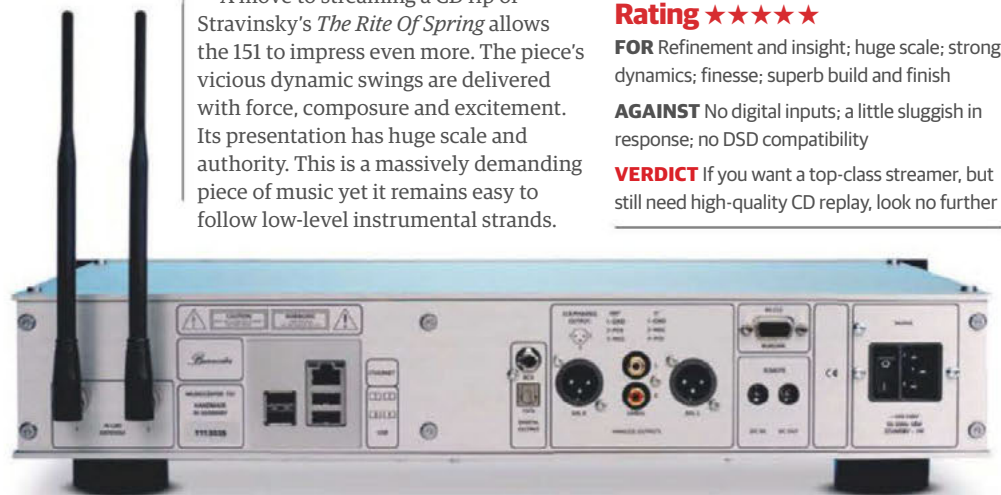
**Consider if** you want a beautifully built high-end digital source and have a suitably talented system to exploit it  
**Highlight** The refinement and scale are as good as we've heard from a streamer

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Refinement and insight; huge scale; strong dynamics; finesse; superb build and finish

**AGAINST** No digital inputs; a little sluggish in response; no DSD compatibility

**VERDICT** If you want a top-class streamer, but still need high-quality CD replay, look no further



# PLAY LIST

The movies, music and games to test your system

## Out this month



### Jupiter Ascending Blu-ray Out now

★★★★☆

#### Bonus content

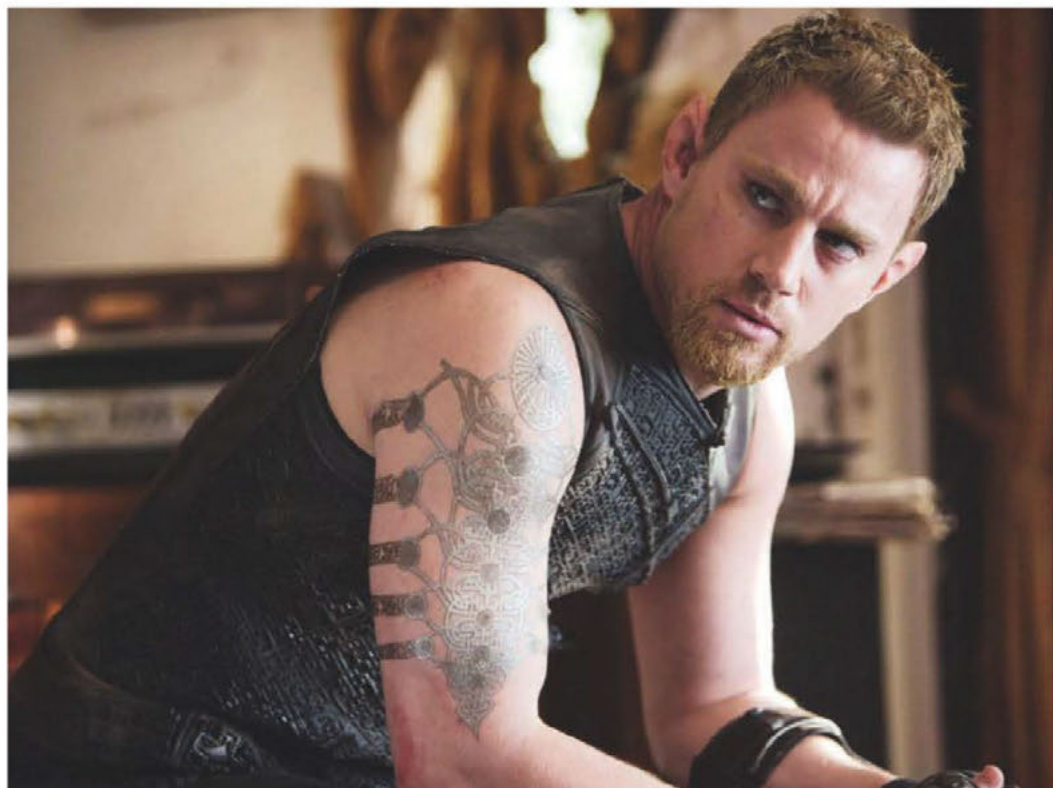
- Jupiter Jones: Destiny Is Within Us
- Caine Wise: Interplanetary Warrior
- The Wachowskis: Mind Over Matter
- Worlds Within Worlds Within Worlds
- Genetically Spliced
- From Earth To Jupiter (And Everywhere In Between)
- Bullet Time Evolved

**Duration** 127m

**Audio English:** Dolby TrueHD 7.1

**Picture** 2.39:1, 1080p

Picture	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Extras	★★★★☆



## Ascending to cult classic status?

*Jupiter Ascending* is a film only the Wachowskis could have made. Nobody gives spiritual hokum as much credence as they do.

*Ascending* sees Mila Kunis's Jupiter, a Russian immigrant who cleans toilets for a living, targeted by the space-faring Abrasax siblings Balem, Titus and Kalique (Eddie Redmayne, Douglas Booth and Tuppence Middleton), each with their own plan for her.

### Galactic wheels keep turning

The Abrasax clan seed worlds and harvest them, turning the population into a commodity to keep the (galactic) wheels of commerce churning. Jupiter, though, is the reincarnation of their mother and holds the key to the universe's most valuable resource: Earth. But as she's about to be terminated, the half-lycan albino soldier Caine (Channing Tatum) comes to her rescue.

It's an utterly daft plot that gives The Matrix duo free rein to indulge their creative wishes with spectacular chases, inventive technology and mumbo jumbo about genetic splicing that sees Sean Bean's military officer cast as a man with the DNA of a bee.

It's space camp - and no one personifies that more than Redmayne's Balem, employing a hoary whisper before shouting very loudly. Booth and Middleton are restrained in comparison, the former a charming cad, the latter a superior presence who effortlessly glides through her scenes.

Kunis's Jupiter is always being rescued and Tatum broods for much of the film. There's less fun to be had with the main leads than the colourful Abrasax family.

The problems don't stop there. The stereotypical characters and story won't win awards for being fresh. Pacing becomes a problem

as the movie thunders to its extremely loud climax - and in building a mythology, it has enough exposition for three films. Attempts at levity come across as a little stiff and forced too.

### Superb visuals and sound

It is, at least, impeccably designed and this disc is reference quality. The visuals are stunning, the digital cinematography razor sharp and packed full of fine detail. The sound design is terrific too, as sounds clang and whoosh with a full-bodied intensity, and Michael Giacchino's operatic score is one of his best. Shame the US Dolby Atmos track is not included.

*Jupiter Ascending* could become a cult classic, adored by a few, disliked by many. It's a ludicrous, entertaining riff on Cinderella - in Space!

Check your cynicism at the door and there's much silliness to enjoy.



Playlist highlights [Join us on Spotify and Tidal](#) [whf.cm/playlist15](#)



**Howlin' Wolf: How Many More Years** 60-odd years old now, and with hindsight both the start of rock'n'roll and the place Elvis Presley came from.

**Talking Heads: Burning Down The House** Mid-period Talking Heads, the band on the cusp between wilful art-rock aesthetics and enormous-selling pop music crowdpleasing.

**Mos Def: Hip Hop** "We went from picking cotton to chain-gang line chopping, to be-bopping, to hip-hopping - blues people got the blue-chip stock option..."

**The Apartments: Swap Places** An on-again, off-again Anglo/Franco/Australian outfit of legendary provenience, The Apartments are back with a first album since 1997.

Music

GAMES, MOVIES & FORTHCOMING RELEASES p78 >

Download, CD, vinyl



**EVERYTHING EVERYTHING GET TO HEAVEN**  
Out now  
★★★★☆

Is there much difference, in practical terms, between a USP and a gimmick? Everything Everything had better hope there is - they're three albums in now, and singer Jonathan Higgs' continuing willingness to get his falsetto voice out at every opportunity is *this close* to the tipping-point. It's quirky, and it makes EE sound distinct (even beyond their ongoing mash-up of angular indie guitar shapes, Talking Heads-y afrobeats and grinding, clattering electronic glitter). But could you do a whole 45 minutes in one sitting?

As long as your teeth aren't set too badly on edge, mind you, there's plenty about *Get To Heaven* to recommend it. It's melodically strong (*Fortune 500* in particular is an ear-worm) and while it's rather one-paced there is a lot of light and shade in the arrangements of the likes of *Spring/Sun/Winter/Dread* and *Blast Doors*.

**Characterful midrange**  
As an overall test of your system's prowess, *Get To Heaven* rather ironically suffers from the 'everything louder than everything else' school of production, with dynamics being flattened to a constant in the quest for all the volume all the time. There's a huge amount of character to be extracted from vocal in the midrange, though, and plenty of indie-disco bottom-end presence and punch to be revealed. And where separation and focus are concerned, *Get To Heaven* is as tricky a proposition as we've heard all year.

**Specifications**  
**Duration** 44m 56s  
**Standout track** *Fortune 500* Meaty, beaty, big and bouncy, like New Order choc-full of legal highs.

Download, CD, vinyl



**WOLF ALICE MY LOVE IS COOL**  
Out now  
★★★★☆

Pop music is a movable feast at the best of times, and for their debut album Wolf Alice have a booted foot in as many camps as possible. Having been an outside tip for 'big thing' status since the February 2013 release of debut single *Fluffy* (included here), *My Love Is Cool* sounds like an attempt to propel Wolf Alice into the mainstream like a slightly-more-credible Florence & The Machine.  
A touch of overdriven shoegaze here (*Your Loves Whore*), a smattering of 4AD cathedral indie there (*Bros*,

*Silk*) and a studied girly dream-pop come-on more or less everywhere (*Lisbon*, *Silk* again, *Freezy*), *My Love Is Cool* is up to its hips in influences. Being derivative is hardly a crime in pop music, mind you, and Wolf Alice are nothing if not judicious.

**Follows the indie template**  
On the whole *My Love Is Cool* is in thrall to the quiet-loud-quiet indie template laid down some decades ago, and as such is a decent test of your set-up's ability to turn it on and off again at speed. There's a good examination of tonality in the massed effects-pedal guitar squalls too, and a lot of midrange nuance to be revealed at the same time. The production, by and large, strikes a nice balance between hi-fi satisfaction and radio-friendly compression - so there's space and detail to be described if your system's up to it. Even if it's not, though, *My Love Is Cool* is a colour-coordinated and well-dressed 50 minutes.

**Specifications**  
**Duration** 49m 14s  
**Standout track** *Your Loves Whore* The '80s crash headlong into the '90s but no one is badly hurt.

**Listen to it this way**

**CD player**  
**Naim CD5si £1080 ★★★★★**  
Agile and assertive, smooth and cossetting - a spectacular all-rounder

**Stereo amplifier**  
**Naim Nait 5si £990 ★★★★★**  
A real up-and-at-'em attitude combined with deft refinement

**Stereo speakers**  
**Triangle Esprit Titus EZ £600 ★★★★★**  
Real scale, reach and rhythmic precision from such an unassuming cabinet

A fine system to provide focus and separation - so great for EE

**Listen to it this way**

**Streamer**  
**Cambridge CXN £700 ★★★★★**  
Everything you want from a music streamer, from sound quality to useability

**Stereo amplifier**  
**Arcam FMJ A19 £650 ★★★★★**  
Among the very best pound-for-pound integrated amps around

**Stereo speakers**  
**Bowers & Wilkins 685S2 £500 ★★★★★**  
Look about £500-worth, sound considerably more expensive than that

Perfect for the dynamic shifts Wolf Alice will throw at them

Movie shorts

**Blackhat**  
Handsome hacker Chris Hemsworth goes on a worldwide hunt for a cyber-terrorist. Michael Mann's latest is more Windows Vista than Mac OS.

**Focus**  
Will Smith and Margot Robbie are glamorous con artists. There are far too many plot twists, none of them particularly clever or, er, focused.

**Last Knights**  
Morgan Freeman and Clive Owen try their best, but even they can't hack and slash their way through this number of clichés, frowns and yawns.

**Project Almanac**  
Teenagers and time travel. It's a fairly fresh take but there's not enough plot, and the whole found-footage schtick is really getting old now.

On-screen

System tester



**Stonehearth Asylum**  
**Blu-ray**  
**Out now**  
★★★★★

The first time we lay eyes on Stonehearth Asylum it's wreathed in fog as thunder decorates the sky. This, it seems, is not a good place. And yet a look inside shows happy, lively patients. The tone – light and playful – is at odds with the exterior. So what are we to believe? That's the crux of this twisty film from Brad Anderson. Jim Sturgess's Dr Newgate arrives at the asylum to

finish his studies, but he experiences some unexpected events. He is greeted by Ben Kingsley's Dr Lamb (whose presence recalls *Shutter Island*) and David Thewlis's Mickey Finn, but their demeanour suggests that something is off. There's light in the darkness in the form of Kate Beckinsale's Eliza Graves, who sparks something in Newgate. Who is she to him and why is he so intent on rescuing her? They are all backed up by a terrific supporting cast including Michael Caine and Sinéad Cusack. The less you know about this film the better...



Watch it this way

**Blu-ray player**  
**Sony BDP-S550 £110**  
★★★★★  
Classy images and stunning sound

**Television**  
**Samsung UE55J58500 £2600**  
★★★★★  
Currently the state of the 4K art

**Speaker package**  
**Dali Zensor1 5.1 £980**  
★★★★★  
A born entertainer and brilliant value

**Home cinema amplifier**  
**Sony STR-DN860 £400**  
★★★★★  
Yet more Sony multichannel excellence

Games

**Massive Chalice**  
**PC, Mac Out now**  
★★★★★



If you're a fan of turn-based strategy games, you'll likely love *Massive Chalice*. The twist is that the campaign lasts 300 years and if you want to have warriors available for that duration you need them to sire heirs. So when you're not battling you're playing Cilla for your subjects – more fun than it might sound.

**Kerbal Space Program**  
**PC, Mac Out now**  
★★★★★



Don't be fooled by the cute men or the simple graphics: this is a pretty detailed Nasa simulator. Your task is to get your Kerbals into space by designing the machines to get there. Cue much trial and error as you work out how to prevent them belly-flopping back into the dirt, but success feels very sweet.

**The Elder Scrolls Online: Tamriel Unlimited**  
**PS4, Xbox One, PC, Mac Out now**  
★★★★★



A massively multiplayer version of *Skyrim* sounds like gaming nirvana, but this suffers from the usual issues with MMOs. Ironically, it's the other players that ruin it – it's hard to feel your quest is special when 10 other players are doing it, killing enemies and picking up loot before you even get there.

**Splatoon**  
**Wii U Out now**  
★★★★★



New game for Wii U alert! And it's not Mario! It's an online shooter, but rather than kill your enemies you're tasked with covering the arena in your team's paint. It's a typically cute approach from Nintendo, and fun to play, but the very poor map rotation and dreadful matchmaking add too much irritation.



## What we are waiting for...

**Movies** (Blu-ray) **X-Men: Days of Future Past, Rogue Cut** (13th July)

We loved it the first time, it had very little Anna Paquin. Now there's 10 minutes of her, plus new X-tras.

**Movies** (Cinema) **Mission Impossible: Rogue Nation** (30th July)

Tom Cruise continues to run a lot. This time, fancy antics include hanging off the side of a plane.

**Music** (Download, CD, vinyl) **Little Boots - Working Girl** (10th July)

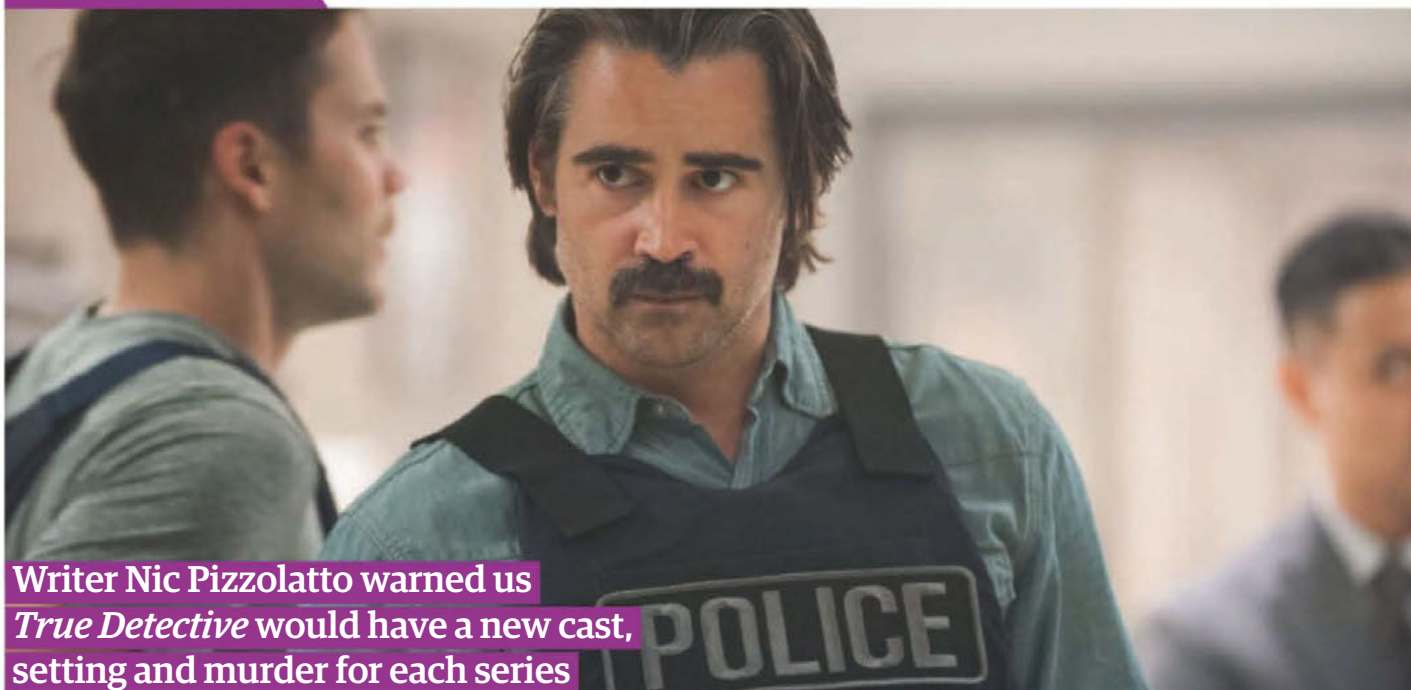
Well this could go one of two ways - fingers crossed it goes the 'superior electro-pop' route, eh?

(Download, CD, vinyl) **Tame Impala - Currents** (17th July)

Our favourite Australian psych/prog/stoner band are back, as fuzzy and phase-y as ever.

## July in Hi-Def

### The best on the box



**Writer Nic Pizzolatto warned us**  
**True Detective would have a new cast,**  
**setting and murder for each series**

**True Detective**  
**Sky Atlantic HD -**  
**Mondays, 9pm**

*True Detective's* slow-burning, time-hopping, gruesome murder mystery was a sensational hit. But the real stars of the eight-part series were Woody Harrelson and Matthew McConaughey. It was their career-best performances that drove the entire show. A bold move, then, to change the entire cast for the second series. Writer Nic Pizzolatto had warned us that the show would follow an anthology format, with a new cast, setting and murder for each series.

What can we expect in series two? The Southern Gothic setting of Louisiana has been swapped for California. The new cast is headed by Colin Farrell, Rachel McAdams and Taylor Kitsch - three lawmakers that need the help of a criminal and entrepreneur (played by Vince Vaughn) to solve a bizarre murder amidst conspiracy and

betrayal. Will it be able to repeat series one's much-lauded, tightly woven and intelligent narrative? We'll find out soon enough.

**Extant**  
**Amazon Prime Instant Video -**  
**2nd July**

This sci-fi drama is back for a second series, with new cast members and the promise of a soft reboot. Halle Berry revives her role as astronaut Molly Woods, who comes back from a 13-month solo mission in space to find out she's pregnant. As she comes home to her robotics engineer husband and the son he created (no joke: he's an android), she's determined to find out what happened to her and whether it's a big alien invasion conspiracy. Spoiler: it might be. Jeffrey Dean Morgan joins the show as a cop with a murder mystery to solve, and Molly could break the case wide open. The trouble is, Molly is also searching for her missing

alien-child, who may just be bringing about the end of human civilisation. Kids today, eh?

**Wimbledon 2015**  
**BBC One/Two HD - until**  
**12th July**

Strawberries and Pimm's. Green lawns and white outfits. Plenty of grunting.

The Wimbledon Championships are back in town, with the world's top players (and the rest) waiting to exhibit their skill on the grass courts. Reigning champion and world number one Novak Djokovic is up against the usual contenders in Roger Federer and Andy Murray, and will be out to avenge his shock defeat to Stan Wawrinka in France.

Two-time winner Petra Kvitová will be holding off the formidable Serena Williams and Maria Sharapova in the ladies' singles, but there's never been a shortage of surprise winners - anything could happen.

**2015 Formula 1 Championship**  
**BBC One HD - 5th July, 12.30pm**

It's the British Grand Prix, and we're on home territory at Silverstone. Lewis Hamilton still leads the driver's championship despite bumps and supposed mistakes, but surely he'll be unstoppable in front of a cheering home crowd? Teammate Nico Rosberg is his closest, fiercest rival, so we're expecting even more fireworks at on this competitive circuit.

We've got our eye on teenager Max Verstappen, too. He's had his fair share of controversy, but his racing has been far more exciting than most of the experienced drivers on the track so far. It's about time the Ferraris, McLarens, Red Bulls and others step up their game - or this could be a pretty straightforward win for Mercedes.

The Hungarian GP at the end of the month on 26th July - same channel, same time.

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## iPAD EDITION

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# BUYER'S GUIDE

NEW

Home cinema surround sound is being transformed with **Dolby Atmos** and **DTS-X** - don't miss our guide to the new formats

The positioning of your **stereo speakers** can affect the sound they make. Our tips on where to put them will see you right

**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 [whathifi.com](http://whathifi.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...



**Sennheiser Momentum 2.0, p119**

"As far as premium portable headphones are concerned, the Momentum 2.0s tick all the boxes"



**Cambridge Audio CXN, p125**

"It's the hugely enjoyable performance that singles the CXN out. It sounds fantastic."

### Inside

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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-S5500**  
★★★★★  
**£110**

Simply astonishing performance and pictures for around £100. Smart functionality too: you can't go wrong...



**SONY BDP-S7200**  
★★★★★  
**£250**

Sony's new Blu-ray offering is a really remarkable achievement. It has huge ability with images and sound.



**PIONEER BDP-LX58**  
★★★★★  
**£600**

A beautifully crisp, punchy picture and dynamically capable sound make this a stellar Blu-ray player

### 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.



**SONY STR-DN1050**  
★★★★★  
**£500**

Incredible value, this home-cinema powerhouse has pretty much all the features and ability you want.



**PIONEER SC-LX58**  
★★★★★  
**£1400**

Mature, powerful, refined - this amp will make you feel as if you're sitting in a large cinema hall.

### SPEAKERS



**Q ACOUSTICS 2000i 5.1 PACK**  
★★★★★  
**£625**

Our 2013 Award winner produces sound with impressive scale for movies and music.



**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.



**KEF R100 5.1**  
★★★★★  
**£2850**

Best Buy for 2013 and 2014, the R100 5.1 is simply superb with demanding film soundtracks - great in stereo too.

### 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.



**SAMSUNG UE48H64800**  
★★★★★  
**£700**

A whole lot of screen for your money - and this is a superb performer as well. A bargain.



**SONY VPL-HW55ES**  
★★★★★  
**£2800**

Superb in 2D, this projector also excels at 3D. Edges are sharp, pictures have depth and stability.

TOTAL  
£1445

TOTAL  
£2430

TOTAL  
£7650

## Hi-Fi Systems

### CD PLAYERS



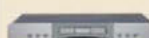
**MARANTZ CD6005**  
★★★★★  
**£350**

This incredibly musical player offers detail in spades, not to mention a great way with dynamics.



**CYRUS Cdi**  
★★★★★  
**£1050**

A player that puts detail resolution, agility and dynamic expression above all else. Which is why we love it.



**ROKSAN CASPIAN M2 CD PLAYER**  
★★★★★  
**£1900**

Combines bite, refinement and rhythm better than anything else we've heard at this price.

### AMPLIFIERS



**MARANTZ PM6005**  
★★★★★  
**£300**

A return to form by Marantz in this market, and a fine match for its CD-player sibling.



**REGA ELEX-R**  
★★★★★  
**£900**

One of the most talented sub-£1k amplifiers we know. Delivers a fast, agile sound with superb dynamic shifts.



**REGA ELICIT-R**  
★★★★★  
**£1600**

The best-value premium stereo amp we know: surefooted, with superb timing, it's very revealing too.

### SPEAKERS



**DALI ZENSOR 3**  
★★★★★  
**£300**

An entertaining and easy listen - an airy, spacious sound with detail, punch and great tonal balance.



**TANNOY REV'N XT 6F**  
★★★★★  
**£1000**

Fast, responsive floorstanders with strong dynamics, crisp timing and impressive detail.



**SPENDOR A6R**  
★★★★★  
**£2500**

Attacking, detailed and balanced, these floorstanders demonstrate a winning way with dynamics.

TOTAL  
£950

TOTAL  
£2950

TOTAL  
£6000

## Complete your home cinema system

### SET-TOP BOXES

Sky+HD 2TB  
£250

Humax HDR-1000S  
(500GB) £220

Humax DTR-T1010  
£230

### PROJECTORS

BenQ W1080 ST+  
£1000

Epson EH-TW7200  
£1900

Sony VPL-HW55ES  
£2800

### COMPACT SPKRS

Tannoy HTS101  
£400

Q Acoustics Q7000i  
£900

B&W MT60D  
£1950

### SUBWOOFERS

B&W ASW610  
£400

B&W ASW610XP  
£700

Velodyne SPL-1000  
Ultra £1400

### STYLE SPEAKERS

Tannoy HTS-101  
£350

Q Acoustics Q7000i  
£900

B&W MT-60D  
£1950

### SOUNDBARS

Philips HTL5140  
£270

Q Acoustics Media 4  
£400

Dali Kubik 1  
£800

### SUPPORTS

Target CL430  
£190

Atacama Evoque  
Eco 60-40 £460

Atacama Moseco 6  
£120

### 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

Clearaudio Concept  
£1000

### TABLETS

iPad Mini  
£200 (16GB)

Google Nexus 10  
£390 (32GB)

Apple iPad Air  
£480 (32GB)

### RADIOS

Roberts Stream 93i  
£150

Revo SuperConnect  
£250

Arcam T32  
£480

### HEADPHONES

Sony MDR-EX650AP  
£60

AKG Y50  
£80

Philips Fidelio  
M1MKII £180

### MICRO SYSTEMS

Denon D-M39DAB  
£310

Cambridge Minx Xi  
£600

Naim UnitiQute 2  
£1150

### AUDIO CABLES

QED XT40  
£10/m

Atlas Elements  
Integra £45

Supra USB 2.0  
£30

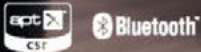


# PODSPEAKERS HAVE LANDED

Introducing PODSPEAKERS by Scandyna  
Available exclusively at Sevenoaks stores nationwide.

MicroPod SE £149	MicroPod Bluetooth £199
SmallPod £249	SmallPod Bluetooth £399
MiniPod MK3 £449	MiniPod Bluetooth £499
BigPod £799	

[www.ssav.com/podspeakers](http://www.ssav.com/podspeakers)



**PODSPEAKERS**  
BY SCANDYNA

FOR THE LATEST PRICES AND OFFERS VISIT [WWW.SSAV.COM](http://WWW.SSAV.COM) OR CONTACT YOUR LOCAL STORE



**£149 OR LESS**  
**SAVE £350**

**NAD • VISO1 • WIRELESS SPEAKER SYSTEM WITH DOCK**  
Dock system with integrated Bluetooth enabling you to wirelessly play music from your iPod, iPhone, iPad or any Bluetooth-enabled smartphone, tablet, or laptop.



**£895 OR LESS**

**NAIM • MU-SO • 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.




**NEW**  
**£599 OR LESS**

**SONY • SRS-X99 • HI-RES WIRELESS SPEAKER SYSTEM**  
Every song in the exceptional clarity of High-Resolution Audio, plus premium wireless streaming. That's the seamlessly-styled SRS-X99 wireless speaker.



**NEW**  
**£399 OR LESS**  
**SAVE £100**

**MARANTZ • NA6005 • MUSIC STREAMER**  
If you prefer direct wireless access to your digital media then look no further. With in-built WiFi, Bluetooth and USB-A capabilities, this player also connects to everything: to your computer, external hard disc, smartphone, and tablet.



**NEW**  
**£499 OR LESS**

**PIONEER • N-50A • MUSIC STREAMER**  
Developed for the digital age, the N-50A Network Audio Player connects to many different sources and features Internet Radio and Music Streaming from compatible devices, a high quality DAC and Airplay and DLNA compatibility.



**£399 OR LESS**

**BLACK OR WHITE**

**BLUESOUND • NODE • HI-RES MUSIC STREAMER**  
Connect your existing stereo system to the world of streaming HiFidelity audio, and access cloud music services and internet radio. Control your music in every room with your Android™ device, iPhone®, iPod touch® or iPad™.



**£1499 OR LESS**  
**SAVE £500**

**Add a Bluesound Module for only £399**

**NAD • C 390DD • DIRECT DIGITAL AMPLIFIER / DAC**  
The combination of sound quality and features make the NAD C 390DD a highly capable and versatile amplifier. Featuring NAD's MDC, the C 390DD comes with 8 inputs which can be expanded to 14 with the optional MDC modules.



**£399 OR LESS**

**NAD • D 3020 AMPLIFIER / DAC**  
Features digital and analogue inputs plus the convenience of wireless streaming with its Bluetooth capability.



**£799 OR LESS**

**NAD • D 7050 •**  
Combines NAD's Digital technology to create the ultimate

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**SEVENOAKS**  
SOUND & VISION



WHAT HI-FI? **WINNER 2012**

### PRO-JECT • ESSENTIAL II • TURNTABLE

Entry-level "plug'n'play" two speed turntable with single piece aluminium tonearm and pre-fitted Ortofon OM5e cartridge.

£209  
OR LESS



£249  
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  
£1049  
OR LESS

### PRO-JECT • 2 XPRESSION SB DC • TURNTABLE

With its 9CC Evolution carbon fibre tonearm and Ortofon 2m Silver cartridge, this turntable sets new standards in its price range.



£425  
OR LESS

### 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.



£899  
OR LESS

SAVE  
£600

WHAT HI-FI? **AWARD 2012**

### NAD • M51 • DAC / PREAMP - SILVER FINISH

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  
£799  
OR LESS

NEW  
£995  
OR LESS

### ARCAM • FMJ CDS27 / FMJ A29 • CD / AMPLIFIER

Introducing Arcam's audiophile Class G integrated amplifier and SACD/CD player with Network streaming up to 192/24 for class leading sound quality.



£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.



£1080

£990

### NAIM • CD5si / NAIT 5si • CD PLAYER / AMPLIFIER

Enjoy outstanding performance from your CDs with this highly acclaimed Naim CD/Amplifier combination.

Available from selected stores. Visit [www.ssav.com](http://www.ssav.com) for details



NEW  
£1249  
OR LESS

NEW  
£1249  
OR LESS

### ROKSAN • K3 • CD / AMPLIFIER

New integrated amplifier with aptX Bluetooth, a phono input plus five additional line inputs for other sources. The K3 CD player is the perfect match for the K3 amplifier. Three finish options available.



£1899  
OR LESS

£1899  
OR LESS

### 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.



£299  
OR LESS

SAVE  
£100

### DENON • CEOL RCD N-9 • CD/STREAMING SYSTEM

Stream high definition music from NAS, computers, mobile devices and the internet, via Wi-Fi, Ethernet, Bluetooth and USB. Features Spotify Connect, Internet radio, CD and FM/AM radio.



NEW  
£3050

### NAIM • UNITI 2 WITH BLUETOOTH 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.



£699  
OR LESS

### 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.



NEW  
£249  
OR LESS

### DENON • D-M40 • CD/DAB SYSTEM

With better connectivity, including an additional optical input, along with performance upgrades to its main components, the D-M40 improves on its award-winning predecessor.

### B&W • P5 WIRELESS HEADPHONES

NEW  
£329  
OR LESS

£329  
OR LESS

### AUDIOQUEST • NIGHTHAWK HEADPHONES

NEW  
£499  
OR LESS

£499  
OR LESS

### NAD • VISO HP30 HEADPHONES

NEW  
£169  
OR LESS

£169  
OR LESS

### SENNHEISER MOMENTUM 2.0 WIRELESS HEADPHONES

NEW  
£379.95  
OR LESS

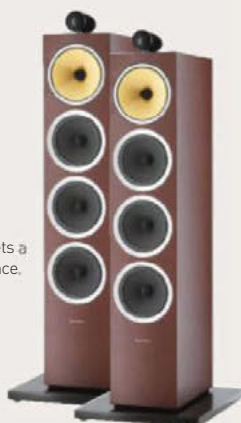
£379.95  
OR LESS





**BOWERS & WILKINS • 685 S2**  
At home on a stand, wall or bookshelf, the versatile 685 S2 is ideal for stereo and home theatre uses in most rooms. And performance is enhanced with the addition of a Decoupled Double Dome tweeter.

**£499**  
OR LESS  
Price excludes stands



### BOWERS & WILKINS CM10 S2

The flagship floorstanding speaker of the CM Series sets a new standard for performance. It combines technologies taken from across B&W's ranges. The result simply sounds and looks beautiful.

**NEW**  
**£2999**  
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



### 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 GOLD 200

Amazing scale and impressive dynamic control are available from this slender three-way design, comprising ribbon tweeters, twin 5.5" bass drivers and a 4" mid-range driver, which is housed in a dedicated enclosure.

**NEW**  
**£2299**  
OR LESS



### MONITOR AUDIO BRONZE 2

The Bronze 2 builds on the strength of its predecessor's audiophile credibility with a neutral tonal balance and high detail resolution combined with high overall efficiency and power handling.

**NEW**  
**£279**  
OR LESS



### PSB IMAGINE X1T

A deceptively slim and discreet floorstanding design, the Imagine X1T has wide bandwidth and high SPL output capabilities that defy its modest size. Features identical 5 1/4" woofers plus a one-inch pure titanium dome tweeter.

**NEW**  
**£749**  
OR LESS

### Q ACOUSTICS • 3050

The flagship 3050 is the perfect speaker for larger rooms, boasting ultra-low levels of distortion, typically found of speakers costing three or four times its price.

**NEW**  
**£499**  
OR LESS  
Standard finishes  
Premium finishes  
£649



### WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 220

The award-winning Wharfedale Diamond 220 is a 2-way, bass reflex bookshelf speaker offering everything you need from an advanced speaker design that doesn't cost the earth.

**£199**  
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. **PRICES FROM £169**

Special Offer

**2 Rooms**

**2 Play:1s**

2 room starter set. While stocks last

**£299** Save **£39**



## BLUESOUND

HiFi for a wireless generation

Stream your digital music collection, internet radio and cloud music services. Bluesound is simple to setup and easily expandable and supports 24-bit/192kHz studio master recordings in lossless FLAC format for crystal clear audiophile-grade sound to any room in your home. **PRICES FROM £399**

HIGH RES AUDIO

"There's a new leader in the wireless multi-room music market - Bluesound combines high-res audio and ease of use in one impressive system."

WHAT HI-FI AWARDS 2015



WHAT HI-FI AWARDS 2014  
Best Compact  
Multi-Room Music System

**NEW**

**£449**  
OR LESS



GLOSS  
RED  
GLOSS  
BLACK  
GLOSS  
WHITE

### PODSPEAKERS • MIINIPOD MK3 • SPEAKERS

Ideal for large areas or where volume is required to make an impact, the MiniPod can be placed on a desk or shelf using the supplied spikes or wall mounted with the optional bracket.

**NEW**

**£199**  
OR LESS



GLOSS  
RED  
GLOSS  
BLACK  
GLOSS  
WHITE

Bluetooth

### PODSPEAKERS • MICROPOD BLUETOOTH SPEAKERS

Introducing the MicroPod Bluetooth. These stylish speakers are ideal for tablets and smartphones and are simple to connect without the need for unsightly wires.

FOR THE LATEST PRICES AND OFFERS VISIT [WWW.SSAV.COM](http://WWW.SSAV.COM) OR CONTACT YOUR LOCAL STORE

## Real Stores

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision have 25 stores nationwide with plans to open more during 2015. 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 (NICWA00).

ADVERT VALID UNTIL 29/07/2015. E&OE

**SEVENOAKS**  
SOUND & VISION



£2199  
OR LESS

**BUY FOR £1749**  
SAVE £450 WHEN YOU TRADE-IN  
ANY HOME THEATRE PRODUCT  
ASK FOR DETAILS

#### 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

£549  
OR LESS



#### ONKYO • TX-NR646 • AV RECEIVER

New 7.2-channel Network AV receiver - the first in its class to feature the revolutionary DTS:X™ and Dolby Atmos®. Also Available: ONKYO TX-NR3030



ESSAV  
.COM



#### PIONEER • SC-LX58 • AV RECEIVER

New 9.2-channel Network receiver with Class D Amplification, Wi-Fi, AirPlay, DLNA, Bluetooth and Dolby Atmos® upgradability. Also Available: PIONEER SC-LX88



£399  
OR LESS

SAVE  
£100



#### 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: SONY STR-DN1060



NEW

£499  
OR LESS



#### DENON • AVR-X2200W • AV RECEIVER

7.2-channel receiver with Dolby Atmos, Spotify Connect support, Bluetooth, AirPlay and DSD streaming. Also Available: DENON AVR-X4100W



NEW

£599  
OR LESS

#### YAMAHA • RX-V679 • AV RECEIVER

7.2-channel network AV receiver featuring Wi-Fi and Bluetooth built-in and 4K Ultra HD compatible HDMI with HDCP2.2. Also Available: YAMAHA RX-A1040 & RX-A3040

**ARCAM • SOLO BAR • SOUNDBAR**  
Not only an ideal solution to improve on the mediocre sound quality of modern TVs, Arcam's superb engineering means it can also be used as a high quality stereo system all over the house. Optional subwoofer also available.



NEW

£799  
OR LESS



**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

NEW BLACK  
GLASS FINISH



**PSB • VS21 • SOUNDBASE**  
PSB has been creating award-winning home theatre speaker systems for decades, and the VS21 brings this extraordinary experience to the sound bar category.



NEW

£399  
OR LESS



#### 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.



WHAT IF...?  
ASK FOR DETAILS



£399  
OR LESS

#### DENON • HEOS HOME CINEMA • SOUNDBAR / SUB

Latest addition to Denon's HEOS range features Dolby Digital and DTS decoders, digital, USB and AUX inputs. TV sound can be distributed throughout HEOS eco system and controlled with the HEOS app or your TV's remote control.



NEW

£599  
OR LESS

#### 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.



ESSAV  
.COM

WHAT IF...?  
ASK FOR DETAILS



£899  
OR LESS

#### KEF • E305 • SPEAKER PACKAGE

The E Series packs uniquely advanced technologies in highly distinctive satellite speakers and a powered subwoofer.



£149  
OR LESS

SAVE  
£180

#### POLK • TL1600 • SPEAKER PACKAGE

The TL1600 is everything you need to get started, and it packs the accumulated wallop of Polk's 30 years of speaker know-how.



NEW

£699  
OR LESS

Deluxe Finishes £899

#### Q ACOUSTICS • 3000 SERIES 5.1 CINEMA PACK

Perfect for every occasion, the new 3000 Series 5.1 Cinema Pack will unleash the full potential of your home cinema electronics.



WHAT IF...?  
ASK FOR DETAILS

£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.

£999  
OR LESS



£5849  
OR LESS

#### SONY • VPL-VW300ES • 4K SXRD PROJECTOR

A fantastic option for movie lovers who want an incredible cinematic experience at home, far beyond the reach of TV.





## SAMSUNG SUHD TV<sup>4K</sup>

### JS9000 SERIES • CURVED 4K UHD TV

Welcome to a new world of picture quality. The revolutionary S9000 SUHD TV doesn't just raise the bar, it changes the game. This is a new benchmark for design with stunning looks from whatever angle you look at it and picture quality previously only seen in professional editing suites. It's a new world of colour, brightness and contrast, immersed in a sleek and elegant package.

Prices from £2599

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FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY

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## SONY

NEW

### X93C SERIES • 4K UHD TV

Prices from £2599

The new X93C 4K 3D TV includes Sony's powerful 4K processor X1 chip designed for optimal playback of 4K material and upscaling of lower resolution content to near 4K resolution along with Triluminos colour technology, Motionflow XR1200Hz and edge-lit LED backlighting. This Android TV lets you connect and enjoy any content, from apps to movies, between different Android devices – the simplest and easiest way ever.

The 'wedge' design accommodates the all-important speakers which are the compatible with the new Hi-resolution audio specifications, with the ability to upscale audio to better than CD quality.

FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY

4K

55 65

## SONY 4K

### X85C SERIES • 4K UHD TV

Experience 4K by Sony and there's no looking back. Bring all your favourite TV entertainment to life with fine detail and exquisite colour. Effortlessly explore apps, games and the fast-growing choice of broadcast and internet 4K content that's coming your way.

Prices from £1799

55 65 75

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Also Available X83C Series 43 & 49 • 4K UHD TV



NEW

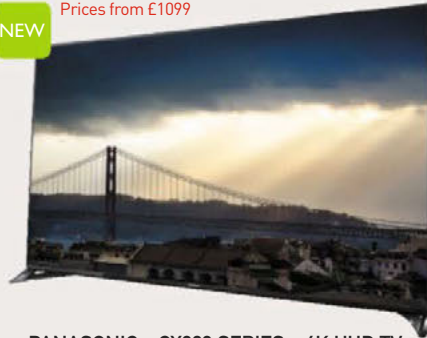
NEW Prices from £459



### SONY • W70C SERIES • FULL HD TV

32 40 48 FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY

NEW Prices from £1099



### PANASONIC • CX802 SERIES • 4K UHD TV

40 50 55 65 FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY

NEW Prices from £1249



### SAMSUNG • JU7000 SERIES • 4K UHD TV

40 48 55 65 75 85 FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY



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### ARCAM • FMJ UDP411 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

With more than ten years of digital video experience, not to mention global recognition of its efforts, Arcam is proud to announce the arrival of its newest disc player, the UDP411.

Also Available: MARANTZ UD7007



ESSAV.COM

### PIONEER • BDP-LX58 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

Enter the world of superior sound and 4K ultra HD pictures. The BDP-LX58 provides just that and more. Experience your Blu-ray films on a whole new level.

Also Available: PIONEER BDP-LX88



NEW £99 OR LESS

### SONY • BDP-S5500 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

The Sony BDP-S5500 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-S6500 & BDP-S7200

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## LCD, LED & OLED 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
OLED	An ultra-thin screen that's commonly used in curved TVs

### The shortlist



**AWARD WINNER**

**Sony KDL-32W706B**

Awards 2014: Best 32in TV



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**

**Samsung UE48H6400**

Awards 2014: Best 47-52in TV



**NEW ENTRY**

**Samsung UE55JS8500**

£2600

### Also consider

Also consider					Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	Active 3D	Passive 3D	Freeview	HDMI	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict										
Up to £500													
Finlux 32H8075-T	200	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Decent picture and smart features – cracking value for the price	LED	32	1366x768	●		●		3	43x73x6
Linsar X24-DVD	300	04.15/FT	★★★★★	ATV with a built-in soundbar that's a credible option for a second room	LED	24	1920x1080			●		2	39x56x11
Panasonic TX-42AS500B	450	10.14/ST	★★★★★	A user-friendly TV that's a little lacking in black levels but is worth a look	LED	42	1920x1080	●		●		2	57x96x7
Panasonic TX-32AS500B	300	11.14/ST	★★★★★	A multi-talented set but its picture could do with some more subtlety	LED	32	1366x768	●		●		2	47x73x7
Panasonic TX-L32E6B	380	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Quite simply one of the best 32in TVs we've tested	LED	32	1920x1080	●		●		3	43x72x5
Philips 32PHT4509/12	280	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Insightful, refined and available at a good price. Worth a look	LED	32	1366x768	●		●		2	42x72x6
Polaroid 3-32-LED-14	200	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Another tempting package from Polaroid	LED	32	1366x768	●		●		3	44x74x10
Polaroid 5-42-LED-14	370	10.14/ST	★★★★★	Asurprising performer that stands up to more established brands	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●		3	56x96x6
Samsung UE32H6400	460	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Near flawless. Pricey, but comes with a bundle of features	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●		4	43x73x6
Samsung UE40F6400	480	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Astunning, feature-laden TV from Samsung. Recommended	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●		4	54x93x5
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-32W706B	350	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Best 32in TV, Awards 2014	LED	32	1920x1080	●		●	●	4	43x73x6
Sony KDL-40W605B	450	10.14/ST	★★★★★	Best 40-46in TV, Awards 2014	LED	40	1920x1080	●		●	●	4	55x93x9
Toshiba 40L6353	400	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Clunky interface aside, this is a decent TV with a great HD picture	LED	40	1920x1080	●		●		4	54x92x27
Toshiba 40L6453DB	430	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Rivals are slicker, but this Toshiba has an attractive picture	LED	42	1920x1080	●		●		4	57x96x9
£500-£2000													
Finlux 42FME242S-T	500	10.14/ST	★★★★★	Sharp picture, decent detail and smart features. Finlux is back on form	LED	42	1920x1080	●		●		2	56x96x6
LG 42LB700V	550	10.14/ST	★★★★★	A fine set, with WebOS being the main attraction here	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●		3	56x95x6
LG 47LB730V	1000	08.14/ST	★★★★★	Solid sound, premium build and a good picture. A fine effort from LG	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	62x106x55
Panasonic TX-L42FT60B	1100	08.13/ST	★★★★★	Likeable TV with a fine picture and great features	LED	42	1920x1080	●		●		3	56x96x4
Panasonic TX-L47AS650B	800	08.14/ST	★★★★★	Talented set, but other TVs have the edge in terms of value	LED	47	1920x1080	●		●	●	3	63x107x5
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
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 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
Polaroid P55D600	700	07.15/GT	★★★★★	No 4K streaming but this Polaroid is a more-than-capable performer	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●		4	80x125x24
Samsung UE40ES6800	950	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Good spec and looks, but the backlight isn't great	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●		3	67x92x33
Samsung UE40F6500	900	08.13/ST	★★★★★	Not a class leader but offers a lot for your money	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●		3	91x60x27
Samsung UE40H6400	550	10.14/GT	★★★★★	An engrossing TV with plenty of smarts and a cracking picture	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●		4	54x92x5
Samsung UE48H6400	700	08.14/ST	★★★★★	Best 47-52in TV, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	LED	48	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	63x109x5
Samsung UE48HU7500	1600	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Some minor flaws aside, this is a great smaller-sized 4K set	LED	48	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	62x107x36
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



## TELEVISIONS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	Active 3D	Passive 3D	Freeview	FreeSat	HDMI	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Sony KDL-55W955B	1600	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A good TV but we expect more from a flagship set	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	79x124x9
<b>£2000 and above</b>														
Bang & Olufsen BeoVision 11	5250	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A truly luxurious TV that delivers a great performance too	LCD	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	6	89x96x6
B&O BeoVision Avant 55	5995	01.15/FT	★★★★★	This is one of the classiest TVs money can buy	LCD	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	6	71x129x10
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 55EC930V	2000	02.15/FT	★★★★★	OLED enters the realms of affordability, and it's a thing of beauty	OLED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	75x123x20
LG 55EG960V	3800	05.15/FT	★★★★★	The price is steep but this 4K OLED is truly stunning	OLED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	3	72x123x5
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 55UF950V	2600	07.15/GT	★★★★★	Offers a strong 4K performance and WebOS 2.0 is fantastic	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	72x124x5
LG 65LA970W	5500	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Fantastic to look at, but lacks the detail of depth of rivals	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	3	84x143x41
LG 65UF850V	2500	06.15/GT	★★★★★	A solid 4K performer that's well worth consideration	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	3	90x145x28
Panasonic TX-L47WT50B	2000	08.12/ST	★★★★★	Stylish, with real areas of expertise	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	63x107x3
Panasonic TX-58AX802B	2499	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A 4K TV worth investigating	LED	58	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	80x130x29
Panasonic TX-65AX902B	5000	01.15/FT	★★★★★	A gorgeous screen but that price is a sticking point	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	86x146x6
Panasonic TX-P65WT600	5500	12.13/GT	★★★★★	A capable set that handles 4K footage very well	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	86x147x6
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
<b>Samsung UE55HU7500</b>	<b>2300</b>	<b>09.14/GT</b>	<b>★★★★★</b>	<b>Best 52-60in TV, Awards 2014</b>	<b>LED</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>3840x2160</b>	<b>●</b>	<b>●</b>	<b>●</b>	<b>●</b>	<b>●</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>75x123x27</b>
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
<b>Samsung UE65HU7500</b>	<b>3500</b>	<b>08.14/FT</b>	<b>★★★★★</b>	<b>Best 60in+ TV, Awards 2014</b>	<b>LED</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>3840x2160</b>	<b>●</b>	<b>●</b>	<b>●</b>	<b>●</b>	<b>●</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>88x145x30</b>
Samsung UE65HU8500	3800	01.15/GT	★★★★★	A feature-laden TV, this is an impressive, attractive and entertaining TV	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	85x145x11
Samsung UE55J58500	2600	07.15/GT	★★★★★	A stellar 4K set from Samsung. No 3D glasses supplied, though	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	72x124x9
Samsung UE65JU7000	2750	06.15/GT	★★★★★	Impressive. Samsung's 2015 4K range is off to a flying start	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	90x146x30

**NEW**

**androidtv**

**X9005C**  
**Ultra Slim 4K UHD Android TV**

Sony's thinnest LED TV yet, at 4.9mm (at its thinnest part); the revolutionary floating style is virtually frameless and mounts flush to your wall. Features the new 4K Processor X1, for Sony's best 4K scaling yet and trilinear technology to boost colour performance.

**KD-55X9005C £2599 • KD-65X9005C £3999**

**4K**



**STR-DN1060**  
**7.2 channel AV receiver**

Take your home entertainment experience to exciting new levels with the STR-DN1060. An immersive viewing experience is a connection away, with both HDCP 2.2 and MHL 3.0 support for viewing of content from 4K broadcasts as well as smartphone connections. There's also 4K upscaling for HD sources, and with High-Resolution Audio you can bring the experience of live music to your living room.

**£499**



**S8505C**  
**Curved 4K UHD Android TV**

Sony's new curved 4K HD TV, available in two screen size options, utilises the Android OS for its Smart TV platform. Features like Google Cast; allow iOS, Android and PCs to share music, photos and video straight onto the big screen. And from Summer 2015, Sony will integrate the YouView platform allowing you to watch your favourite TV shows from BBC iPlayer, 4oD, ITV Player and Demand 5 as well as live TV using the lovely YouView interface with no need for a separate set-top box.

**KD-55S8505C £2199 • KD-65S8505C £3499**



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TELEVISIONS continued

TELEVISIONScontinued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	Active 3D	Passive 3D	Freeview	Freesat	HDMI	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
£2000 and above														
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-65S9005B	3900	01.15/GT	★★★★★	Thoughtful design married with seriously good picture quality	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	4			155x90x33
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 upscaled content but it looks great with 4K	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	4			88x172x10



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 TV
- Twin HDMI outputs** These are used if you have two displays, say a projector and a TV

The shortlist



Sony BDP-S5500  
£110



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR  
Sony BDP-S7200

Awards 2014: Best Blu-ray player £150-£300



AWARD WINNER  
Panasonic DMP-BDT700

Awards 2014: Best Blu-ray player £300+

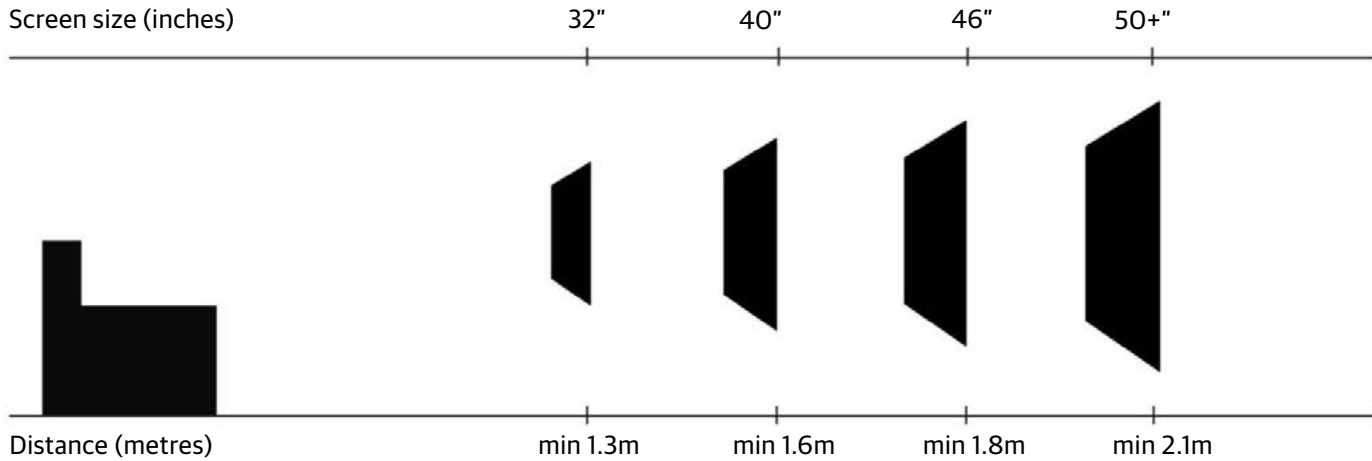
Also consider

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		HDMI out	Optical out	Co-axial out	Multichannel	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500									
LG BP645	85	02.15/GT	★★★★★	A fine Blu-ray player replete with a strong feature list	1	1	0	No	5x43x21
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-BDT260	80	02.15/GT	★★★★★	An impressive Blu-ray spinner that's even more value for money after its price drop	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-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

What screen size shall I buy?

Is that close enough?



- 1.3m to the TV**  
**Buy a 32in screen**  
When you're sitting this close to your telly, a 32in TV is optimal. If you watch a lot of high-def Blu-ray and TV, though, you should consider buying a 37in set.
- 1.6m to the TV**  
**Buy a 40in screen**  
You can afford to go up to a 42in set if you're sitting here. Economies of scale mean that 40- and 42in TVs are cheaper than an equivalent 37in.
- 1.8m to the TV**  
**Buy a 46in screen**  
Now you're talking. If you can get your sofa this far away from the screen, a 46 or 48in TV is just the ticket, particularly with HD images. And that's a big telly.
- 2.1m to the TV**  
**Buy a 50+ in screen**  
... or a 52, or even a 55. It'll look pretty huge for the first few days, but you'll quickly get used to - and come to really appreciate - the extra screen size.



## BLU-RAY PLAYERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	HDMI out	Optical out	Co-axial out	Multichannel out	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Panasonic DMP-BWT740	455	11.14/FT	★★★★★	2	1	1	No	6x43x24
Philips BDP3380	80	01.14/GT	★★★★★	1	0	1	No	4x41x21
Pioneer BDP-160	120	01.14/GT	★★★★★	2	0	1	No	6x44x25
Pioneer BDP-450	225	01.12/FT	★★★★★	1	0	1	No	9x44x25
Samsung BD-H6500	100	02.15/GT	★★★★★	1	1	0	No	4x36x20
Sony BDP-S4100	80	01.14/GT	★★★★★	1	0	1	No	4x36x20
Sony BDP-S5100	140	07.13/GT	★★★★★	1	0	1	No	4x36x20
Sony BDP-S5200	85	02.15/GT	★★★★★	1	0	1	No	4x27x20
Sony BDP-S5500	110	07.15/FT	★★★★★	1	0	1	No	4x23x20
Sony BDP-S6200	180	08.14/GT	★★★★★	1	0	1	No	4x36x20
Sony BDP-S7200	230	09.14/FT	★★★★★	1	0	1	No	5x43x21
Sony PlayStation 3 (2012)	250	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	1	1	0	No	6x29x23
Sony PlayStation 4	349	02.14/FT	★★★★★	1	1	0	No	19x3x3
Xbox One	430	01.14/FT	★★★★★	1	1	0	No	8x33x27

£500 and above								
Cambridge Audio Azur 752BD	800	04.13/FT	★★★★★	2	1	1	8ch	9x43x31
Marantz UD7007	500	12.12/FT	★★★★★	1	1	1	No	11x44x31
Oppo BDP-105D	1100	03.15/GT	★★★★★	2	1	1	8ch	12x43x31
Onkyo BD-SP809	500	04.12/GT	★★★★★	2	1	1	No	10x43x31
Panasonic DMP-BDT700	500	10.14/FT	★★★★★	2	1	1	7ch	7x45x26
Pioneer BDP-LX58	600	04.15/FT	★★★★★	2	0	1	No	12x43x39
Pioneer BDP-LX88	1300	03.15/GT	★★★★★	2	1	1	No	13x44x34



## 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

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Throw Ratio	Resolution	Rated Brightness (Lumens)	HDMI in	DVI in	PC in	Component in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Weight (kg)
Up to £1000													
BenQ W1070+	650	11.14/GT	★★★★★	DLP	1.15-1.5	1920x1080	2200	2	0	1	1	10x31x24	2.75
BenQ W1080ST	850	12.13/GT	★★★★★	DLP	0.69-0.83	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	1	10x31x24	2.85
Epson EH-TW5200	700	11.14/GT	★★★★★	DLP	1.22-1.47:1	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	1	10.5x30x25	3
InFocus IN3118HD	990	05.13/GT	★★★★★	DLP	1.6-1.92	1920x1080	3600	2	0	1	0	10x34x25	3.7
InFocus IN8606HD	650	11.14/GT	★★★★★	DLP	1.22-1.47:1	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	1	26x28.5x12	3
Optoma HD25	800	05.13/GT	★★★★★	DLP	1.5-1.8	1920x1080	2000	2	0	2	2	12x38x31	4.5
£1000-£3000													
BenQ W1080ST+	1000	05.15/GT	★★★★★	DLP	0.69-0.83	1920x1080	2200	2	0	1	1	10x31x24	3
BenQ W1400	1000	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	DLP	1.07-1.71	1920x1080	2200	2	0	1	1	12x34x28	4
BenQ W1500	1400	04.15/GT	★★★★★	DLP	1.07-1.71	1920x1080	2200	2	0	1	1	12x34x28	3.9
Epson EH-TW6100W	1600	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	LCD	1.32-2.15:1	1920x1080	2300	2	0	1	1	14x42x37	6
Epson EH-TW6600	1400	04.15/GT	★★★★★	LCD	1.32-2.15	1920x1080	2500	2	0	1	1	16x41x30	6.7
Epson EH-TW7200	1900	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	LCD	1.34-2.87:1	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	1	16x41x40	8
Optoma HD50	1000	05.15/GT	★★★★★	DLP	1.39-2.09:1	1920x1080	2200	2	0	1	1	12x29x27	4
Philips Screeneo HDP1590TV	1500	05.14/FT	★★★★★	DLP	0.321	1280x800	500	3	0	1	0	15x34x29	5
Sony VPL-HW55ES	2800	04.14/GT	★★★★★	SXRD	n/a	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1	18x41x46	9.6
£3000 and above													
Epson EH-TW9200W	3000	04.14/GT	★★★★★	LCD	1.34-2.87:1	1920x1080	2400	6	0	0	1	14x47x40	9
JVC DLA-X35BE	3000	04.13/GT	★★★★★	D-LIA	n/a	1920x1080	1300	2	0	1	1	18x46x47	15
Panasonic PT-AT6000E	3000	04.14/GT	★★★★★	LCD	1.18-2.36	1920x1080	2400	3	0	1	1	15x47x36	8.7
SIM2 C3X Lumis 3D-S	30000	11.11/FT	★★★★★	DLP	1.82-2.48:1	1920x1080	3000	2	0	0	1	46x21x46	11
Sony VPL-HW50ES	3000	12.12/FT	★★★★★	SXRD	1.64-2.37	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1	18x41x46	9.6
Sony VPL-VW500ES	8500	04.14/FT	★★★★★	SXRD	1.64-2.37	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1	18x41x46	9.6
Sony VPL-VW95ES	5000	01.12/FT	★★★★★	SXRD	1.38-2.83	4096x2160	1700	2	0	0	0	20x50x46	14



## 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



**AWARD WINNER**  
**Yamaha RX-V377**

Awards 2014: Best home cinema amp up to £350



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**  
**Sony STR-DN1050**

Awards 2014: Best home cinema amp £350-£700



**AWARD WINNER**  
**Pioneer SC-LX58**

Awards 2014: Best home cinema amp £700-£1500

### Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Channels /power (w)	HDMI in	HDMI out	Networking	3D passthrough	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
<b>Up to £300</b>									
Pioneer VSX-528	285	02.14/GT	★★★★★	A well-equipped budget amp with good surround sound capabilities	5x130	6	1	●	17x44x33
Yamaha RX-V375	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier up to £350, Awards 2013	5x100	4	1	●	15x44x32
Yamaha RX-V377	250	07.14/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best home cinema amplifier up to £350, Awards 2014</b>	5x70	4	1	●	15x44x32
<b>£300-£500</b>									
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
<b>£500-£1000</b>									
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

## Dolby Atmos & DTS:X

The lowdown on what to expect from the next generation of surround sound

The arrival of Dolby's Atmos surround system brought immersive, room-filling sound to the home. DTS has stepped up to the plate with its own DTS:X.

But what is it, where can you get it and where's the content?

### The basics

Atmos and DTS:X deliver object-based surround sound but both differ in how they implement it. Dolby requires upward-firing speakers or in-ceiling speakers that produce 'height', which allows sounds to come from above.

DTS:X will work with existing set-ups so your speaker package should, in theory, work with no upgrades. DTS:X doesn't require a specific speaker configuration and supports up to 32 speaker locations. How does it create a 3D soundfield without upward-firing speakers? DTS claims that the extra channels will compensate, producing sounds that immerse the viewer. Will this be more effective? We'll have to wait and see.

### What can you play it on?

A standard Blu-ray player only passes through Atmos or DTS:X. Decoding is the job of the AV receiver. Atmos launched last autumn and is now supported by a wide range of manufacturers. By the time you read this DTS:X may already be out – it's on track for a summer 2015 launch – with several manufacturers and most of the industry onboard.

The list includes Anthem, Cambridge Audio, Denon,



Marantz, McIntosh, Onkyo, Pioneer and Yamaha, the majority of which will equip receivers via a firmware update. Before we went to press Sony announced some of its AV receiver line-up for 2015, but there was no mention of support for either Atmos or DTS:X. That could change when the company announce its higher-end receivers.

### Where's the content?

Dolby has seen growth in this area with *American Sniper* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* among confirmed UK

Blu-rays. Naturally, it's a little thin on the ground for DTS:X. *Ex Machina* is the format's first title, but only in the US. The UK Blu-ray release does not carry a DTS:X track.

Expect the situation to change once Ultra HD Blu-ray arrives later this year as both Atmos and DTS:X are included in the format's specifications. By then we'll know if either technology is here for the long haul.

**Onkyo has dived in with support for Dolby Atmos across its range. The implementation of Atmos is superb in the TX-NR3030, with effects placed all around the room**



AV RECEIVERS & AMPLIFIERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Channels /power (w)	HDMI in	HDMI out	Networking	3D passthrough	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Denon AVR-X4000	900	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Decent if you're looking for a sub-£1000 AV receiver	7x125	7	3	●	●	17x43x38
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-DN1040	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £350-£700, Awards 2013.	7x100	8	2	●	●	16x43x32
Sony STR-DN1050	500	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £350-£700, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	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-V677	560	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A fun receiver that's not the most balanced, but is endlessly entertaining	7x150	6	1	●	●	17x43x36

£1000-£2000										
Anthem MRX-510	1700	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Rarely have we seen a multi-channel amp so accomplished with music	7x75	7	2	●	●	16x44x37
Onkyo TX-NR838	1000	10.14/FT	★★★★★	A commendable amplifier with a huge number of features	7x180	7	1	●	●	34x58x51
Pioneer SC-LX58	1400	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £700-£1500, Awards 2014	9x190	8	3	●	●	19x44x44
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-A1040	1000	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Well-featured and full of power, but lacks in the thrill department	7x110	8	2	●	●	18x44x43

£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
Pioneer SC-LX88	2200	01.15/GT	★★★★★	A staggeringly powerful amp with a captivating sound	9x250	8	3	●	●	19x44x44
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
Onkyo TX-NR3030	2500	06.15/FT	★★★★★	A stonkingly good receiver that offers plenty for the asking price	11x185	8	3	●	●	34x60x59
Yamaha RX-A3030	2000	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £1500+, Awards 2013	9x150	8	1	●	●	19x44x47
Yamaha RX-A3040	2000	01.15/GT	★★★★★	A smooth and powerful amp, that's well worth auditioning	9x230	8	2	●	●	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

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		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)
Up to £500																			
B&W ASW610	450	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Best subwoofer up to £700, Awards 2011	200	25	●	●	●	Forward	1	1	●	●	●	●	●	4	31x31x38
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-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

£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
Velodyne SPL-1000 Ultra	1400	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Best subwoofer £700+, Awards 2011	1200	25	●	●	●	Forward	1	1	●	●	●	●	●	3	34x33x34

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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

  
**Q Acoustics 3000 5.1 Cinema Pack**  
£700

  
**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**  
**Dali Zensor 15.1**  
Awards 2014: Best Traditional Pack £700-£1500

  
**AWARD WINNER**  
**Monitor Audio Radius R90HT1**  
Awards 2014: Best Style package £1400-£1800

Also consider

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
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 2014	16x11x14	11x25x17	16x11x14	42x28x37 1
Wharfedale DX-1HCP	400	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Gets a lot right for this kind of money	19x12x12	12x29x12	19x12x12	34x29x32 2
£500-£1000								
Dali Zensor 1 5.1	980	07.15/GT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £700-£1500, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	27x16x22	16x44x29	27x16x22	31x29x31 3
Jamo A 200 HCS 5	640	01.13/FT	★★★★★	Agutsy and entertaining sound at this price	22x9x5	22x9x5	22x9x5	31x28x31 7
KEF E305	900	11.13/ST	★★★★★	A room-filling system but there are more dynamic packages out there	26x14x16	16x22x15	26x14x16	32x43x27 2
Mission M <sup>3</sup>	700	01.15/FT	★★★★★	Petite, likable and convenient, just lacks the thrills of rival packages	9x9x9	9x9x9	9x9x9	28x27x27 1
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 2014	23x15x20	23x16x12	23x15x20	23x16x12 2
Q Acoustics 3000 Series 5.1	700	07.15/GT	★★★★★	Q Acoustics punches well above its weight. Another excellent budget offering	24x15x20	15x43x20	24x15x20	40x20x43 5
Q Acoustics Q7000i	900	11.13/ST	★★★★★	Best style package £700-£1000, Awards 2014	24x10x16	12x20x16	24x10x16	32x46x20 2
Wharfedale 100-HCP	950	11.13/FT	★★★★★	A very good package, but could do with a better centre speaker	32x17x26	17x47x27	32x17x26	39x35x31 7
Wharfedale Diamond 220 HCP	850	07.15/GT	★★★★★	Wharfedale opts for a more measured approach and succeeds impressively	32x18x26	19x47x26	32x17x27	38x35x31 4
£1000-£2000								
Acoustic Energy 1 Series 5.101	1000	07.15/GT	★★★★★	Produces a big, punchy and refined sound. An all-rounder worth investigating	30x19x25	19x45x26	30x19x25	28x28x28 2
B&W MT-50	1100	11.13/ST	★★★★★	Best style package £1000-£1400, Awards 2014	25x11x16	25x11x16	25x11x16	26x26x33 2
B&W MT-60D	1950	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Best style package £1800+, Awards 2014	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	1650	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £1500-£2500, Awards 2014	98x24x34	15x43x21	18x46x15	34x33x36 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
KEF Q300 5.1	1880	10.11/GT	★★★★★	An admirable package for the purists	36x21x30	21x63x30	36x21x30	33x34x33 3
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 2014	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
£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
B&W 683 Theatre	2750	11.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented and entertaining speaker package that doesn't quite captivate	99x19x36	22x59x30	31.5x16x23	33x33x38 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
KEFR100 5.1	2850	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £2500-£3500, Awards 2014	28x18x29	17x53x31	28x18x29	37x33x35 4
Monitor Audio Apex	2400	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Best style speaker package £2000+, Awards 2011	25x14x14	14x61x10	25x14x14	34x34x41 2
Monitor Audio Silver 6 AV12	2875	06.14/GT	★★★★★	A hugely capable surround package. Worthy of serious consideration	94x35x20	19x50x24	25x31x12	23x16x14 6



SURROUND SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Front speaker (hwd, cm)	Center speaker (hwd, cm)	Rear speaker (hwd, cm)	Subwoofer (hwd, cm)	Finishes
Paradigm MilleniaOne	2500	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Smooth and detailed, but slightly lacking in attack	20x12x15	20x12x15	20x12x15	34x30x32	2
Tannoy Revolution SEAV	2400	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Despite a few issues with the centre and sub, this is an exciting package	95x20x25	15x31x16	37x20x25	44x43x37	1



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

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER  
Marantz CD6005

Awards 2014: Best CD Player up to £500



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR  
Cyrus CDi

Awards 2014: Best CD Player £500-£1500



AWARD WINNER  
Roksan Caspian M2 CD

Awards 2014: Best CD Player £1500+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Inte	Trans	Co-ax	Opt	XLRC	RCA	Head	Co-ax	Opt	AES	USB	Fin	Dim (hwd)
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	★★★★★	A spacious sounding disc spinner	●		1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x31
Marantz CD6005	350	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Best CD player up to £500, Awards 2014	●		1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x44x34
Mitchell & Johnson CDD-201V	250	07.15/FT	★★★★★	A re-modelled Sansui that looks smart and delivers a crisp, clean sound	●	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x43x29
Onkyo C-N7050	350	04.15/FT	★★★★★	Is it a CD player or a high-res streamer? Regardless, it's hugely appealing	●		1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	10x44x30
Teac CD-P800NT	350	06.15/FT	★★★★★	A versatile one-box solution that offers impressive sound and features	●		1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	1	10x43x30
£500-£1000																	
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	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1500, Awards 2013	●		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
£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	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1500, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●		1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	7x22x36
Cyrus CD Xt Signature	1750	05.15/FT	★★★★★	Partner the Xt with a suitable DAC and you have a top-class transport		●	1	1	0	0	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 Antila IIS Eco	2995	09.11/FT	★★★★★	The already good Antila 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 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	1695	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Best CD player £1500+ Awards 2014	●		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
Yamaha CD-S3000	3500	10.14/GT	★★★★★	An understated player that lets the music take centre stage	●		1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	14x44x44

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BIGGEST BRANDS, BEST PRICES, EXPERT ADVICE!



A selection of our massive range of top-rated hi-fi

SAVE  
£10



## CAMBRIDGE TOPAZ AM1 AMPLIFIER

Solid build quality and connectivity make the AM1 a great first amp. 6 year Supercare only £9.99

REGULAR PRICE

£79.95

VIP CLUB PRICE

£69.95

LOWEST  
PRICE  
GUARANTEED

NEW FOR 2013



## DENON DM40 DAB MINI SYSTEM EXC SPEAKERS

The latest in a long line of award-winning mini hi-fi systems that are big on sound quality. Tune into your favourite digital radio station, or enjoy music directly from your iOS device or smartphone with its handy USB input.

6 year Supercare only £24.90

Also available in silver

£249

DAB

LOWEST  
PRICE  
GUARANTEED



## MONITOR AUDIO A100 STEREO AMPLIFIER

"Large-scale dynamics with a surprising degree of composure." - What Hi-Fi. 6 year Supercare only £19.90. Also available in white.



£199

SAVE  
£200

6 YEAR  
GUARANTEE  
INCLUDED



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2013

## TANNOY REVOLUTION DC6T SE ESPRESSO FLOORSTANDING SPEAKERS (PAIR)

"These Special Edition speakers ooze fantastic all-round ability: they're special indeed." - What Hi-Fi.

TSP £699.95

REGULAR PRICE

£549.95

VIP CLUB PRICE

£499.95

LOWEST  
PRICE  
GUARANTEED



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

## PROJECT DEBUT CARBON TURNTABLE

"The latest version of the long-running Debut remains a winner. Recommended." - What Hi-Fi.

6 year Supercare only £32.50

Available in a range of colours.

£325

SAVE  
£190

6 YEAR  
SPEAKER  
GUARANTEE  
INCLUDED



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

## MARANTZ PM6005, CD6005 & WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 220 AMPLIFIER, CD PLAYER & BLACK SPEAKERS (PAIR)

"Superb sound quality on a budget for your analogue and digital music," commented What Hi-Fi of the PM6005, while they said of the CD6005, "A fantastic player and immense value for money."

TSP £837.95 | 6 year Supercare only 10% of Marantz purchase prices

Wharfedale Diamond 220 also

available in walnut or white.

Amp and CD player also

available in silver.

Call for individual unit prices.

£649.95

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Joel, Manager, City store  
14th year of service

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WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

## ARCAM FMJ A19 AMPLIFIER

"It's clear that its strength lies in its competence. Each musical element is delivered with a remarkable amount of composure and stability." - What Hi-Fi.

6 year Supercare only £89.50

£695

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PRICE  
GUARANTEED



## ARCAM CDS27

SACD PLAYER WITH MUSIC STREAMER

A top quality CD/SACD player and music streamer in one, the Arcam CDS27 is a complete digital entertainer.

6 year Supercare only £79.95

WiFi

£799.95

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PRICE  
GUARANTEED



## MUSICAL FIDELITY M3si & M3SCD AMPLIFIER & CD PLAYER

Experience the incredible M3si that offers deep and dynamic sound quality. A powerful option for hi-fidelity fanatics. The M3SCD boasts class-leading components throughout including an impressive built-in DAC so you can enjoy great sounding digital music as well as CDs.

6 year Supercare only £109.90 each

At selected stores.

£1099 each

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£70**

**6 YEAR  
SPEAKER  
GUARANTEE  
INCLUDED**



### DENON DM39 & Q ACOUSTICS 2020i MINI SYSTEM & GRAPHITE SPEAKERS (PAIR)

"Very special indeed," said What Hi-Fi of the Denon DM39 mini-system, and they described the Q Acoustics as "Beautifully put-together speakers."

TSP £338.95 | 6 year Supercare only 10% of DM39 price  
DM39 also available in black | Q3020 available in other colours.  
Call for individual unit prices.



REGULAR PRICE

**£299.95**  
VIP CLUB PRICE

**£269.95**

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GUARANTEED**

NEW FOR 2015



### CAMBRIDGE AUDIO CXN NETWORK MUSIC PLAYER

"A stylish, feature-packed streamer that sounds great and is a joy to use," said What Hi-Fi on this fantastic player. Introduce your Hi-Fi to a world of music straight from your iPhone with Airplay built-in.

6 year Supercare only £39.95  
Also available in silver

**£699.95**

**SAVE  
£170**

**6 YEAR  
SPEAKER  
GUARANTEE  
INCLUDED**

NEW FOR 2015

SELECTED  
STORES ONLY



### MARANTZ MCR610 MELODY MEDIA & MONITOR AUDIO BRONZE 2 STREAMING MINI SYSTEM & BLACK SPEAKERS (PAIR)

"This is an excellent all-in-one system" said What Hi-Fi of the MCR610. The Bronze 2 speakers remain among the best of their class as great sounding all-round performers.

TSP £569 | 6 year Supercare only 10% of Marantz purchase price  
MCR610 also available in white | Bronze 2 also available in walnut  
Call for individual unit prices.



**£499.95**

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**6 YEAR  
GUARANTEE  
INCLUDED**

FREE

3M QED Revelation worth £169.95. While stocks last.



### Q ACOUSTICS CONCEPT 40 FLOORSTANDING SPEAKERS (PAIR)

"The Concept 40s build on the brands strengths to deliver a wonderfully inviting sound." – What Hi-Fi.  
Also available in white.



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### ROKSAN K3 AMP & CD CD PLAYER & AMPLIFIER

Roksan's K3 components are sure to please even the most discerning audiophile. Fully equipped with Bluetooth for easy music streaming, the K3 Amp was described by What Hi-Fi as, "An excellent all-rounder that not only delivers big sound, energy and texture in spades but does so for a very reasonable price."

6 year Supercare only £124.90 each

**£1249** each

**SAVE  
£400**

**6 YEAR  
SPEAKER  
GUARANTEE  
INCLUDED**

EXCLUSIVE!

NEW FOR 2015



### CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 851A, 851N & TANNOY XT6F AMPLIFIER, NETWORK MUSIC PLAYER & FLOORSTANDING SPEAKERS (PAIR)

"For scale and power, not to mention build and style, the Azur 851A is hard to beat." – What Hi-Fi on the 851A.

TSP £3399.85 | 6 year Supercare only 10% of 851A & 851N purchase prices  
Amplifier & network music player also available in silver.  
Speakers also available in oak.

Call for individual unit prices.

**£2999.95**

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ARCAM audiolab **audioquest.**

**CAMBRIDGE** **CYRUS**

**DALI.** **DYNAUDIO** **FOCAL**

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**MONITOR AUDIO** **naim** **ROKSAN**

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PLAY:1, PLAY:3 & PLAY:5  
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**BRAND NEW HEOS 1 IN STOCK**

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**CONTROL YOUR MUSIC ANYWHERE.**  
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Amazing Sound. Amazing Rewards.  
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### CAMBRIDGE GO BLUETOOTH SPEAKER

"A stellar performance at a very attractive price."  
- What Hi-Fi.

6 year Supercare only £11.95  
Also available in white, red and blue.

**£119.95**

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Wireless speakers  
Best in class

**Bluetooth**

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**Bluetooth**

### MONITOR AUDIO AIRSTREAM S200 WIRELESS MUSIC SPEAKER

"Great price and streaming features galore... a very desirable wireless speaker."  
- What Hi-Fi.

6 year Supercare only £19.90  
Also available in white.

**£199**

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AWARDS 2014  
Wireless speakers  
Best in class

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**2 YEAR GUARANTEE INCLUDED**

### NAIM MU-SO WIRELESS MUSIC SPEAKER

"Naim's first entry into the wireless speaker market, and it's an absolute belter... you won't be disappointed."  
- What Hi-Fi.

6 year Supercare only £89.50

**£895**

**WHAT HI-FI?**  
AWARDS 2014  
Wireless speakers  
Best in class

**Bluetooth**

## A small selection from our headphone range

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### SONY MDR-EX650 HEADPHONES

"From sound to fit, the EX650s are everything a pair of in-ears should be."  
- What Hi-Fi.

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**WHAT HI-FI?**  
AWARDS 2014  
Headphones  
Best in class

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### SENNHEISER MOMENTUM M2 HEADPHONES

"Easily one of the best pairs of buds we've heard this year."  
- What Hi-Fi.

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**WHAT HI-FI?**  
AWARDS 2014  
Headphones  
Best in class

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### PHILIPS FIDELIO M1 MK2 HEADPHONES

"A lovely pair of portable headphones. Highly recommended."  
- What Hi-Fi.

**£149.95**

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AWARDS 2014  
Headphones  
Best in class

**SAVE £60**

### SHURE SRH1540 HEADPHONES

"If you want to enjoy great sound in pampering comfort all day long, give these a go."  
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**£369.95**

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AWARDS 2014  
Headphones  
Best in class

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From simple TV set-ups to a multi-room system or dedicated home cinema, we can do it all. We'll optimise your settings to best suit both your room and your preferences.
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Highly competitive installation costs and product prices as low as, if not lower than, the biggest internet retailers.

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Pete, Darren, Tim, Richer Sounds Installers.  
17 combined years of service!





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**FULL 1080PHD SMART TV**

**SAMSUNG UE48H6400**  
48" SMART 3D LED TV

"Punchy, subtle and exciting... one the outstanding deals of the year." – What Hi-Fi.

TSP £599

Also available 32", 40" & 55"

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Best of the Best  
QUAD CORE  
Wi-Fi  
Freeview HD

REGULAR PRICE **£549**

**VIP CLUB PRICE £529**

**SAVE £300**

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**CURVED 4K ULTRA HD SMART TV**

**SAMSUNG UE48JS8500**  
48" CURVED 4K ULTRA HD SMART 3D LED TV

Experience phenomenal detail with this incredible curved screen. It delivers new levels of colour and brightness that will bring your favourite films, live sports and video games bursting to life. You can enjoy a huge choice of entertainment too thanks to Samsung's very own Smart hub that's quick and easy to use.

TSP £2099

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**QUAD CORE**  
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Claim £250 back when you trade in any flat 32" + TV. Offer ends 12.08.2015

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**4K ULTRA HD SMART TV**

**PANASONIC VIERA TX40CX680B**  
40" 4K ULTRA HD SMART 3D LED TV

"Good value set that flies the flag for 4K, offering a fine picture and good stack of features with it." – What Hi-Fi.

Also available 50" & 55"

**WHAT Hi-Fi AWARDS 2014**  
★★★★★  
QUAD CORE  
Wi-Fi  
Freeview HD

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**free time**

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**LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED**

**6 YEAR GUARANTEE INCLUDED**

**4K ULTRA HD SMART TV**

**SONY BRAVIA KD55X9005CBU**  
55" 4K ULTRA HD SMART 3D LED TV

Experience excellent detailed picture quality on a phenomenally thin screen. This Sony also offers a huge range of apps with its new Android Smart hub that's a joy to use for web browsing and streaming shows or movies.

Also available 65"

**NEW FOR 2015**

**DUAL CORE**  
**Wi-Fi**  
**FULL HD**

**CALL OR SEE WEB**

**LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED**

**6 YEAR GUARANTEE INCLUDED**

**4K ULTRA HD SMART TV**

**SAMSUNG UE48H6400**  
48" SMART 3D LED TV

Android TV has arrived with this fantastic Smart Sony. You'll enjoy more choice than ever with this new 4K stunner.

Also available 43"

**WHAT Hi-Fi AWARDS 2014**  
★★★★★  
QUAD CORE  
Wi-Fi  
Freeview HD

**NEW FOR 2015**

**CALL OR SEE WEB**

**LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED**

**6 YEAR GUARANTEE INCLUDED**

**4K ULTRA HD SMART TV**

**PANASONIC TX55CX802B**  
55" 4K ULTRA HD SMART 3D LED TV

Premium 4K pictures meet the latest Smart tech to create a truly cutting-edge TV.

Also available 40", 50" & 65"

**WHAT Hi-Fi AWARDS 2014**  
★★★★★  
QUAD CORE  
Wi-Fi  
Freeview HD

**NEW FOR 2015**

**freesat HD**

**£2299**

**LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED**

**6 YEAR GUARANTEE INCLUDED**

**CURVED 4K ULTRA HD SMART TV**

**LG 65EC970V**  
65" CURVED 4K ULTRA HD SMART 3D OLED TV

"Fully living up to all those OLED hopes we've built up over the years." – Trusted Reviews.

**£5999**

**NEW FOR 2015**

**Trusted Reviews EDITOR'S CHOICE**  
**QUAD CORE**  
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Pop in for a demo & expert advice on projectors

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**Sharing your passion for movies**

No matter which projector you choose, a white wall simply won't show off the best it's capable of. That's why we offer a huge range of different screens and have in-store experts who will help you find which is exactly right for your needs.

**Chris, Deputy Manager, Leeds store, 11th year of service**

**SAVE £80**

**BENQ W1070 3D PROJECTOR**

"Pictures from the BenQ W1070... comfortably surpassed our expectations." – trustedreviews.com.

TSP £549.95 | 6 Year Guarantee only 10% of purchase price

**£469**

**FULL 1080p**

**WHAT Hi-Fi AWARDS 2014**  
★★★★★  
QUAD CORE  
Wi-Fi  
Freeview HD

**SAVE £100**

**BENQ W1400 3D PROJECTOR**

"Big-screen entertainment for a great price." – What Hi-Fi.

TSP £999.95 | 6 Year Guarantee only £89.95

**£899.95**

**FULL 1080p**

**WHAT Hi-Fi AWARDS 2014**  
★★★★★  
QUAD CORE  
Wi-Fi  
Freeview HD

**LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED**

**NEW**

**EPSON EHTW7200 3D PROJECTOR**

"Exciting, immersive and effortless." – What Hi-Fi.

6 Year Guarantee only £189.95

**£1899.95**

**FULL 1080p**

**WHAT Hi-Fi AWARDS 2014**  
★★★★★  
QUAD CORE  
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Also available in white.

£299.95



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DACs

Digital-to-analogue converters take a digital data stream from their 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

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)
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 2014	0	2	2	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	★★★★★	Best Bluetooth receiver, Awards 2014. Accessories Product of the Year	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	●	1	1	0	3x10x6
Audioengine D1	150	05.12/FT	★★★★★	A DAC and headphone amp with a fine sound	1	1	0	0	1	●	1	1	0	3x9x10
Audioquest DragonFly	215	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC up to £300, Awards 2012	1	0	0	0	0	●	1	0	0	6x2x1
Audioquest DragonFly v1.2	130	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC up to £300, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	1	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	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	●	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	●	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	●	1	1	0	6x17x18
Furutech ADL GT 40	400	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Cables & Accessories, Awards 2011	1	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 microStreamer	180	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC up to £300, Awards 2013	1	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	●	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	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	●	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	●	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	5x17x10
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	●	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	1	0	7x10x14
£500-£1000														
Audiolab M-DAC	600	06.15/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £500-£700, Awards 2014	1	2	2	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	1	0	7x16x4
Chord Electronics Qute Ex	990	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best DAC £700-£1000, Awards 2014	1	1	1	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	1	0	8x22x27
Musical Fidelity M1 SDAC	800	08.13/FT	★★★★★	An impressive spec list but performance is trumped by cheaper rivals	1	1	2	0	0	●	1	1	0	10x22x31
Parasound Zdac	500	11.13/GT	★★★★★	The Zdac produces a lively, likable sound	1	1	1	0	0	●	1	1	1	5x22x26
Pathos Convento	675	06.15/GT	★★★★★	Offers an engaging performance. Could do with a little more drive	1	1	2	0	0	●	1	1	1	6x20x23
Pioneer U-05	700	06.15/GT	★★★★★	The kind of DAC that gets your toes tapping	1	2	2	1	0	●	3	1	1	10x30x27
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 PHA-3AC	720	06.15/GT	★★★★★	A fine performer with plenty of strengths but more than a few weaknesses	2	1	0	0	0	●	2	1	0	7x8x14
Sony UDA-1	500	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Not the most musically exciting DAC, but an excellent choice for desktop users	2	1	0	0	0	●	2	1	0	3x18x14
£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
Antelope Zodiac Platinum	8595	06.15/FT	★★★★★	Excellent features and a rhythmic sound make for a likeable effort	1	2	2	1	0	●	2	1	1	11x17x19
Audio Research DAC 8	4698	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Pricey, 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
Benchmark DAC HGC	1750	11.14/FT	★★★★★	A hugely capable DAC but there are cheaper contenders out there	1	2	2	0	0	●	1	2	1	5x20x21
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
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 HDSD	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	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £1000+, Awards 2014	2	1	1	0	0	●	3	1	0	2x13x10
Cyrus DACXP Signature	3000	11.13/FT	★★★★★	With the Signature upgrade, the DACXP remains a fine product	0	2	4	0	0	●	0	2	2	8x22x37
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



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)
Musical Fidelity M6 DAC	2000	07.13/GT	★★★★★	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	13x44x39
NAD M51	1500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	1	1	1	1	2	0	1	1	0	8x44x30
Naim DAC	2150	07.13/GT	★★★★★	2	3	3	0	0	0	1	1	0	7x43x30
Naim DAC-V1	1250	07.14/GT	★★★★★	1	2	3	0	0	1	1	1	1	9x21x32
Oppo HA-1	1200	03.15/GT	★★★★★	2	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	8x25x33
TAD DA1000	11995	05.15/FT	★★★★★	1	1	4	1	0	1	1	1	1	9x27x27
T+A DAC 8	1250	09.13/FT	★★★★★	1	1	4	1	0	1	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

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	33.33	45	78	Elec. speed change	Manual operation	Phono amp	Tonearm Inc.	Cartridges Inc.	USB port	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £1000														
Audio Technica AT-LP1240USB	500	10.14/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	16x45x35
Pro-Ject Elemental	150	04.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●			●		●	●		3	9x43x30
Pro-Ject Essential II	210	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	●	●			●		●			3	14x46x36
Pro-Ject 1 Xpression Carbon UKX	575	01.15/FT	★★★★★	●	●			●		●	●		1	13x42x34
Pro-Ject 2 Xperience 2-Pack	900	12.14/GT	★★★★★	●	●			●		●	●		1	13x46x36
Pro-Ject 2 Xperience Basic +	600	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	●	●			●		●	●		1	14x46x36
Pro-Ject Debut Carbon	300	10.14/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●		●		●	●		7	12x42x32
Rega RP1	225	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	●	●			●		●	●		3	12x45x36
Rega RP1 Performance Pack	300	10.14/GT	★★★★★	●	●			●		●	●		4	12x45x36
Rega RP3/Elys2	550	10.14/GT	★★★★★	●	●			●		●	●		3	10x45x36
£1000 and above														
Clearaudio Concept	1000	12.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	14x42x35
Clearaudio Ovation/Tali. V2 Gold	5995	04.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●		●	●		4	14x42x35
Clearaudio Performance SE	2660	08.12/FT	★★★★★	●	●			●		●	●		2	13x42x33
Kronos Turntable	30000	07.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●			●					1	28x56x36
Kuzma Stabi S/Stogi S	2940	04.10/FT	★★★★★	●	●					●			1	14x40x30
Linn Majik LP12	2350	03.09/FT	★★★★★	●	●			●		●	●		5	14x45x36
Pro-Ject 2 Xperience X-Pack	1000	08.10/GT	★★★★★	●	●		●	●		●	●		1	14x46x39
P'ject Xten./Ortof. RS-309D	4000	07.09/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●		●			4	25x55x45
Rega RP8/Apheta	2200	12.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●		●	●		●	●		1	12x45x36
Rega RP6/Exact	1000	12.14/GT	★★★★★	●	●		●	●		●	●		8	12x45x36
Roksan Radius 5.2	1375	Aw.09/FT	★★★★★	●	●			●		●			8	15x45x37
Thorens TD309	1250	06.10/FT	★★★★★	●	●		●	●		●	●		2	13x47x43



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Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	DAB	FM	MW	Internet	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £100									
Aves Air	50	09.13/GT	★★★★★						10x6x2
Pure Digital Move 2500	90	11.11/FT	★★★★★						10x6x1.5
Pure Digital Move 400D	90	11.12/GT	★★★★★						8.5x15x2.7
Pure Evoke D2	85	09.13/GT	★★★★★						15x21x7
Q2 Internet radio	90	03.11/FT	★★★★★						10x10x10
Roberts Duologic	75	01.10/GT	★★★★★						15x25x83
£100 and above									
Geneva World Radio DAB+	270	09.13/GT	★★★★★						17x30x7
Philips Original Radio Mini	110	09.13/GT	★★★★★						25x12x12
Pure Evoke D4 with Bluetooth	150	08.14/FT	★★★★★						18x22x12
Pure Digital Evoke Flow	150	05.10/GT	★★★★★						18x21x11
Pure Evoke F4	180	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★						18x21x11
Pure Digital One Flow	100	11.12/GT	★★★★★						15x21x8
Pure Pop Maxi	100	06.15/FT	★★★★★						17x19x10
Revo AXIS XS	200	11.12/GT	★★★★★						12.5x22x15
Revo AXIS X3	200	01.14/FT	★★★★★						12.5x22x15
Revo Pixis	100	09.13/GT	★★★★★						13x16x16
Revo SuperConnect	250	09.14/FT	★★★★★						18x27x12
Roberts Revival iStream 2	200	12.14/GT	★★★★★						16x26x13
Roberts Stream 93i	150	11.14/FT	★★★★★						21x24x13
Ruark Audio R1 Mk3	200	04.15/FT	★★★★★						17x13x13.5
Tivoli Albergo+	200	02.14/FT	★★★★★						11x19x11
Tivoli Model 10+	160	09.13/GT	★★★★★						20x12x12
View Quest Christie	100	05.15/FT	★★★★★						14x22x13
View Quest Retro 1	100	12.11/GT	★★★★★						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

The shortlist



Q Acoustics 3020  
£190



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR  
B&W 685 S2  
Awards 2014: Best Standmounter £400-£800



AWARD WINNER  
ATC SCM 11  
Awards 2014: Best Standmounter up to £1200+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount	Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £200								
Acoustic Energy Compact 1	150	10.11/FT	★★★★★				2	22x15x20
Audioengine P4	183	02.10/FT	★★★★★				3	23x14x17
Cambridge Audio Aero 2	150	03.15/ST	★★★★★				2	37x20x31



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SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount	Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Up to £200								
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
Monitor Audio MR2	160	03.15/ST	★★★★★	A very good attempt at a budget hi-fi speaker	●		2	35x19x25
Polk Audio TSx110B	100	03.15/FT	★★★★★	They're not perfect but these budget speakers are a pleasant surprise	●		2	28x18x23
Q Acoustics 2010i	120	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Set the standard at this price and size level	●		4	23x20x15
Q Acoustics 2020i	150	03.15/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers up to £200, Awards 2013	●		4	26x17x28
Q Acoustics 3020	190	05.15/ST	★★★★★	For a budget speaker this is beyond expectations. These are fabulous value	●		5	26x17x23
Roth Oli RA1	100	12.14/FT	★★★★★	If space is at a premium and your budget is low, then these are an excellent fit	●		2	23x15x15
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
Acoustic Energy 101	250	07.15/FT	★★★★★	Re-energised with a lively sound, these tiny Acoustics are an appealing proposition	●		2	30x19x25
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
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
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 Aeromax 2	450	12.14/FT	★★★★★	A fine pair of stand-mounters, however a little honing wouldn't go amiss	●		2	37x20x3
Cambridge Audio Aero 6	400	06.15/GT	★★★★★	Superb floorstanders; you'll struggle to find better at this price point		●	2	98x24x34
Cambridge Audio SX-60	200	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Impressive speakers but they could do with more refinement	●		2	34x20x27
Dali Lektor 2	299	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Seriously entertaining speakers and simply stunning at this money	●		2	31x18x22
Dali Zensor 1	200	03.15/ST	★★★★★	These Dali's are still entertaining all-rounders, but they've finally been outclassed	●		2	27x16x22
Dali Zensor 3	300	10.14/GT	★★★★★	If it's entertainment you crave, then these standmounters deliver in spades	●		3	35x21x29
Epos K1	400	04.15/ST	★★★★★	For £400 the K1s put in a decent performance. Rivals have the edge in terms of excitement, though	●		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
JBL Arena 170	400	06.15/GT	★★★★★	These JBLs are talented, lively speakers		●	2	96x22x28
KEF Q300	450	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Not quite at the top anymore, but still fine, engaging standmounters	●		3	36x21x30
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
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 3050	500	06.15/GT	★★★★★	Staggeringly good. They would give £1000 speakers a run for their money	●		5	100x20x30
Q Acoustics 2050i	460	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander up to £600, Awards 2014		●	4	100x32x27
Q Acoustics Concept 20	350	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers £200-£400, Awards 2014		●	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
Quad 11L Classic	330	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Impressive standmounters but lack a touch of sparkle	●		4	31x19x24



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SPEAKERScontinued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
<b>Ruark Audio MR1</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>06.14/ST</b>	<b>★★★★★</b>	<b>Best desktop speakers, Awards 2014</b>	●		3	17x13x14
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
Wharfedale Diamond 121	230	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Fabulous sound. For insight and entertainment, the 121s needn't fear any rival	●		7	32x17x23
<b>Wharfedale Diamond 220</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>03.15/ST</b>	<b>★★★★★</b>	<b>Best stereo speakers up to £200, Awards 2014</b>	●		4	50x32x41
Wharfedale Diamond 230	500	06.15/GT	★★★★★	Loses a star but still offers plenty of value		●	4	94x20x33
£500-£1500								
Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic	1000	07.11/GT	★★★★★	A classic yes, but not the best around	●		2	30x18x26
Audio Pro LV2e	700	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Wireless desktop speakers with a hi-fi flourish			3	98x14x24
Audiovector Ki3 Standard	1200	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Packed with resolution and speed		●	5	98x14x24
<b>ATC SCM11 (2013)</b>	<b>1200</b>	<b>Aw.13/FT</b>	<b>★★★★★</b>	<b>Best standmounter up to £1200, Awards 2014</b>	●		2	38x21x25
AVI ADM9.1	1125	07.12/GT	★★★★★	A simple way to make the most of your music	●		5	30x20x26
<b>B&amp;W 683 S2</b>	<b>1150</b>	<b>10.14/GT</b>	<b>★★★★★</b>	<b>Best floorstander £600-£1200, Awards 2014</b>		●	2	99x19x36
B&W 684 S2	800	05.15/ST	★★★★★	A floorstander that's capable in many areas but, as a whole, is less than the sum of its parts		●	2	92x16x23
<b>B&amp;W 685 S2</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>04.15/ST</b>	<b>★★★★★</b>	<b>Best standmounter £400-£800, Awards 2014. Product of the Year</b>	●		2	35x19x32
Cabasse MT32 Antigua	500	04.15/ST	★★★★★	Wonderfully easy on the ears, the MT32s are a smooth listen	●		2	41x22x30
Cambridge Audio Aeromax 6	900	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Lots of potential with these speakers, however they struggle in a few areas		●	2	98x24x34
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 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
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 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 Xeo 3	1365	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Versatile wireless speakers	●		2	28x17x26
Eclipse TD508 Mk3	960	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Not an all-rounder, but still a rather special speaker	●		3	29x18x27
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
Eclipse Planet LW Bridge System	1400	01.15/FT	★★★★★	A commendable effort; decent sound and stylish looks to go with it	●	●	3	29 diameter
Epos K2	1000	05.15/ST	★★★★★	Small floorstanders with a big sound. We like the minimalist look, too		●	2	86x19x25
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 905	600	04.15/ST	★★★★★	A hugely accomplished pair of standmounters, although the finish could be better	●		2	31x19x25
Focal Aria 906	760	12.13/ST	★★★★★	For scale, power and refinement, you won't find many better	●		3	33x21x25
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
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 RX6	800	12.09/GT	★★★★★	A sensational product from Monitor Audio - detailed, dynamic and very attractive, too		●	6	91x28x31
Monitor Audio SoundFrame 1	900	02.12/GT	★★★★★	An impressive alternative to conventional speakers			2	54x39x9
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 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
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

SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
£500-£1500							
PSB Imagine X1T	750	05.15/ST	★★★★★	Big on fun and energy, these could do with more subtlety and refinement. Highly commended, though	●	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	05.15/ST	★★★★★	A talented 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
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
Tannoy Revolution XT 6	600	04.15/ST	★★★★★	Tannoy's new range is an exciting step forward, although a little more detail wouldn't go amiss	●	2	40x22x30
Tannoy Revolution XT6F	1000	05.15/ST	★★★★★	These Tannoys offer a stunning, potentially class-leading performance	●	2	100x27x32
Tannoy Revolution XT8F	1300	07.15/FT	★★★★★	Give them space and partner them well and few rivals will be able to match them	●	2	108x32x35
Triangle Antal 902	900	05.15/ST	★★★★★	The power comes through but at the cost of subtlety. Still, there aren't many that offer this much fun	●	1	110x26x31
Triangle Color 123	600	08.12/FT	★★★★★	A brilliant desktop speaker package		3	14x14x14
Triangle Esprit Titus EZ	600	04.15/ST	★★★★★	A classy pair of articulate and expressive standmounters	●	3	31x17x27
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
Analysis Audio Omega	14500	08.11/FT	★★★★★	These planar floorstanders are a sonic treat	●	1	168x61x6
ATC SCM19	2000	06.15/FT	★★★★★	Faultless performers; we've not heard many better	●	2	44x27x30
ATC SCM 100A	11615	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Massively talented and proportioned	●	4	107x40x56
ATC SCM40A	6280	04.14/FT	★★★★★	Favours an analytical reproduction of music, these ATCs offer exceptional sound performance	●	2	98x37x34
B&O BeoLab5	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 CM6 S2	1500	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Good speakers but they lack the freedom of expression that we'd expect	●	3	40x20x30
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 Rubicon 2	1600	11.14/GT	★★★★★	A great pair of standmounters that deliver an expressive and enthusiastic sound	●	4	35x20x34
Dali Rubicon 5	2400	03.15/FT	★★★★★	Another pair of fine speakers from Dali – fast, agile and authoritative	●	4	89x20x34
Dynaudio Focus 160	1800	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Just do the job and don't intrude on the entertainment	●	6	35x20x29
Dynaudio Xeo 4	1775	11.14/FT	★★★★★	The Xeo 4s serve great-quality, convenient, versatile wireless sound	●	2	28x17x25
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

System killers

A selection of albums to give your system a workout



Tom Holkenborg  
*Mad Max: Fury Road*

Tom Holkenborg (also known as Junkie XL) edges towards a rock opera with this score for the latest *Mad Max*. It's propulsive and percussive. A system that's good at sifting through detail is a must with this OST.



Kendrick Lamar  
*To Pimp A Butterfly*

Kendrick Lamar's latest is a vibrant mesh of rap and hip-hop styles. It takes a while for all the dots to connect but when they do this is a compulsive, engaging album with something to say about Black culture.



King Creosote  
*From Scotland With Love*

With one of his most ambitious albums yet, Kenny 'King Creosote' Anderson reflects on Scotland's past. Sometimes peppy, oftentimes reflective, it's a languid, enjoyable listen.



Leonard Cohen  
*Popular Problems*

Leonard Cohen is 80 years young and still pumping out the music. *Popular Problems* won't leave your system gasping for breath, but its deftly complex tracks require a set-up's skill with integration.



SPEAKERScontinued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Focal Diablo 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 Easya	1800	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Convenient and easy to use, these Focals are compromised by a relaxed delivery	●	2	90x17x24
Focal Electra 1038Be	7700	07.15/FT	★★★★★	Light them up and these floorstanders will have no problem shining. Wonderfully accomplished	●	2	125x30x40
GamuT M'inenT 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
Linn Akubarik	15600	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Deeply impressive engineering but its presentation veers towards the clinical	●	200+	105x35x45
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
PMC Fact 3	4100	08.11/FT	★★★★★	Hugely capxable 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
PMCTwenty 22	1970	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Best standmounter £1200+, Awards 2014	●	4	41x18x37
PMCTwenty 23	2300	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £1500+, Awards 2013	●	4	92x15x33
PMCTwenty 26	5750	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Yet another top-class speaker from PMC's Twenty range	●	4	109x19x44
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 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
Roksan Darius S1	5000	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Excellent pair of performers and one of the most enjoyable stand-mounters we've heard	●	2	38x20x38
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	★★★★★	Best floorstander £1200+, Awards 2014	●	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
Triangle Signature Delta	4900	07.14/FT	★★★★★	If you value excitement and entertainment, put these speakers at the top of your shortlist	●	3	123x37x39
Wharfedale Jade-5	1650	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Floorstanders that pack immense power and poise	●	3	106x25x40
Wilson Audio Duette II	19000	02.15/FT	★★★★★	It needs a capable amp and source but when Duette II gets going it sounds breathtaking	●	16	47x27x31
Wilson Audio Sophia 3	16500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Expensive, but they deliver a stunning sound full of detail, dynamics and drive	●	7	105x35x48

Speaker positioning

Speaker positioning is a notoriously tricky subject. The size of the speakers, the space they're given and how manufacturers tune them will affect the performance. It pays to experiment, and these tips will help you on your way.

What's in a name?

You've heard of bookshelf speakers, right? The name is a misnomer. They're not meant to be placed on an actual bookshelf and that goes for most speakers. Place them on a rickety support and performance will degrade because of a lack of rigidity and resonances. Speakers need a steady and robust support, so invest in a pair of speaker stands. Bear in mind that no one stand will work well with all speakers. Find what works for you.

Toe the line

What is speaker toe-in? Simply the degree at which a speaker is angled in towards the listener. Some manufacturers have specific angles but it's your ears that'll notice the difference. Play a snippet of a track you know and tweak the toe-in by shifting your speaker an inch or so until the stereo imaging snaps into focus.

Ear me

Loudspeakers need care in positioning. Placing them close to a wall can help performance but it can negatively affect it too, depending on how the speaker has been tuned. Give them too much room and the performance may lack solidity and energy. Place them too close and there's a chance they'll sound overblown with boomy bass. Every speaker will react differently. Start near to the rear wall and play 30 seconds of music you're familiar with: stop, move and repeat the process until you find an area you're happy with.

Where to put them?

We prefer to place the speakers at the points of an equilateral triangle, with the listener at the top. Use the triangle as a starting point and then experiment and fine tune the positioning to your satisfaction.



We'd plump for Q Acoustics' Concept speaker stands, which so far have worked well across a range of loudspeakers



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

The shortlist



**AWARD WINNER**  
**Marantz PM6005**

Awards 2014: Best Stereo amp up to £300



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**  
**Arcam FMJ A19**

Awards 2014: Best Stereo amp £500-£800



**AWARD WINNER**  
**Rega Elex-R**

Awards 2014: Best Stereo amp £800-£1500

Also consider

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Power (w)	DAC	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	USB in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Speaker outs	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 A19	650	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best Stereo amp £500-£800, Awards 2014. 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		9x43x3
Cambridge Audio Azur 351A	300	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Worth considering if you prefer an energetic approach	45	●	5	0	0	●	1	2	●	●	●	2		9x43x3
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
Creek Audio Evolution 50A	800	01.15/GT	★★★★★	An entertaining amp that holds its own against established rivals	55		5	0	0		0	1		●	●	2		6x43x8
Cyrus 6a	800	01.15/GT	★★★★★	Still precise and insightful but now lacks rivals' energy	40		6	0	0		0	●	2		●	●	2	7x22x36
Denon PMA-720AE	350	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Entertaining and capable, but sonically stubborn	50		4	1	0		1	●	1	●	●	●	2	12x43x31
Marantz PM6005	300	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp up to £500, Awards 2014	45		5	1	0		1	2	●	●	●	2		11x44x37
Micromega MyAmp	480	12.14/GT	★★★★★	An amp with attack and verve, although the finish could be better	30	●	3	0	0	●	0	1		●	●	2		7.5x14x14
Monitor Audio Airstream A100	400	12.14/GT	★★★★★	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	●	●	●	1	10x44x29
NAD C356BEE	600	10.10/FT	★★★★★	A party animal of an amplifier	80		7	0	0		2	2	●	2	●	●	1	13x44x34
NAD C356BEE DAC	695	01.12/FT	★★★★★	A good amplifier with a great DAC	80	●	8	0	0	●	2	2	●	2	●	●	1	13x44x34
NAD D 3020	400	12.14/GT	★★★★★	A punchy and lively sound that's great fun to listen to	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	01.15/GT	★★★★★	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-9010	200	06.15/FT	★★★★★	A musically satisfying stereo amp for a bargain price	44		5	1	0		1	1	●	●	●	1		13x44x33
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
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-70	800	05.13/ST	★★★★★	Excels in many areas, falls short of class-leading	90		3	1	1	●	1	●	2	●	●	●	2	14x44x36
Quad Vena	600	01.15/FT	★★★★★	An interesting proposition but it's left wanting in terms of finesse	46	●	2	0	0	●	0	1			●	4		10x31x30
Rega Brio-R	480	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £400-£600, Awards 2012	50		4	1	0		1	1			●	2		8x22x31
Rega Elex-R	900	01.15/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £800-£1500, Awards 2014	72		4	1	0		1	●	1		●	1		8x43x32
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
TEAC AI-301DA	400	12.14/GT	★★★★★	An amp with an unadventurous, but pleasant presentation	30	●	2	0	0	●	0	1		●	●	2		6x21.5x25
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-S501	360	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	A capable amplifier that's packed with features	60		6	1	0		1	1	●	●	●	2		15x44x39

£1000 and above

Arcam FMJ A39	1500	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Powerful and authoritative, but it needs better timing and detail	120	6	1	0	●	1	●	2	●	●	1	10x43x43	
Audio Ana. Fortissimo AirTech	1750	05.15/FT	★★★★★	A feature-packed and capable performer that's worth an audition	100	●	5	1	1	●	0	●	1	●	●	2	12x45x39
Burmester 032	12380	06.15/FT	★★★★★	It's big, pricey and it sounds fabulously good	105	6	0	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	1	19x48x48	
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	



AMPLIFIERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Power (w)	DAC	Line level	MM phono	MC phono	USB in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Speakers	Tone controls	Headphones	Remote control	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
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		6	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 DACXP Signature	3000	11.13/FT	★★★★★	With the Signature upgrade, the DACXP remains a fine product	70		2	0	0		1	●	1		●	●	2	7x22x36
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 KA1180Mk2	5995	09.13/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest amps we've heard	180		4	0	0		1		1			●	2	9x50x34
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
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 5XS	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 ClassicRemix HiDAC	2850	05.15/FT	★★★★★	Another intriguing offering from Pathos that offers top-notch sound	70	●	5	0	0	●	0	●	1				5	17x37x28
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 Mk II	3950	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Mixes fine aesthetics with a great sound for a terrific amp	110	●	5	0	0	●	1	●	1			●	1	17x42x43
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	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier £1500+, Awards 2014	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
Roksan K3	1250	02.15/GT	★★★★★	An excellent all-rounder at a reasonable price	150		5	1	0		1	●	1			●	3	10x43x38
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
T+A PA 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 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	MM phono	MC phono	Tape loop	Preamp out	Balanced	Headpho	Tone cont	Remote c	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £5000														
Cyrus DAC XP+	2550	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Massive ability in a small box	2	0	0	1	●	●			●	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
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
Naim NAC 152 XS	975	02.10/GT	★★★★★	It's good, but could do better with dynamics	5	0	0	0	●				●	7x43x30
Quad QC-twenty four	1000	06.13/FT	★★★★★	Pleasant listen but works best with Quad's valve power amps	5	0	0	2	●					9x30x22
Townshend Allegri	1895	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Basic features, but terrific sound	6	0	0	0	●					5x13x31
£5000 and above														
Aesthetix Janus Signature	10000	04.15/FT	★★★★★	You won't find many high-end preamps better than this one	5	1	1	1	●	●			●	11x45x46
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 CPA 8000	25500	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A magnificent preamp, but not quite the masterpiece its price demands	8	0	0	2	●	●	●	●	●	31x42x36
GamuTD3i	5500	01.15/FT	★★★★★	If you want an insightful and honest pre-amp, this is a fine place to start	4	0	0	1	●	●			●	11x43x42
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
Mark Levinson 326S	9300	07.15/FT	★★★★★	A classy and composed offering when used with the 532H power amplifier	7	0	0	2	●	●			●	7x45x35
McIntosh C2500	7495	01.14/FT	★★★★★	A refined and entertaining preamp that needs a little care in partnering	8	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	●	19x44x46



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

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Type	Power (w)	Phono in	XLR in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Weight (kg)
Up to £5000										
Audiolab 8200MB	1900	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Hefty, but a bit of a blunt instrument	Mono	250	1	1	15x22x38	9
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
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
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
Quad QSP	1200	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Needs to be auditioned - a confident listen	Stereo	140	2	0	15x33x27	14
£5000 and above										
Atlas Stereo Signature	10000	04.15/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest power amps we've heard. An absolute beast	Stereo	200	2	2	22x46x48	32
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
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
GamuT D200i	9300	01.15/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest power amplifiers we've heard	Stereo	220	1	1	16x43x47	34
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
Mark Levinson 532H	7500	07.15/FT	★★★★★	A hefty, solid power amp that, when paired with 326S pre, offers a hugely entertaining sound	Stereo	300	1	1	19x45x50	34
Quad II eighty	6000	06.13/FT	★★★★★	A capable monobloc amp that should be considered	Mono	80	1	0	21x43x18	57



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									
B&W Z2	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★	Still impressive but lacks other, non-Apple streaming options compared with rivals		iOS	●	40	18x32x10
Epoz Aktimate Micro	260	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Best desktop speaker, Awards 2012		iOS	●	40	24x15x20
Epoz AktiMate Mini	350	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Not the smallest desktop speakers, but they'll make your iPod sing		iOS	●	40	30x19x21
Epoz AktiMate Mini+	360	08.13/FT	★★★★★	A versatile product that offers quality sound	●	iOS	●	40	30x19x21
Gear4 AirZone Series 1	200	04.12/ST	★★★★★	AirPlay and iPad support, with good sound too	●	iOS	●	n/a	18x33x19
JBL OnBeat Venue LT	200	03.13/FT	★★★★★	The Venue LT is a versatile, talented and enthusiastic dock	●	iOS	●	30	13x42x14
Klipsch iGroove HG WWI	110	04.12/ST	★★★★★	A great dock with only a slight lack of refinement		iOS	●	30	14x40x16
KitSound Boom Dock	100	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Big, bold and brutally exciting		iOS		60	15x42x28
Logitech S715i	80	04.12/ST	★★★★★	Best speaker dock up to £200, Awards 2012		iOS	●	20	6x39x13
Logitech UE Air Speaker	300	06.12/FT	★★★★★	Best speaker dock £200-£350, Awards 2012	●	iOS	●	n/a	17x53x15
Orbitsound T12v3	299	12.11/FT	★★★★★	An effective panacea for your TV's sound		iOS	●	180	10x61x11
Philips Fidelio Primo DS9	300	09.11/FT	★★★★★	A well-built and easy to use dock		iOS	●	50	18x51x21
Pure Digital Contour 100Di	100	04.12/ST	★★★★★	Versatile, great looking and great sounding		iOS	●	20	18x31x15
Pure Digital Contour 200i Air	200	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Pure's first radio-less speaker dock fares well, but it can be bettered	●	iOS	●	36	23x37x18
Revo K2	300	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Lots to like - but it's not perfect		iOS	●	40	33x11x11
Ruark Audio R2i	280	09.09/FT	★★★★★	Fine DAB radio and iPod system		iOS	●	20	12x34x18.5
£500 and above									
B&W Zeppelin Air	500	12.11/ST	★★★★★	A massive step up from the original	●	iOS	●	150	17x54x21



IPOD DOCKS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	Dock type	Aux	Power (w)	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Geneva Lab Model M	550	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS		50	20x37x25
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



Wireless speakers

Bluetooth Universal wireless system that's incorporated into most sources  
AirPlay Apple's accepted wireless system; works over your home network

The shortlist



Ultimate Ears Megaboom  
£250

“The Megaboom is a great addition to UE’s family of wireless speakers.”



AWARD WINNER  
Dali Kubik Free

Awards 2014: Best Wireless speaker £500-£750  
“The engineers at Dali have struck gold with the Kubik Free, and have used their speaker expertise to great effect.”



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR  
Naim Mu-so

Awards 2014: Best Wireless speaker 750+  
“The Naim Mu-so is a seriously attractive product. Everything promised is delivered.”

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	Aux	Charging	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £300									
Bayan Audio SoundBook	150	01.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●		●	9x16x4
Bose SoundLink Mini	170	01.14/GT	★★★★★			●	●	●	5x18x6
Cambridge Audio Bluetone 100	200	10.14/GT	★★★★★			●	●		118x35x12
Cambridge Audio Minx Air 100	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★		●	●	●		18x35x12
Cambridge Audio Go	120	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	24x12x6
Cambridge Audio Minx Go	100	08.13/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	23x24x6
Denon Envaya DSB200	170	11.14/FT	★★★★★			●	●	●	14x26x5
Harman/Kardon Go+Play	280	05.13/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	24x50x23
Jawbone Big Jambox	260	09.12/FT	★★★★★		●	●		●	9x26x8
iLuv MobiOut	70	05.13/GT	★★★★★		●		●	●	0x0x0
JBL Charge	120	01.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	18x7x7
JBL Flip	100	05.13/GT	★★★★★		●		●	●	0x0x0
JBL Flip 2	100	07.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●		●	6.5x16x16
JBL OnBeat Rumble	230	10.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●		17x45x22
Loewe Speaker 2go	200	02.15/ST	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	11x24x5
Logitech UE Mobile Boombox	75	05.13/GT	★★★★★			●	●	●	6x7x11
Monitor Audio Airstream S200	200	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	27x12x14
Monitor Audio Airstream S300	250	10.14/GT	★★★★★		●		●	●	15x47x15
Monitor Audio Airstream WS100	250	09.13/GT	★★★★★			●			13x12x12
Panasonic SC-NA10	130	01.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	10x20x3
Philips BT3500B	70	03.15/GT	★★★★★		●	●		●	10x20x4
Pure Jonga S3	170	06.13/FT	★★★★★		●	●		●	13x13x14
Pure Voca	65	03.15/GT	★★★★★		●	●		●	7x19x5.5
Roberts Travel Pad	80	03.15/GT	★★★★★		●	●		●	8x19x2.5
Roth OLI POWA-5	250	06.14/ST	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	27x18x21
Samsung M5	230	10.14/FT	★★★★★		●		●		14x34x17
Sonos Play:1	170	01.14/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●		16x12x12
Sony RDP-XA700	285	03.13/GT	★★★★★	●		●	●		18x40x16
Sony SRS-X3	130	07.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●		●	7x19x7
Sony SRS-BTM8	85	05.13/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●		19x25x9
Ultimate Ears Boom	170	01.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●		●	16x6.5x6.5
Ultimate Ears Megaboom	250	04.15/FT	★★★★★		●	●		●	n/a

WIRELESS SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	Aux	Charging	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
£300 and above									
Audio Pro Allroom Air One	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £400+, Awards 2013	●	●	●		20x31x19
Bang & Olufsen BeoPlay A2	300	02.15/ST	★★★★★	Not perfect, but its spacious sound, battery life and stylish design are worthy of a look		●	●	●	14x26x4
Bluesound multi-room system	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Best multi-room system £500+, Awards 2014. Product of the Year			●	●	n/a
B&WA5	400	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Not the loudest but delivers a potent, punchy sound	●	●			18x30x20
B&WA7	700	12.12/FT	★★★★★	If you use AirPlay, the A7 demands your attention	●	●			22x36x16
B&WT7	300	02.15/ST	★★★★★	B&W's first Bluetooth speaker is a resounding success		●	●	●	11x21x5
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 200	430	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Majors in excitement, detail and power – a real entertainer	●	●	●		45x22x17
Dali Kubik Free	645	03.14/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £500-£750, Awards 2014		●	●	●	31x15x15
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-£500, Awards 2014		●	●	●	15x14x18
Libratone Zipp	370	10.13/ST	★★★★★	Stylish, portable and fully-featured. Libratone hits the jackpot with the Zipp	●	●	●		26x12x12
Libratone Zipp BT	300	02.15/ST	★★★★★	A wireless speaker that's lovely to listen to	●	●	●	●	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
Naim Mu-so	895	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £750+, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	●	●	●	12x63x26
NAD Viso 1 AP	500	08.14/GT	★★★★★	A strong, rounded package that thoroughly deserves your attention	●	●	●	●	26x48x30
Nocs NS2 v2	300	02.15/FT	★★★★★	Versatile and fun desktop speakers	●	●	●		16x11x14
Philips Fidelio E2	300	06.14/ST	★★★★★	Classy, versatile speakers but you'll need some room to accommodate them		●	●		30.5x16x16
Pioneer XW-SMA4	350	12.12/GT	★★★★★	Bags of features, solid build and smart design – just watch that bass	●	●	●	●	21x36x17
Pure Jongo S3 (pair)	340	06.14/ST	★★★★★	A tad disappointing as a pair; rivals offer a more insightful performance		●	●	●	13x13x14
Pure Jongo System	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Not the ultimate word in sound quality, but it wins us over with its peppy character		●	●	●	n/a
Samsung M7	330	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Overly fussy in terms of setting up, the M7 is a comfortable performer nonetheless		●	●		14x40x19
Samsung Shape Audio System	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Lacks a consistent sound across the range but a good first effort nonetheless		●	●		n/a
Simple Audio Roomplayer+	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	A worthy contender but there are cheaper, more impressive options out there	●	●			n/a
Sonos System	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Best multi-room system £500+, Awards 2014		●	●	●	n/a
Sony SRS-X9	600	06.14/FT	★★★★★	A do-it-all speaker with superb sound quality	●	●	●		13x43x13
Tangent Classic	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★	A speaker with a big sound and plenty of bass		●	●	●	23x60x32

Headphones: Best buys

Whether you're looing for a portable, in-ear, wireless and noise-cancelling headphone, here are the best of best



**Noise-cancelling**  
**Bose QuietComfort 25, £270**  
Noisy commute? Noisy workplace? That's where the QuietComfort 25s come into play. Flick the switch and the world goes eerily silent. Whereas other noise-cancelling cans can struggle with eliminating consistent noises (or just sharp, loud ones), the QuietComforts manage to nip most of the outside world in the bud. Rest assured they excel with playback too, having little to no problems with any genre you throw at them.



**In-ear**  
**Sennheiser Momentum M2 IEi, £90**  
Sennheiser has been impressing lately with its Momentum range and the M2 IEis (the lower case 'i' stands for Apple iPhone), are another terrific effort. They offer an excellent fit (and come with different-sized ear tips) and the attractive design draws the eye, but the true measure of them can be found in the fine clarity of their sound. Smooth and balanced, for an in-ear they offer a healthy dose of bass without muddying the details.



**Wireless**  
**Philips Fidelio M2BT, £185**  
Wireless is improving, though it's not quite the match of a wired connection, Philips' M2BTs show that the gap is reducing bit by bit. The obvious benefit is not tangled cables but the M2BTs ease of use (the controls are built into the right ear pad) makes it more intuitive than reaching for your phone. And the sound? There's a sense of detail, a richness and enthusiasm with none of the harshness of wireless sound that makes listening to music with these cans a joy.



**Portable**  
**AKG Y50, £80**  
Bold and striking, and that's just the design, AKG's Y50s are a refreshing change for the Austrian company. What hasn't been altered too much is their approach to sound. They're not as direct as another past winner – the K451s – but they offer a clear, open (despite being closed on-ears) soundstage with plenty of detail and dynamism. Effortlessly communicating the complexities of music, they're able to pluck the sound of an instrument from a dense track. Excellent.





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 E10S

Awards 2014: Best in-ears up to £50  
“The SoundMagic E10Ses punch well above their weight in terms of sound quality.”



Sennheiser M2 IEi  
£90

“Sennheiser’s Momentum range has made a real impact and it’s fair to say the latest addition delivers on all fronts.”



AWARD WINNER  
Shure SE425

Awards 2014: Best in-ears £150-£300  
“The SE425s sound fun, absorbing, classy, polished and captivating.”

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	●	Closed			120
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 DTX 501 p	60	03.15/GT	★★★★★	A superb performance that’s let down by an indifferent build quality	●	Closed			120
Beyerdynamic DTX71iE	54	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Detailed and with supreme tone control	●	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
JVC HA-ETR40	35	02.15/GT	★★★★★	An affordable in-ear that nails both comfort and sound	●	Closed			6.6
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
Monster iSport Strive	50	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Stylish, sporty-looking buds with a fine sound	●	Closed			47
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

“Frankly I was not expecting much... but – Ouch! – there was a difference and it was not small...”

When Martin Colloms reviewed Russ Andrews Speaker Zapperators in Hi-Fi CRITIC magazine, he admitted that his expectations weren't high. But when he heard them...

“... A reduction in noise floor, treble grain and sibilance, increased fine detail resolution and texture, and imaging was more natural with better distant perspectives. The sound was calmer, flowed better and with slightly better subjective timing and lower fatigue”.

Martin Colloms, Hi-Fi Critic, Jan-Mar 2009

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HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		In-ear On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling Wireless	Weight (g)
Up to £70								
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 PMX 685i Sports	45	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Modest looking in-ears but they have it where it counts despite the poor remote	●	Closed		18
Sennheiser PX100-II	40	11.10/FT	★★★★★	An improvement over the previous model, very good open-backed cans	●	Open		80
Slick Distributions SD50	30	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Features and price make it easy to forgive minor sonic flaws	●	Closed	●	71
Sol Republic Relays	60	02.15/GT	★★★★★	A satisfying, fuss-free pair of in-ears	●	Closed		13.4
SoundMagic E10	35	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears up to £40, Awards 2013	●	Closed		11
SoundMagic E10S	40	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears up to £50, Awards 2014	●	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-EX650AP	60	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £50-£100, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	Closed		9
Soul Electronics Flex	50	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Performance surpasses expectations at this price, a great buy for fitness bods	●	Closed		18
£70 and above								
AKG K3003i	1000	04.12/FT	★★★★★	The best, and priciest, in-ears we've seen	●	Closed		10
AKG K545	210	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Built to last but lacks refinement and likeability	●	Closed		280
AKG K550	99	02.12/ST	★★★★★	Best home on-ears up to £150, Awards 2014	●	Closed		305
AKG K551	230	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Smashing all-rounders that really sing	●	Closed		305
AKG K812	1100	10.14/FT	★★★★★	It needs a top-class system to shine but these cans sound heavenly. Highly recommended	●	Open		390
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 Y845BT	110	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Both portable and comfortable, these cans could do with a bit of subtlety and refinement	●	Closed	●	150
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	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears up to £100, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	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-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-CX9iS	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-ES88	230	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Appealingly eccentric cans	●	Closed		130
Audio Technica ATH-M50	130	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Immersive and refined: a great effort	●	Closed		284
Audio Technica ATH-M50x	130	12.14/GT	★★★★★	They sound a little warm but these are fine headphones nonetheless	●	Closed		285
Audio Technica ATH-W1000X	650	07.10/FT	★★★★★	Best home on-ear headphones £500-£800, Awards 2010	●	Closed		350
Audio Technica ATH-W555i	89	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	An excellent pair of on-ears for the bass-loving iPhone-owner	●	Closed		165
Bang & Olufsen BeoPlay H2	170	05.15/GT	★★★★★	A stylish pair of on-ears that combines impressive build quality with accessible sound	●	Closed		150
Beats Studio 2.0	270	04.15/GT	★★★★★	Eschewing detail for a smooth sound, these Beats are nevertheless exciting to listen to	●	Closed	●	260
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 DX160 iE	86	11.14/GT	★★★★★	A strong performer from Beyerdynamic with a smooth, weighty sound	●	Closed		32
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 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 T51i	245	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears £200-£300, Awards 2014	●	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 d=on't quite feel worth the money	●	Closed		330
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
Bose QuietComfort 25	270	04.15/GT	★★★★★	Best noise-cancelling headphones, Awards 2014	●	Closed	●	195
Bose Soundlink On-ear	220	01.15/GT	★★★★★	A talented pair of Bluetooth cans with impressive battery life	●	Closed	●	153
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 P5 Series 2	250	02.15/FT	★★★★★	Gorgeous looks and a stunning sound, these are a great upgrade on the P5s	●	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
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



HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Weight (g)
Focal Spirit One S	225	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Need a bit more clarity and sparkle to go with its lovely, balanced sound	●		Closed		180
German Maestro GMP 8.35 D	150	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Virtually indestructible sonic goodness	●		Closed		220
Goldring NS-1000	100	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Sweet, powerful sounding noise-cancellers	●		Closed	●	183
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 SR125e	150	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Open, spacious and sturdy. Great performance for the money	●		Open		363
Grado SR325e	300	09.14/ST	★★★★★	Best home on-ears £150-£300, Awards 2014	●		Open		330
Grado SR325is	300	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Best home on-ear headphones £150+ Awards 2011	●		Open		330
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
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 Mode M40	290	02.13/FT	★★★★★	Klipsch's first noise-cancelling headphones are excellent performers	●		Closed	●	356
Klipsch X11i	200	11.14/GT	★★★★★	If you are serious about portables then these in-ears need to be on your shortlist	●		Closed		10
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 Pro by Dre	350	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Brilliant at what they do well	●		Closed		299
NAD Viso HP50	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A promising pair of cans from NAD, but the design lets them down	●		Open		453
NAD Viso HP20	130	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Timing could be tighter but these in-ears are an easy listen	●		Closed		n/a
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 M1MKII	180	05.15/GT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears £100-£200, Awards 2014	●		Closed		166
Philips Fidelio M1BT	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best wireless headphones, Awards 2013	●		Closed	●	500
Philips Fidelio M2BT	185	01.15/GT	★★★★★	Best wireless headphones, Awards 2014	●		Closed	●	190
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
Polk Ultrafocus 8000	260	04.15/GT	★★★★★	An exciting listen, but one that's a little short on refinement and balance	●		Closed	●	340
PSB M4U1	219	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Better than the M4U2? Close but no cigar	●		Closed		340
PSB M4U2	250	04.15/GT	★★★★★	PSB's first pair of headphones make a superb travel companion. Highly recommended	●		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 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 2014	●		Closed		8
Sennheiser MM 400-X	150	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Best wireless headphones, Awards 2012	●		Closed	●	105
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 2.0	250	07.15/FT	★★★★★	Sennheiser keeps the momentum going with these beautifully balanced over-ears	●		Closed		240
Sennheiser Momentum M2 IEi	90	02.15/FT	★★★★★	Easily one of best in-ear buds we've heard this year	●		Closed		16
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 Mom. 2.0 Wireless	380	05.15/FT	★★★★★	Whether you're using a wired or wireless connection, these headphones offer great performance	●		Closed	●	260
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 Urbanite	150	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Stylish but not quite as expressive when it comes to sound	●		Open		260
Sennheiser Urbanite XL	200	05.15/GT	★★★★★	XL in terms of size, their relaxed, unfussy approach to sound makes for a good option	●		Closed		313
Sennheiser X 320	70	10.12/ST	★★★★★	The best Xbox gaming headphones we've heard so far	●		Closed		280

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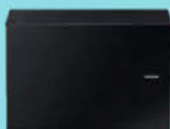
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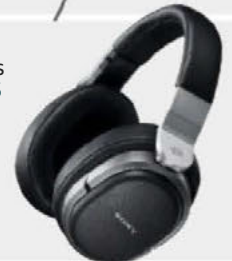
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HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight (g)
£70 and above									
Shure SE425	200	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £150-£300, Awards 2014		●	Closed		32
Shure SE846	950	06.14/FT	★★★★★	The most capable in-ears we've heard		●	Closed		36
Shure SRH1540	430	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Best home on-ears £300+, Awards 2014		●	Closed		286
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-1A	170	05.15/GT	★★★★★	A few niggles aside, these stylish and comfy cans bear up to closer inspection		●	Closed		225
Sony XBA-2iP	130	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £120-£200, Awards 2012		●	Closed		6
SoundMagic HP100	150	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Sparkling detail, spacious character		●	Closed		228
Thinksound ts02+mic	90	02.13/FT	★★★★★	Eco-friendly buds provide a clear sound and a clearer conscience		●	Closed		10
Ultrason HFI-580	125	11.10/GT	★★★★★	Not class-leading, but still worthy of consideration		●	Closed		285
Ultrason HFI-780	160	02.12/ST	★★★★★	Big and bold, and offer excitement in spades		●	Open		285
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



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.

The shortlist



Denon D-M39DAB

Awards 2014: Best music system up to £400



Cambridge Audio Minx Xi

Awards 2014: Best music system £400-£800



Cyrus Lyric 09

Awards 2014: Best music system £1500+

Also consider

Also consider					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 2014	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●
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	●		●	●	●	●	●		●
Yamaha MCR-232	300	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Harsh treble docks it a star but it's an impressively compact micro system	●			●	●	●	●		●
Yamaha R-N500	350	03.15/FT	★★★★★	Stacked with features, the R-N500 is good value for money	●			●	●	●	●		●
£500 and above													
Cabasse Stream3	850	07.13/FT	★★★★★	Hardware is great but the app needs developing	●	●	●				●	●	
Cambridge Audio MinxXi	600	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £400-£800, Awards 2014. Product of the Year		●	●					●	●
Cyrus Lyric 09	3000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £1500+, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
HRT Stage	1200	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Limited inputs and a low-rent feel, but judged on sound alone and it's fantastic							●		
Linn Akurate Exakt/Akudorik	17500	03.15/FT	★★★★★	A highly capable package in which the Akurdorik speakers excel		●	●				●	●	●
Linn Majik DSM	2965	02.13/FT	★★★★★	A thoughtfully designed system and a pleasure to use	●	●	●				●	●	●
Marantz M-CR610	435	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £400-£800, Awards 2013	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●
McIntosh MXA70	5995	02.15/FT	★★★★★	An expensive but desirable system							●	●	●
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	●	●		●	●				●
SonoroSTEREO	500	06.15/FT	★★★★★	A steady, laudable attempt at an all-in-one solution	●	●		●	●				
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										
Panasonic SC-BTT460	350	06.13/FT	★★★★★	No HDMI inputs but still a cracking system	●	●	●	1	0	5.1
Philips HTS5563	400	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A super budget solution	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
Pioneer BCS-SC626	400	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Great features, with tough competition	●	●	●	2	2	2.1
Q Acoustics Q-TV2	150	11.09/FT	★★★★★	A great way of boosting poor sound on your TV				1	0	2.1
Samsung HT-E5530	450	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Plenty of bang for your bucks	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
£500-£1000										
Harman-Kardon BDS-570	750	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Compact and ultimately convenient	●	●	●	2	3	5.1
LG BH8220B	600	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A bit pricey, but a good performer	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
LG BH9520TW	600	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Packed with features but a little pricey	●	●	●	1	2	9.1
Panasonic SC-BTT590	500	08.12/GT	★★★★★	An excellent all-in-one Blu-ray system	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
Sony BDV-N7100W	600	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Best cinema system, Awards 2013	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
Sony BDV-N5200W	500	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best cinema system, Awards 2014	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
£1000 and above										
Harman-Kardon BDS 477	1100	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A jack of all trades that's pretty good	●	●	●	0	3	2.1



## Soundbars & Soundbases

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. Soundbases have emerged as alternatives in the market, a one-box unit that can sit beneath and support your television.

### The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Philips HTL5140

Awards 2014: Best soundbar up to £300



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Q Acoustics Media 4

Awards 2014: Best soundbar £300 to £600



AWARD WINNER

Yamaha YSP-2500

Awards 2014: Best soundbar £600+

### Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Discrive	Smart	Ext. subwoofer	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	RCA in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £2000											
Arcam Solo bar	800	03.15/FT	★★★★★	An ambitious soundbar that doesn't quite match the audio performance of its peers			4	1	1		13x100x11
Bose Solo 15 Soundstage	400	06.15/ST	★★★★★	A soundbase with a big, bold sound			0	1	1	●	8x63x36
Bowers & Wilkins Panorama 2	1650	09.13/GT	★★★★★	An improvement on the original	●		3	1	0		13x110x18
Cambridge Audio Minx TV	200	02.14/ST	★★★★★	A soundbase that delivers an exciting sound at a great price			0	1	0		8x43x38
Cambridge Audio TV2	200	06.15/ST	★★★★★	Best soundbase up to £300, Awards 2014			0	1	0	●	12x53x33
Cambridge Audio TV5	250	06.15/ST	★★★★★	A price reduction has made this soundbase an excellent budget buy			0	1	0	●	10x73x34
Canton DM 50	400	09.14/GT	★★★★★	With gorgeous sound and looks, the DM 50 justifies its price			0	1	1		6.5x54.5x30
Canton DM 75	450	06.15/ST	★★★★★	Best soundbase £300+, Awards 2014			0	1	1	●	7x73x32
Canton DM 90.2	1100	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Thunderous sound but needs a bit more refinement	●		0	2	2		15x90x30
Dali Kubik One	800	01.15/FT	★★★★★	Dali's first soundbar is another resounding success			0	2	0	●	15x98x10
Focal Dimension	800	01.15/ST	★★★★★	A bold move that pays off handsomely. Spectacular			1	1	0		12x116x12
Geneva Model Cinema	550	06.15/ST	★★★★★	Class and quality in spades; this is the best soundbase money can buy			0	1	1	●	10x70x35

SOUNDBARS & SOUNDBASES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Disc drive	Smart	Ext. subwoofer	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	RCA in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £2000											
JBL Cinema Base	300	01.15/FT	★★★★★	Delivers a good sound at an appealing price			0	1	0		10x60x40
Klipsch R-20B	700	02.15/FT	★★★★★	A good soundbar with a powerful sound. Rivals edge it out on balance and detail, though	●		0	1	0	●	10x102x7
Sony HT-XT1	230	06.15/ST	★★★★★	Lacks refinement but counters with a punchy sound			3	1	0		7x72x31
JBL Cinema SB200	200	03.14/ST	★★★★★	A very good single-bar solution to boost your TV sound			0	1	0		12x90x10
JBL Cinema SB 350	350	12.14/ST	★★★★★	Stiff competition prevents this immersive sounding soundbar from getting five stars	●		1	1	0		8x100x6
JBL Cinema SB400	450	06.13/ST	★★★★★	A good-looking, capable alternative to TV speakers	●		3	1	0		10x110x6
LG NB3520A	250	01.13/GT	★★★★★	Impressive quality and authority for a soundbar	●		0	2	0		8x100x5
LG NB3530A	190	03.14/ST	★★★★★	An admirable and attractive soundbar from LG, but it's up against fierce competition	●		0	2	0		71x95x50
LG NB4530A	300	06.13/ST	★★★★★	Best soundbar up to £400, Awards 2013	●		1	1	0		8x104x4
Libratone Diva	650	01.15/ST	★★★★★	Connection issues aside, this is a strong one-box system with streaming options aplenty	●		0	1	0		16x99x10
Maxell MXSP-SB3000	220	02.14/ST	★★★★★	An enjoyable performer with some impressive features			3	1	1		8x94x39
Monitor Audio ASB-2	800	01.15/ST	★★★★★	Still great but new competition takes its toll	●		3	1	1	●	101x19x17
Orbitsound M9	300	06.13/ST	★★★★★	Given its size, the M9 is an impressive performer	●		0	1	0		9x30x10
Philips HTL5120	250	03.14/ST	★★★★★	A stonking soundbar for only £250			2	1	0		15x101x8
Philips HTL5140	270	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbar up to £300, Awards 2014	●		1	1	0		5x105x7
Philips HTL9100	600	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbar £400-£800, Awards 2013	●		2	1	1		7x103x16
Pioneer SBX-N700	250	12.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented subwoofer with an exhaustive feature set. And now with a price cut	●	●	0	2	0		9x90x12
Polk Audio N1	200	12.14/GT	★★★★★	A sizeable soundbar with an appealing sound			0	1	1		10x99x11
Q Acoustics Media 4	400	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbar £300-£600, Awards 2014, Product of the Year	●		0	1	0	●	11x14x100
Samsung HW-H550	310	12.14/ST	★★★★★	A soundbar that combines decent design with good performance	●		1	1	0		6x94x6
Sandstrøm S42SWLH13	150	03.14/ST	★★★★★	A great-looking soundbar with plenty of connections	●		2	1	0		11x90x5
Sonos Playbar	600	01.15/ST	★★★★★	An impressive soundbar that produces fantastic surround sound	●		0	1	0		9x90x14
Tannoy BaseStation One	350	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Tannoy's first soundbase may not be a class-leader, but it has a great sound			1	0			12x64x36
Toshiba SB3950M1	190	12.14/ST	★★★★★	Nails the basics of sound quality and user-friendliness	●		2	1	0		9x90x6
Yamaha SRT-1000	300	06.15/ST	★★★★★	There's a lot to like but the excitement levels could use a boost			0	2	1	●	8x78x37
Yamaha YAS-201	350	06.13/ST	★★★★★	A very good soundbar but not worthy of being a class-leader	●		3	2	1		14x43x35
Yamaha YSP-1400	400	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Brings big sound to a smaller budget			0	1	1	●	10x100x13
Yamaha YSP-2200	800	10.11/GT	★★★★★	Best soundbar, Awards 2012	●		3	2	1		9x89x12
Yamaha YSP-2500	800	01.15/ST	★★★★★	Best soundbar £600+, Awards 2014	●		1	2	1	●	7x94x14



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	●

Wake up to streaming!

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MEDIA SERVERScontinued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Hard drive capacity	HDMI out	Optical out	Coaxial out	HDMI in	Optical in	Coaxial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/kHz)	Video
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	
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														
Amazon Fire TV	80	01.15/FT	★★★★★	A great streaming media player... if you're an Amazon customer	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	●	16/48	●
Amazon Fire TV Stick	35	06.15/FT	★★★★★	Like the Fire TV this is a great streamer. Super speedy, too	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	●	16/48	●
Apple TV	80	03.15/GT	★★★★★	A limited but likeable streamer from Apple	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	●	16/48	●
Bluesound Node	400	05.15/GT	★★★★★	Best streamer up to £600, Awards 2014	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	●	24/192	
Cabasse Stream Source	300	05.15/GT	★★★★★	A decent streamer at a more-than-fair price, but the competition in this area is fierce	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	●	24/96	
Google Chromecast	30	03.15/GT	★★★★★	A neat and effective media streamer that's an absolute bargain	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	●	16/48	●
Now TV	10	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Still offers great value for money but rivals have the edge over it	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	●	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 2 XS	100	06.12/GT	★★★★★	A family friendly streamer	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	●	16/48	
Roku 3	100	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Expensive, but good features and speedy operation make this a winner	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	●	16/48	●
Roku Streaming Stick	40	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Not the smoothest streaming stick around, but Roku's effort is a great try	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	●	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	
£500-£1000														
Bluesound Powernode	600	10.14/FT	★★★★★	A superb way for hi-fi fans and audiophiles to get their high-res kicks	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	●	24/192	
Cambridge Audio CXN	700	07.15/FT	★★★★★	Style and features in spades, this is a very special streamer from Cambridge	0	1	1	0	1	1	3	●	24/192	
Camb.Audio Stream Magic 6 V2	700	05.15/GT	★★★★★	Best streamer £600-£1000, Awards 2014, Product of the Year	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	●	24/96	
Pioneer N-50A	500	05.15/GT	★★★★★	The excellent N-50 again, this time better than ever	0	1	1	0	1	1	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 Stream Xa	1250	05.15/GT	★★★★★	Best streamer £1000 - £1500, Awards 2014	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	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	2010	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best streaming system £1500+, Awards 2014	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 2	1195	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £800-£1500, Awards 2014	0	0	1	0	2	2	1	●	32/192	
Pioneer N-70A	1000	05.15/GT	★★★★★	A contender that delivers the goods but still comes up a bit short	0	1	1	0	1	1	3		32/384	
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	

"The Cyrus Streamline extracts a stunning level of detail. Instruments and vocals are beautifully layered and music sounds fluid yet unhurried"

August 2011



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

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Freeview	Freesat	Sky	Virgin	YouView	Tuners	Hard drive capacity (GB)	HDMI out	Smart
Up to £500												
Humax DTR-T2000	200	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Best Freeview HD recorder, Awards 2014				●	●	2	500	1 ●
Humax DTR-T1010 (500GB)	230	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best Freeview HD recorder, Awards 2013				●	●	2	500	1
Humax HD-FOXT2	100	07.10/GT	★★★★★	Best Freeview HD receiver, Awards 2011				●	●	1	n/a	1
Humax HDR-1000S (500GB)	220	01.13/FT	★★★★★	Best Freesat recorder, Awards 2013				●	●	2	500	1
Icecrypt T2400 (2TB)	330	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Loads of storage, but could do with more features				●	●	2	2TB	1
Samsung STB-E7500	270	09.12/FT	★★★★★	One of the best, most flexible, Freeview HD TV recorders				●	●	2	500	1 ●
Sky+ HD 2TB	250	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best subscription service, Awards 2014. Product of the Year				●	●	2	1TB	1
Sony SVR-HDT1000	300	12.11/GT	★★★★★	One to appeal to the 'bigger is better' crowd				●	●	2	1TB	1
Virgin Media TiVo	200	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Best cable recorder, Awards 2011				●	●	3	1TB	1 ●



Portable music 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 used in the gym. Higher-end machines will add video, internet browsing and apps as well.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Web browsing	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Up to £1000								
Acoustic Research M2	900	06.15/FT	★★★★★	5	720x1280	64	●	137x71x15
Astell & Kern AK100 MkII	700	04.14/GT	★★★★★	2.5	320x240	32	●	79x59x15
Apple iPod Nano 16GB (2012)	130	01.13/FT	★★★★★	2.5	240x240	16	●	77x40x5
Apple iPod Shuffle 2GB	40	12.11/GT	★★★★★	n/a	n/a	2	●	30x30x10
Apple iPod Touch 64GB (2012)	330	12.12/FT	★★★★★	4	1136x640	64	●	123x59x6
Cowon Z2	200	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	3.7	800x480	16	●	116x63x12
FiiO X5	290	08.14/GT	★★★★★	2.4	400x360	n/a	●	114x68x16
iBasso DX50	200	08.14/GT	★★★★★	1	96x96	8	●	60x40x20
SanDisk Sansa Clip+ 8GB	40	12.11/GT	★★★★★	2.4	320x240	8	●	10x64x17
Sony NWZ-A15	170	12.14/FT	★★★★★	2.2	320x240	16	●	109x44x9
Sony NWZ-ZX1	550	04.14/GT	★★★★★	4	854x480	128	●	123x61x16



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
Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 8.9	330	01.15/GT	★★★★★	A strong performer but the Kindle Fire still feels a little restrictive				Android	●	8.9	2560x1600	16/32/64	231x158x8
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	●	7.9	2048x1536	16/32/64	200x135x7
Apple iPad mini 3	320	01.15/GT	★★★★★	Little in the way of updates, but it's still the 8in tablet to be reckoned with				iOS	●	7.9	2048x1536	16/64/128	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	★★★★★	Best tablet over 8in, Awards 2014. Product of the Year				iOS	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x170x8



TABLETS continued

Product		Tested	Verdict		OS	NFC	3G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Apple iPad Air 2	400	12.14/FT	★★★★★	An excellent tablet with an unrivalled user experience	iOS		●	9.7	2048x1536	16/64/128	240x170x6
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
Google Nexus 7	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Best tablet up to £300, Awards 2012	Android	●	●	7	1280x800	16/32	199x120x11
Google Nexus 7 (2013)	200	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best tablet up to 8in, Awards 2014	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
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
Samsung Galaxy Tab S 8.4	320	01.15/GT	★★★★★	The best tablet we've tested from Samsung so far	Android		●	8.4	2560x1600	16/32	213x126x7
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
Sony Xperia Z3 Tablet Compact	330	08.14/FT	★★★★★	A superb tablet that's terrific with music and video	Android	●	●	8	1920x1200	16/32	213x124x6
Tesco Hudl 2	130	01.15/FT	★★★★★	There's little to grumble about at this price, a nifty budget tablet	Android			8.3	1920x1200	16	128x224x9



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

Our recommendations

Product		Tested	Verdict		OS	NFC	4G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Apple iPhone 5S		Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best smartphone, Awards 2013	iOS		●	4.0	1136x640	16/32/64	124x59x8
Apple iPhone 6		Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best phone up to 5in, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	iOS	●	●	4.7	1334x750	16/32/128	138x67x7
Apple iPhone 6 Plus		12.14/GT	★★★★★	A big-screen phone from Apple, but the sound disappoints	iOS	●	●	5.5	1920x1080	16/64/128	158x78x7
Google Nexus 5		07.14/GT	★★★★★	A decent all-rounder but new rivals have bettered it	Android		●	4.95	1920x1080	16/32	138x69x9
Google Nexus 6		03.15/FT	★★★★★	A compelling phone but bigger isn't necessarily better with the Nexus 6	Android		●	5.96	1440x2560	32/64	160x83x10
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 8S		07.13/GT	★★★★★	Capable and fun, if feature-light	Windows		●	4.7	800x480	4	121x63x10
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		12.14/FT	★★★★★	Still an excellent phone even if newcomers have bettered it	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
LG G Flex 2		07.15/FT	★★★★★	A improvement on the Flex, though it's left wanting on the multimedia side	Android	●	●	5.5	1920x1080	16/32	149x752x9
Motorola Moto X (2014)		12.14/GT	★★★★★	Little in the way of flashy features but one of the best phones of 2014	Android	●	●	5.2	1920x1080	16/32	141x72x10
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 930		11.14/FT	★★★★★	We'd like more apps but this is (again) the best Windows effort we've seen	Windows	●	●	5	1920x1080	32	137x71x10
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 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 Note 4		12.14/GT	★★★★★	The fourth iteration of the Galaxy Note and it's the best one yet	Android	●	●	5.7	1440x2560	16/32	154x79x9
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
Samsung Galaxy S6 Edge		06.15/FT	★★★★★	A few minor complaints can't mar what is a truly excellent handset	Android	●	●	5.1	2560x1440	32/64	149x76x10
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
Sony Xperia Z3		12.14/GT	★★★★★	Best phone 5in+, Awards 2014	Android	●	●	5.2	1920x1080	16	146x72x7

# Recorded music is at a crossroads

The format in which you listen to your music could be undermining the quality of your hi-fi system

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.

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.

## 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.soundcraftifi.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 2040  
www.oandlhifi.co.uk

**SOUTH WEST**

**Bath**  
**AUDIENCE**  
14 Broad Street.  
t: 01225 333310  
www.audience.org.uk

**Cinderford**  
**CERITECH AUDIO**  
1 Pavilion Business Park,  
Speculation Road.  
t: 01600 716362  
www.ceritech-audio.co.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**  
8 Brook Park,  
Gaddesby Lane.  
t: 0333 200 4475  
www.cymbiosis.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

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### STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY .....	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
SERVICE .....	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
FACILITIES .....	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
VERDICT .....	★ ★ ★ ★ ★



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
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
Philix 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 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 Sound and Image	30	11.09/GT	★★★★★	A respectable upgrade, it provides greater fidelity in sound and vision over budget cables	2 1.3
Wireworld Island 6	46	10.10/GT	★★★★★	Packs a firm punch and strong dynamics	1.4 2.0
£80 and above					
Audioquest Cinnamon	80	01.11/FT	★★★★★	A top-notch HDMI that's a credit to any system	2 1.4
Audioquest Forest	80	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A true and worthy rival to Chord's Supershield	5 1.4
Audioquest HDMI-X	95	03.09/GT	★★★★★	A real entertainer - chunky bass and images are well defined	3 1.3
Atlas HDMI	160	07.07/GT	★★★★★	Upgraded version of the existing Atlas HDMI - delivers good detail and contrast	7 1.3

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AudioQuest Cinnamon USB to Lightning Cable

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Atlas Hyper Integra Audio Cable

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AudioQuest Cinnamon RJ/E Cable

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Tellurium Q Ultra Blue Speaker Cable

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130 www.whathifi.com

Need more info? Go to [whathifi.com](http://whathifi.com)



## HDMI CABLES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Length as tested (m)	HDMI type
Chord Company Active	115	10.09/GT	★★★★★	1.5	1.3
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 Reference	125	06.10/GT	★★★★★	5	1.3a
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



## 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 PRO12102	30	03.11/FT	★★★★★	USB	2

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QED XT40 Speaker Cable



Atlas Element Integra Audio Cable



QED Performance Optical Cable



AudioQuest DragonFly V1.2



AudioQuest Pearl HDMI Cable



QED Performance Digital Cable



Supra USB 2.0 Cable



Merlin Tarantula MK6 Mains Cable

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DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Length tested (m)
Up to £50					
QED Performance Coaxial	30	10.08/GT	★★★★★	Best coaxial digital cable, Awards 2012	Co-axial 1
QED Performance Graphite	40	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best optical digital cable, Awards 2012	Optical 1
Supra USB 2.0	29	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best USB cable, Awards 2012	USB 1
True Colours Industries Coral	35	06.09/GT	★★★★★	Best digital interconnect, Awards 2010. Excellent optical lead	Optical 1
Wireworld Nova 6	40	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Like an up-and-coming band: unrefined but likeable and energetic	Optical 1
£50 and above					
Audioquest Cinnamon	60	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Like a fine paintbrush: controlled and delicate but lacking the big, broad strokes of a roller	USB 1.5
Atlas Equator Optical	50	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Worth checking out, but not for the basshunters	Optical 1
Chord Company Optichord	51	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Confident, competent and extremely likeable. Highly recommended	Optical 1
Chord Co. Prodac Pro Digital	70	05.11/FT	★★★★★	Even better following an upgrade to its plugs	Co-axial 1
Clearer Audio Copper-line 75	97	Aw.08/FT	★★★★★	This is another fine cable from the Copper-line stable. It's well worth a listen	Co-axial 1
Clearer Aud. Silverline Optimus	185	09.09/GT	★★★★★	The sheer brilliance of this cable makes it stand out	Co-axial 0.5
Ecosse The Director SE	89	09.09/GT	★★★★★	Spacious sounding and great with higher frequencies	Co-axial 1
Furutech Formula 2	55	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Best USB cable, Awards 2011	USB 1.2
Kimber USB	52	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Worth an audition if you're after something laid-back	USB 1
QED Qunex 75 Signature	80	09.09/FT	★★★★★	Beautifully made, but not quite as thrilling as we'd like	Co-axial 1
QED U Play (Bluetooth)	65	05.10/FT	★★★★★	It's small, cheap, and does an efficient job	Bluetooth 10
Vertere Pulse D-Fi	70	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	A must-audition if you can stretch your budget	USB 1
Wireworld Ultraviolet 5 USB	50	08.09/FT	★★★★★	Best USB cable, Awards 2010. If you use digital kit, this needs to be on your audition list	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

The shortlist



**Wireworld Luna 7**

06.14 Group Test ★★★★★

“There’s no brightness or sharpness to speak of and although weighty, there’s no suggestion that bass notes sound overblown.”



**QED Reference Audio 40**

06.14 Group Test ★★★★★

“The Reference Audio 40 looks like a serious stereo interconnect. Build quality and feel are very reassuring.”



**AWARD WINNER**

**Atlas Element Integra**

Awards 2014: Best Analogue Interconnect

“There’s nothing to dislike here: the Element Integra is highly recommended as a first upgrade.”

Also consider

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 2014	● 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 7	40	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Delivers a confident and likable sound. A great option at this price	● 1

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ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	RCA phono	3.5mm-to-RCA	Length tested (m)
£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
Chord Crimson Vee3	50	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A nice, easy-going cable that's a little too restrained		1
Ecosse The Baton Mk II	104	08.08/GT	★★★★★	Although there's much to admire, the Baton Mk II 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
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 pricy 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
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

System builder

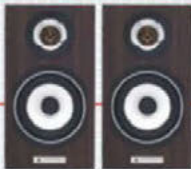
The perfect partners for bringing the best out of Audioquest's FLX-SLiP 14/4 speaker cable



Stereo amplifier

Rega Brio-R £480 ★★★★★

It has a basic feature set but performance-wise this amp can unearth the hidden subtleties within a track as well as deftly communicate its rhythm and agility.



Hi-fi speaker

Triangle Espirt Titus EZ £600 ★★★★★

The distinguishing characteristic of the Tituses is their articulate, enthusiastic presentation. Give them time to run in and they'll serve you well.



Speaker stands

Q Acoustics Concept 20 £200 ★★★★★

The Concept 20's are a good fit here with their layer of compliant compound that dampens unwanted resonances and converts them into heat energy.



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



Talk Electronics Talk 3  
£4/m



Wireworld Lluna 7  
£6.50/m



**AWARD WINNER**  
**QED XT40**  
Awards 2014: Best speaker cable

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	
Up to £10/m				
Audioquest FLX-SLIP 14/4	5.80	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Best Speaker Cable, Awards 2013
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
QED Ruby Anniversary	6	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Rich and detailed but lacking in rhythm and dynamics

Bwire

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**Wireworld Lluna 7 Speaker Cable**

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March 2014

**Van Den Hul The Clearwater**

**WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION**  
★★★★★  
July 2008

**Atlas Hyper 2.0 Speaker Cable**

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**Chord Carnival Silverscreen Cable**

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July 2008

**QED Silver Anniversary XT**

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## SPEAKERS CABLES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	
QED Ruby Anniversary Evolution	6	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Rich, detailed, energetic and clean. A great cable
QED X-TC	4	09.10/FT	★★★★★	A great budget cable that's able to hold its own
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

## £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 XT40	10	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best speaker cable, Awards 2014. Product of the Year</b>	
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 The Clearwater	10	03.14/GT	★★★★★	A cable with an impressive level of detail and clarity	

Biwire

Speaker cables | Speaker stands



## 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

## The shortlist



Custom Design FS104 Signature  
£200



Q Acoustics Concept 20 speaker stands  
£200



**AWARD WINNER**  
Atacama Moseco 6  
Awards 2014: Best speaker stands

## Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Fillable	Finishes
Up to £500							
Atacama Duo 6	65	02.13/GT	★★★★★	A very likable pair of speaker stands	60x31x31	●	1
Atacama Nexus 6	200	12.00/FT	★★★★★	Still fine performers despite their age	60x25x30	●	1
Atacama Moseco 6	120	09.14/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best speaker stands, Awards 2014</b>	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 Signature	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 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
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

**"While £300 may seem a lot of money to spend on stands – especially such industrial looking ones – in the case of the Dreadnought Broadside it's worth it"**

August 2008



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

Our recommendations

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
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	Variablex60x55 3
Atacama Evoque Eco 60-40	450	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Best equipment support, Awards 2014	3	Variablex60x40 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 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
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	Variablex79.5x40 5
Hi Fi Racks Podium Slimline	350	03.13/FT	★★★★★	A simple rack design with pretty decent results	4	Variablex55x40 1
Quadraspire Q4evo	380	11.09/GT	★★★★★	A solid, cohesive and supremely affordable rack	4	Variablex59x39.5 8
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	Variablex115x32 1
BDI Valera 9724	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Complicated to assemble but the results make it worthwhile	3	54x112x52 3
Hi Fi Racks Akorner 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	Variablex59x40 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	Variablex163x52 8
Quadraspire Sunoko Vent T	800	11.09/GT	★★★★★	A first-rate rack, that highlights subtleties	4	Variablex59x47 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	VariablexVariablex53 16

"HiFi Racks Podium serves up a muscular sound that times well, and is able to handle production dynamics and subtleties with ease "

August 2011

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## 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

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Line level In Outputs
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)
<b>Up to £500</b>					
Cambridge Audio 651P	120	06.13/GT	★★★★★	A phono stage that belies its budget price	● ● 1 2.5x8x11
Creek Audio OBH-15	240	02.09/GT	★★★★★	Decent phono amplifier for a relaxed listen	● ● 1 6x10x15
Graham Slee Gr-Amp 2 Comm.	160	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Low on frills, high on quality	● 1 7x10x25
Leema Elements	495	03.10/FT	★★★★★	Best phono stage, Awards 2011	● ● 2 5x11x10
Lehmann Black Cube	325	02.09/GT	★★★★★	Clarity and punchiness make this a great amp	● ● 1 5x11x11
Pro-Ject Phono Box S	120	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Just needs a little more excitement to trouble its rivals	● ● 2 7x10x14
Musical Fidelity V-LPS II	160	06.13/GT	★★★★★	For an affordable phono stage, the V-LPS II produces admirable results	● ● 1 5x11x11
Rega Fono Mini A2D	85	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Best phono stage, Awards 2012	● 1 6x18x25
Rega Fono MM MK2	200	06.13/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best phono stage, Awards 2014</b>	● ● 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

Our recommendations					MM/MC	Tracking weight (g)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict			
Up to £500						
Goldring 2100	92	05.10/GT	★★★★★	It punches well above its weight - with great results	MM	1.7
Goldring 2500	224	03.09/GT	★★★★★	A Group Test winner with its full bodied and detailed sound	MM	1.7
Grado Prestige Silver	115	05.10/GT	★★★★★	Smooth and balanced, but can be awkward to fit	MM	1.5
Nagaoka MP110	89	05.10/GT	★★★★★	A great first upgrade cartridge that does much right	MM	1.8
Ortofon 2M Black	460	04.11/GT	★★★★★	Power and dynamics are on tap from this Ortofon	MM	1.5
Ortofon 2M Bronze	275	03.09/GT	★★★★★	If you want a neutral and analytical cartridge this fits the bill	MM	1.5
Ortofon 2M Red	80	05.10/GT	★★★★★	An easy to fit and fine sounding cartridge	MM	1.8
Rega Exact	195	03.09/GT	★★★★★	This Rega is a fun listen that does much right	MM	1.75
Roksan Corus Silver	400	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Better then ever - but heftily priced to match	MM	1.9

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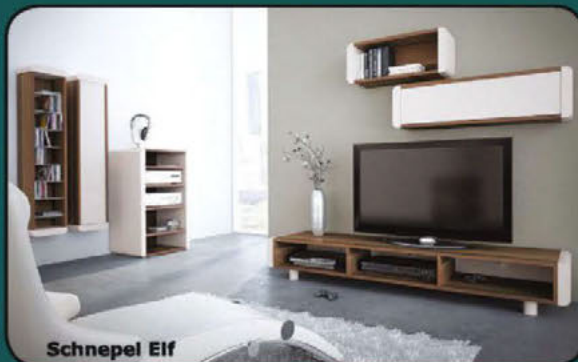


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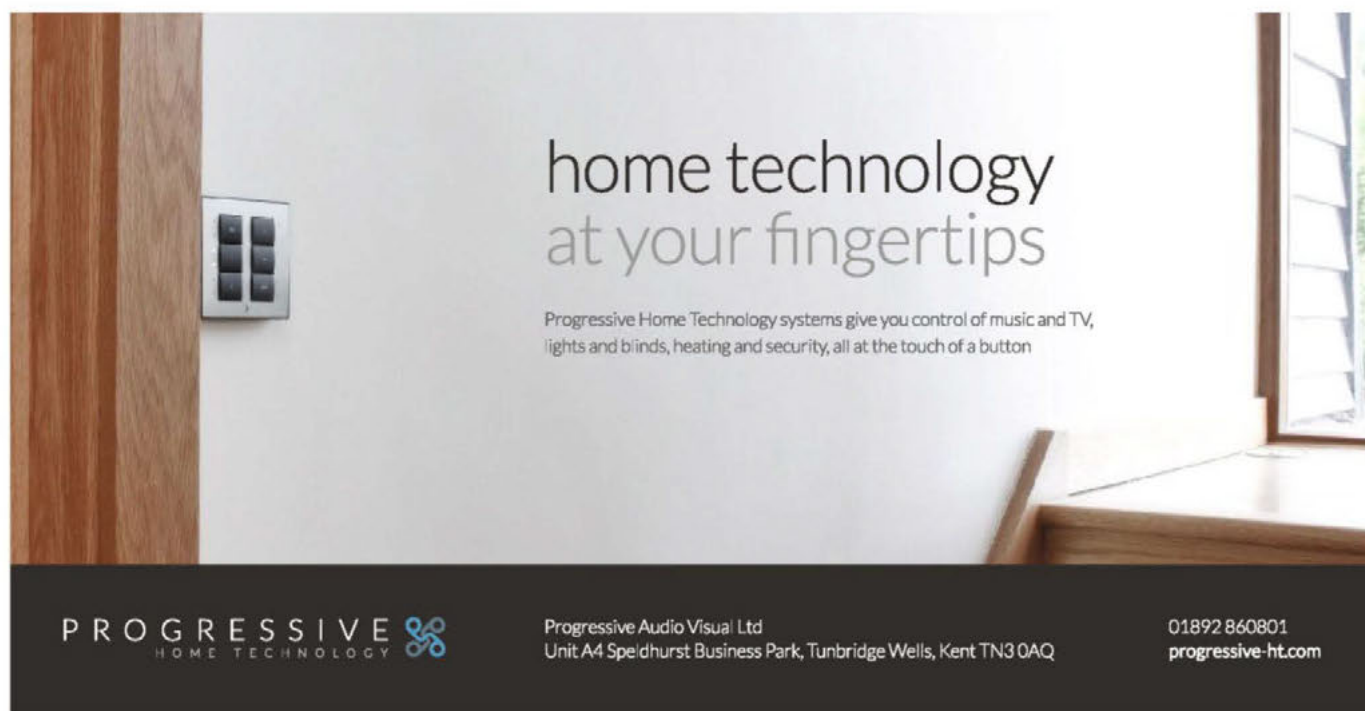
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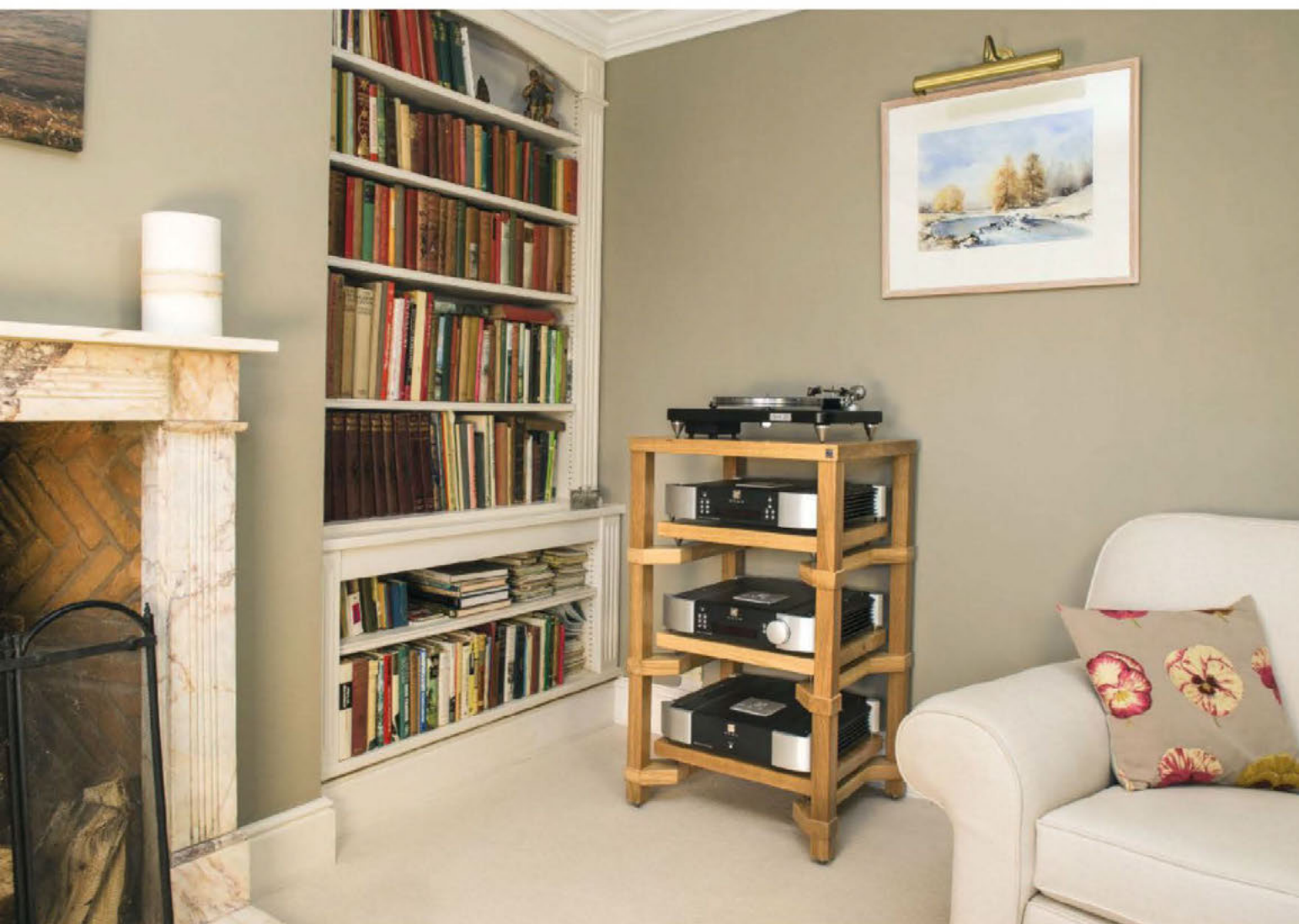
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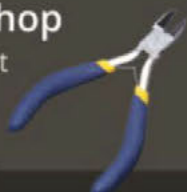
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## Samsung SGH-i900 (Omnia)

★★★★★

Free

**AT THE HEART** of the SGH-i900, or Omnia as it's also known, is Windows Mobile 6.1 Professional. Masking this operating system is Samsung's own 'Touchwiz' user interface.

Touchwiz is a much more palatable system than the painful Windows offering, with large colourful graphics and icons making up the simple menu system. To help with ease of use, the screen also incorporates haptic technology, which acknowledges every key press with a small vibration. The

**"The Samsung is laden with features and comes with 8GB of internal storage"**

Samsung is laden with features that are present on other phones in this group, such as A2DP stereo Bluetooth, GPS navigation and HSDPA functionality. The Omnia comes with 8GB of internal storage and this can be boosted with a microSD memory card.

Worthy of mention are the numerous file formats that the Samsung supports. Besides MPEG4, WMV and H.264 video codecs, the Omnia can also

**FOR**  
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decent interface

**AGAINST**  
Windows Mobile is a  
clunky operating  
system; strange  
stylus; average picture  
and sound quality

**VERDICT**  
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blow your mind

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pretty much  
everything it does,  
but it never excels

handle DivX and Xvid files straight out of the box. Compatible audio formats include MP3, AAC, AAC+ and WMA.

Some of the menus and controls require the use of the Omnia's strange telescopic stylus. It isn't particularly accurate and you often find yourself prodding away furiously trying to get the phone to recognise your commands.

You play music and video content through the phone's Touch Player. The system is competent enough to display album artwork, but it still lacks the finesse, quality and resolution displayed by the iPhone and BlackBerry Storm.

The bundled headphones fit surprisingly well and come with different sized ear-buds, which is very accommodating. They hook up to the

phone using Samsung's own proprietary connection, although the inline volume control has a 3.5mm jack for alternative headphones. This avenue should definitely be explored, as in use, the headphones sound bright and are easily agitated by lively, dynamic tunes.

Otherwise, general sound quality and video quality are okay, but not memorable. The Omnia does everything competently without ever excelling. Video playback just about matches the quality of the Nokia, and musically the Omnia just treads water, failing to bring your music collection to life.

If you're looking for a multimedia phone the Omnia might be worth a casual glance, but there are more capable, more attractive alternatives out there.



www.whatifit.com JANUARY 2009

WHAT IF IT? 67

## Samsung SGH-i900 (Omnia)

Just a hint of things to come

**W**e weren't the least bit surprised Samsung's new Galaxy S6 won this month's premium phone group test (p30). The Korean tech giant has been at the top of the Smartphone tree for years now.

That hasn't always been the case, as is made clear by our January 2009 review of one of Samsung's earliest efforts. The SGH-i900, known as the Omnia to its friends, showed clear signs of where the brand was headed, but it certainly didn't have the all-round talent to worry the iPhone of the day.

### Plenty of features, but performance was lacking

It was packed with features including a telescopic stylus, the then still ooh-worthy haptic feedback and a microSD card slot. As continues to be Samsung's way, file compatibility was excellent. The phone's primitive Windows Mobile OS made the inclusion of WMV and WMA files obvious, but we were happy to see AAC alongside MP3 on the audio side of things.

Performance wasn't great though, with the i900 failing to deliver video and audio with any great skill. We also weren't taken with the Windows OS, finding it clunky in use - though the early iteration of Samsung's Touchwiz interface came in for some praise.

Fast forward to today's Galaxy S6 and it's clear Samsung has learned much over the years. The latest phone has plenty of ability to match its comprehensive specifications. Video performance is about as good as it gets and audio, once a real weakness of Samsung's handsets, has improved enough to give Apple's engineers a few sleepless nights. Not a bad showing for a handset founded from such humble beginnings.

The Galaxy S6 has taken the best bits from the Omnia, and now it's added superb performance



**Fast forward to today's Galaxy S6 and it's clear Samsung has learned much over the years**

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