

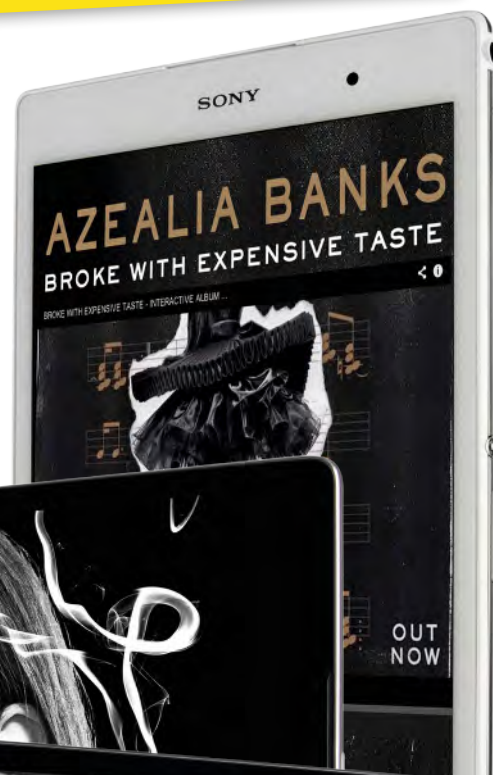
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What Hi-Fi? Awards 2014,
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Trusted Reviews 'Recommended',
October 2014



AV Forums 'Highly Recommended',
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Home Cinema Choice 'Best Buy',
July 2014

Put a little money in this type of thing - nothing to worry about...

It doesn't surprise me that some people are sceptical. The pace of development in the consumer electronics world is now such that consumers are almost obliged to be on their guard. But take it from me, Dolby Atmos is nothing to be guarded about.

We've tested **two superb home cinema amps from two of the biggest names around (p52)**, both of which are Atmos-enabled and both of which demonstrate the extraordinary possibilities of this new surround-sound standard. It's a huge advance in your home cinema experience.

Naturally, it doesn't come for free. And, of course, there's next-to no Atmos-soundtracked content available at the moment. But that's beside the point. You need to hear Atmos, and then you'll know.



Simon
Simon Lucas, Editor

My products of the month



Tidal

First test p25

In the right circumstances it sounds superb. Tidal is packed with potential.



Philips Fidelio M2BT

Test p51

Just the latest manifestation of the enormous roll Philips is on with its audio products.

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 "It's the level of refinement, detail and clarity that really grab during a first listen"



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"It may not be revolutionary, but when a product is as good as this, the added tweaks make it an even better all-round experience"

Verity Burris Multimedia editor



Dali Kubik One

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"Dali's first attempt at a soundbar is a gorgeous, complete package"

Ced Yuen Staff writer



Pioneer SC-LX88

Test p54

"A powerhouse performance that's immersive and exciting - especially with Dolby Atmos"

Kashfia Kabir Multimedia journalist



Rega Elex-R

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"The finest example of detail, dynamics and drive at this level. It'll be hard to beat"

Becky Roberts Staff writer



Gamut D3i/D200i

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"Arguably the most transparent and insightful pre/power combination we've heard in years"

Ketan Bharadia Technical editor



Mission M²

First test p11

"One of our old home cinema favourites is back with a bang - Mission's latest is punchy, powerful and gives a great spread of sound"

Andy Madden Reviews editor



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"The tablet market is a competitive place to be right now, particularly at this screen size, and it shows"

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Test AV amplifiers

"Both promise stunning home cinema sound, and both are kitted with the latest features - including Dolby Atmos"

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Temptation

"This pre/power combination is easily easily one of the best we've heard"



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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

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FIRST TESTS

**MORE
FIRST TESTS**



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A tiny 5.1 speaker package makes a big impression



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Another star turntable from Pro-Ject

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EXCLUSIVE

Compact Vena is a breath of fresh air for Quad

Quad Vena | Stereo amplifier | £600

Compact stereo amps are all the rage at the moment. Products such as the Monitor Audio Airstream A100 and NAD D 3020 have been a breath of fresh air, bringing clever design, smart features and excellent sound to the world of hi-fi. They're a great shout for those of us who consume music over multiple sources, whether CD player, computer or high-tech smartphone.

New tech for a respected brand

The appeal for such products hasn't been lost on Quad, one of the most respected hi-fi brands in the business. The Vena may be chunkier than the NAD and more sedate-looking than the Monitor Audio, but it looks and feels the part – build quality is excellent, the design cut very much from Quad cloth.

The 'Lancaster Grey' finish, pictured here, gives a classic look – if you want something with a bit more pizzazz, it's worth casting your eyes over the three optional



The three other finishes cost an extra £100 each



finishes – piano black, piano white or sapele mahogany – although note that each one will set you back an additional £100.

The front panel is a minimalist affair with a motorised volume control and a line-up of buttons corresponding with the amp's inputs. Everything's there bar a built-in phono stage for a turntable.

Both Type A and Type B USB inputs are on the back: the former allows you to charge an iDevice and play music directly, the latter is the go-to socket for hooking up a computer. Optical and coaxial digital inputs and outputs complete the line up. Sample-rate support extends all the way to 24-bit/192kHz high-res files.

Bluetooth also gets the nod for added convenience and the fact there's aptX support means you can take advantage of higher quality audio beamed from a compatible smartphone or tablet. Because

Tidal sounds great, and
better than the market-
leading lossy services

Tidal, p25

We start with a quick blast of *Up Is Down* - and a blast is exactly how it feels. It's quite unlike the traditional Quad character to which we've become accustomed. It's big, bold - boisterous



of the aluminium chassis and the effect it has on a wireless signal, you need to use an external antennae - supplied in the box. This is a slightly untidy solution, but it can fold away out of sight. If you buy one of the optional finishes, none of which use the aluminium casing, there's no aerial socket to contend with.

A big, bold, boisterous sound

We start with a quick blast of *Up Is Down* from *Pirates Of The Caribbean: At World's End* - and a blast is exactly how it feels. It's quite unlike the traditional Quad character to which we've become accustomed. The track sounds big, bold - even quite boisterous. There's serious weight and power on show, as wave

after wave of orchestral attack crashes down on the listener.

Stream a CD rip of Jay-Z's *Already Home* and the Quad shows a superb sense of control. Faced with the meaty, concentrated bassline the Vena keeps a firm grip, offering depth and control in equal measure. The soundstage is wide but all the elements are held firmly in place. Strings sound explicit, the vocal focused and straight to the point.

We play music through the headphone amplifier and we're pleased to report the Quad's lively sonic character continues. Faced with Led Zepplin's *Kashmir* the

USE IT WITH

Azealia Banks Broke With Expensive Taste

Parental Advisory! Explicit Content! Nevertheless, the Quad will positively lap up this album from the excellent young hip-hop artist from Harlem



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

In detail...

1 If you've bought the Vena in the 'Lancaster Grey' finish, that means you've also got the aluminium casework. That has many advantages, but one of them isn't an internal aerial. For this finish, then, the external aerial comes into its own.

2 The analogue connections allow you to connect your old-school kit, while the pre-outs can lead to a power amplifier, should you wish to indulge in some system tinkering and upgrading.

3 Digital connectivity is comprehensive, with a choice of coaxial and optical inputs and outputs. The Vena will support high-resolution music files all the way up to 24-bit/192kHz, so most high-res bases are covered. The input selected is highlighted on the front of the Vena.

4 The Type B (squared) USB input is to connect to a computer, while the Type A is for an iPhone or other Apple device either to charge or play music.



Vena doesn't shirk its responsibilities, placing tight, punchy drum thwacks alongside the track's gutsy guitar riff.

Switch to Bluetooth, pair up a smartphone, and even though there is the inevitable drop in quality that the streaming system brings, along with a loss of scale and dynamics compared to a wired connection, you don't experience the thin, hard quality that often blights the use of Bluetooth.

Needs a touch more finesse

It's when music calls for a little more restraint and delicacy that the Quad can't quite stand up to scrutiny. Play Hozier's soulful *Take Me To Church* and the tune sounds just a touch rushed. The soundstage is still well-organised and there's plenty of detail and attack on offer

when the chorus kicks off – but we'd like greater finesse and more of a feel for the track.

The Quad sticks to one speed, however, and isn't able to shift up or down the gears depending on the demands of the track. The emotion and intimacy of the piano and vocal at the start of the *Take Me To Church* don't latch on to your senses like the very best amplifiers at the money can.

A shift in Quad's sound

Nevertheless, the Vena is still an interesting proposition, not least because of the apparent shift by Quad to a more driven, potent sound. Whether this direction is taken with the company's future products remains to be seen – but for now, Vena is a good option to have in this flourishing sector of the market.

Faced with Led Zeppelin's *Kashmir*, the Vena doesn't shirk its responsibilities, placing tight, punchy drum thwacks alongside the track's gutsy guitar riff

SYSTEM BUILDER

Three partners that will help make sure you get the best from the Quad Vena



Smartphone

Sony Xperia Z3 from £530 SIM free

★★★★★

With aptX Bluetooth on-board, you should stream music to the Quad using a smartphone.



Speakers

Q Acoustics Concept 20 £350 ★★★★★
Team the Concept 20s up with the Quad and you've got a formidable pairing



Headphones

AKG K550 £100 ★★★★★

A huge bargain, considering they started out in life at twice the price.

Total build £1450

TECH SPECS

Inputs Analogue x2, optical x2, coaxial, USB Type A, USB Type B • **Outputs** Analogue pre-out, optical, coaxial • **Power output** 46W • **Bluetooth** Yes, aptX • **Dimensions** (hwd) 10 x 31 x 30cm • **Weight** 6.1kg

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Solid build; aptX Bluetooth; potent, authoritative sound; deep, controlled bass; focused soundstage

AGAINST Delivery lacks finesse

VERDICT The Vena's a solid effort from Quad. Greater subtlety could turn it into a brilliant amp

REVIEWER'S NOTES... GETTING TO KNOW THE QUAD VENA

1 Lancaster Grey is the standard finish for the Vena, but £100 more gives you three premium finishes. Sapele mahogany looks particularly striking.

2 Don't forget to attach the supplied antenna so you can beam music to the Vena via Bluetooth. This only has to be used with the all-aluminium model.

3 Using Bluetooth saps quite a bit of energy from our iPhone 6, so to save juice we plug it into the Vena's USB Type A socket to charge...

4 ...while we move on to the Type B socket next to it. With a hard drive full of hi-res tracks, we're soon enjoying the Quad's powerful and robust delivery.

5 Playing around with various types of speakers during testing, we find the Vena seems to work particularly well with the Q Acoustics Concept 20s.

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Rediscover Music

Technics

Technics.com

Mission M³ | Speaker package | £700

Mission, almost accomplished

If it's a tiny home cinema system you want, the Mission M³ is a great solution. We were big fans of the original - the M Cube (£1000) claimed five stars for its style and performance back in 2005.

Almost a decade on, the new and updated Mission M³ once again is a tempting proposition for those who want a large 5.1 cinema sound but don't have enough space for traditional, boxy speakers. The Mission M³ package comprises five dinky satellite speakers (each small enough to fit into the palm of your hand) and an active subwoofer.

Driving force

While the M³ speakers retain the same petite dimensions of their predecessors (each measure 9cm cubed), there are a couple of notable changes.

The biggest update is the use of Balanced Mode Radiator (BMR) driver technology. Each M³ satellite has a 75mm-BMR driver, which replaces the NXT panels of the previous model. Mission claims that the BMR drivers help deliver a larger spread of sound as well as being able to receive a full-range signal. This means you can connect the speakers directly to your AV receiver. It's a more conventional design than before, where you had to connect your amp to the sub which in turn linked to the satellites.

The subwoofer has a downward-firing 20cm driver powered by 200W of amplification, and mirrors the cuboid design of the satellites. It's large, but still compact enough to be tucked in a corner. There are volume, crossover and phase controls on the back panel, and the sub is up on metal spikes.

Black-and-white decision

The speakers are sturdily built, with a soft-touch finish giving a smart, premium look. The package comes in an all-black finish, although there will be a white version available later in the year. The speakers are tiny, but the Mission M³ delivers a surprisingly loud and powerful performance. We're impressed with the weight and punch in the lower frequencies, too. There's muscle to the bass, with satisfying oomph and

**Satellites of love**

The satellites come with adjustable stands attached, making them easy to place around your home or inside bookshelves. If you prefer wall mounting, brackets are included too.

Cohesion between each speaker is seamless, and the spread of sound is impressive. Effects are steered across the room effectively

wallop to explosions and crashes in *Guardians of the Galaxy*. Make sure to give the subwoofer space, as it sounds a little boomy when the action picks up.

Cohesion between each speaker is seamless, and the spread of sound is impressive. Effects are steered across the room convincingly and with a great sense of movement. While it would struggle to fill up a large home cinema room, the Mission M³ has no problem filling up smaller, medium-sized rooms with its bold sound.

Detail definition is respectable, and there's a smoothness to the Mission's presentation that's comfortable to listen to. It's a well-timed, agile performance too.

On the flipside, there's a lack of sparkle to the crunch of shattered glass, while explosions and gunshots don't have that bite we expect. We sometimes have to strain to hear dialogue over the booming power of the subwoofer. While we appreciate the Mission M³ doesn't veer towards a bright, thin sound, we think the treble is rolled off a bit too much

**USE IT WITH
X-Men
Days of
Future
Past**

A head-spinning and chaotic time-travel adventure that has plenty of action to get your system firing.

- rivals in this category, such as the new Cambridge Audio Minx S215 system (£500), express the balance of frequencies, dynamics and clarity better.

We're hugely impressed by how muscular and integrated the speakers are, and it's a shame it doesn't have an ounce more clarity to gain that fifth star.

Despite its flaws, the Mission M³ remains a likable and convenient speaker package. It's a fuss-free system to install and place in your room, and will suit smaller home cinema rooms nicely. But there are rivals that offer a slightly more engaging performance.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Big and powerful sound; muscular and punchy low end; great spread of sound; agile and well-integrated; smart finish and design

AGAINST Top end lacks bite and excitement

VERDICT Petite and powerful, but not quite the all-round performance we hope for

Also consider**Cambridge Audio Minx S215
£500 ★★★★★**

A small system that gets it right: delivering a big, dynamic and refined sound that's hugely entertaining.

System builder total build £1745**Television****Samsung UE48H6400
£700 ★★★★★**

Lovely picture detail, colour balance and a wealth of smarts: one of the best.

**Home cinema amplifier****Yamaha RX-V377
£250 ★★★★★**

Powerful and punchy, this entry-level AV receiver will suit the muscular character of the Mission M³ system.

**Blu-ray player****Sony BDP-S5200
£95 ★★★★★**

An Award-winning Blu-ray player that delivers terrific video and audio performance on a budget.



Hudl 2 | Tablet | £130

Time to get into a Hudl

After the runaway success of its 2013 predecessor, Tesco's Hudl is back with an updated spec list and new design in the hope of once again showing the budget-tablet market how its done. Does it succeed? Yes.

For its price tag of £130 (and even less if you use the store's Clubcard vouchers), the Hudl 2 packs an impressive spec sheet and performance that far exceeds its price point. It's still not going to give the iPad mini a run for its money, but then that's not its intention. This is a budget product and if you want a good, accessible tablet that costs less than half of most of its competitors, read on.

The Hudl 2 has had a screen-size boost from its predecessor, up from 7in to 8.3in, and its resolution is increased to full HD as well. There's a respectable 273ppi, which comes close to, and in some case exceeds, many of its pricier competitors. Design is much improved, and it both looks and feels a little more refined. The bulky bezels from the original Hudl have been shaved off along its longest edges, and it's slimmer too.

Thanks for the memory

It's available in 16GB only, but there is a microSD-card slot for boosting it by another 32GB, while there is a HDMI port for connecting the tablet to your TV. There's very little to grumble with at this price in terms of performance. Video is clean and crisp, with

1 The 5MP-camera on the Hudl 2 is one of its weak points: even in good light shots look washed out, auto-focus is unreliable and exposure unwieldy.



2 At 9mm and 410g, there is pleasing heft to the Hudl 2 tablet (which is available in eight different colours) and it feels nice in the hand.



The bulky bezels from the original Hudl have been shaved and it's slimmer, too

ample detail and a good handle on motion – it's a bit softer around edges than pricier competitors, but that's only to be expected. Whites are slightly on the creamy side and blacks don't go to the inky depths of the Samsung Galaxy Tab S 8.4, but it doesn't detract from the overall picture, with colours well-judged and accurate.

Loud and direct

You'll have to make some compromises on audio quality at this price though, but we'd still take the Hudl 2's well-balanced, character over the hard-edged Nexus 9. It's perfectly enjoyable and can be listened to at length. The stereo speakers on the Hudl sit on the back of the device and are Dolby-optimised. Play a movie and they'll go pretty loud with dialogue clear and direct, though the treble is a touch harsh and unrefined, and soundtracks can sound a little muddled.

Multi-media use drains the battery on the Hudl quicker than we like, resulting in around 7-8 hours under heavy use.

Every little helps

You'll find Tesco apps pre-loaded here – but it's been nicely done. Otherwise in a largely vanilla version of Android 4.4 KitKat, there is a small 'T' in the top left-hand corner that serves as the hub for everything Tesco. This includes access to Clubcard statements, grocery and clothing offers, suggestions for content from Tesco's Blinkbox services (now covering music, movies and books). Of course, if you're not a Tesco user you can simply ignore it. Other software tweaks added are helpful too: suggestions for popular apps to download, a child-safety feature, and a 'get started' app, which will walk you around some key things to do with



USE IT WITH Sound Magic E10s

Brilliant budget buds to match a good budget tablet.

The Hudl 2 has had a screen-size boost from its predecessor, up from 7in to 8.3in

your Hudl when you first get it. Handy for those who are new to the world of tablets.

General performance throws up no major issues, with its 1.83GHz quad-core Intel Atom processor and 2GB RAM managing to keep things running smoothly for the most part.

The Hudl 2 is a superb little tablet that requires a little leeway when it comes to balancing performance with value, because it offers plenty of both. In many respects it can take the fight to some of the pricier Android tablets out there, but overall it lacks the refinement available if you spend more. However, at this price its shortcomings are easier to forgive, and any compromises it's had to make in the process have been nicely done – though we wish sound was better.

We'd happily recommend the Hudl 2 for families and tablet newcomers. Tesco has done it again: the unexpected champion of the budget-tablet world.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Great value for money; good HD screen; microSD card slot; easy to use; performance;

AGAINST Battery life could be better; camera is very poor

VERDICT At this price there's little to grumble about – this is a superb budget tablet

Also consider

Apple iPad mini 2
£240 ★★★★★

With the price drop it's better value than ever, and offers a stellar performance.



LG MUSICflow



SMART HI-FI AUDIO Wireless Multi-room

LG MUSICflow creates a whole new way to re-connect with your favourite music. Whether it's moving tracks from speaker to speaker, group playing or creating your very own home cinema, the LG MUSICflow provides endless possibilities. Simple to set up and easy to control thanks to LG's intuitive MUSICflow player app*, our range of speakers and soundbar will transform your audio experience.

www.lg.com/uk/musicflow



*LG MUSICflow Player app is available on android, iOS and Windows PC only.

AKG
by HARMAN



meet the new
Y50

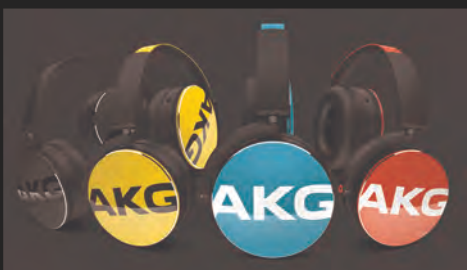
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AWARDS 2014

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On-ear headphones

Best portable on-ear headphones up to £100

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Amazon Fire TV | Mediastreamer | £80

Fire lights the way for Amazon

Physical formats are dead. Or that's what you might think, if you look at the number of streaming devices on the market. Even TVs come with streaming services built into them these days. Now Amazon wants a part of the action, and its champion is the Fire TV streaming media player. Are things about to heat up?

Box clever

The Fire TV comes in the shape of a box with cables, but don't worry about it getting in the way. It's a handsome little square: about the size of two stacked CD cases. It's subtle and stylish - the black finish is mostly matt, with glossy accents, which are fingerprint magnets. Corners are a bit sharp, but you'll hardly be fondling it.

There are five connections: power, LAN, HDMI out, optical out, USB. This last one doesn't seem to do anything at the moment, but may be activated in the future. That means no plug-and-play local file playback. There is no bundled HDMI cable, but you do get two Amazon-branded 'AAA' batteries for the remote control.

Creative accounting

To get started, you need an Amazon account. A nice touch is the pre-registration: buy a Fire TV through your Amazon account and it will come pre-loaded with your details. Installation is straightforward. Just connect the mains adaptor and an HDMI cable - the system guides you through the rest. Attaching an ethernet cable is the faster (and more stable) way to connect to the internet, but wi-fi doesn't take much effort - just follow the prompts to locate your network.

Next you get a cute animated video introducing the Fire TV and its features. Once that's over, you are taken to the home screen, showing recommended content and recent activity. This is also where you download apps. It's a simple interface with colourful tiles on the right and a list on the left: 'Search', 'Home', 'Movies', 'TV', 'Watchlist', 'Video Library', 'Games', 'Apps', 'Photos' and 'Settings'. Amazon has also launched itself into games territory: there's a small (but growing) selection of titles, which can be downloaded into the 8GB internal storage. While you won't get anything near PS4 quality, there are a few of the better titles you



Amazon Fire TV is a tidy little square, about the size of two stacked CD cases

might find on your tablet. For more intensive ('proper') games such as *Dead Trigger 2* you'll need something more substantial. Amazon has made a Bluetooth games pad, which looks and handles like an amalgam of Xbox and Playstation controllers (it's sold separately for £35). Click on 'Movies' or 'TV' and you're taken to an extensive library, but this is limited to Amazon Instant Video - great for people with Amazon Prime membership, but others will be asked to pay.

Reliable sources

Other sources can be downloaded and then found in 'Apps'. We're pleased to see most of the streaming big guns: Netflix, BBC iPlayer, Demand 5, YouTube, Spotify. It's a crowded app market, like the one you find on Roku streaming devices. That means despite some goodies, most of the apps (free or purchased) aren't particularly useful. We can see the appeal of Sky News, Curzon Home Cinema and Vevo, but HypnosisTV?

The Fire TV offers 1080p video output. Audio output supports Dolby Digital Plus with up to 7.1 channels. The quality is on par with other streaming devices we've tried: the Full HD picture is sharp and sound is solid. What really impresses us is the speed of operation - it's seriously fast.

USE IT WITH

Amazon Prime Instant Video

A very good video subscription service with a quality film selection. The TV offering is only going to get better, too.

Armed with 2GB of RAM (versus the Roku Streaming Stick's 512MB), the Fire TV responds quickly.

Don't want to type? Then you can search by voice. Hold down the microphone logo on the remote and call out film titles or actors' names. Speech recognition is among the best we've seen, only occasionally tripping over such spell-check favourites as Chiwetel Ejiofor and M. Night Shyamalan. Sadly, it is not advertised that this feature works only for Amazon Instant Video. On every other app you'll have to tap your way through.

The Amazon Fire TV is mostly a success, but there's still work to do. We love the speed and the voice search function. What we don't like is the price and app offering. For the money, we'd like more apps. Rivals such as Roku may not be as slick but they offer a similar experience for less. We're also not keen on the huge bias towards Amazon Instant Video customers, which leaves everyone else unable to use all the functions.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Speedy; voice search; good performance and build quality

AGAINST Voice search is not universal; no USB playback

VERDICT A great streaming media player, but tilted to much towards Amazon members

Also consider Roku Streaming Stick £50

★★★★★

Not as fast, but it's cheaper, and similar.



The USB socket isn't active yet. It may be used in future upgrades

Elipson Planet LW Bridge system | Wireless speaker system | £1400

Elipson build a Bridge of highs

Elipson provides smart-looking rings to act as bases for the speakers

We like this Elipson package. It's beautifully built, mostly wireless and sounds pretty decent too. And we can't overlook that distinctive appearance either. Whether you go for the looks or not, at least it makes a welcome change from the usual rectangular wooden boxes we normally find.

Slam-dunk speakers

At the heart of this package are the Planet LW speakers. These are basketball-sized and available in neatly applied black, white or red gloss finishes. Don't worry about them rolling off their supports, Elipson supply smart-looking metal rings to act as bases.

These speakers use a two-way coaxial driver array comprising a 16.5cm mid/bass (loaded by a rear-firing port) and a fabric dome tweeter. There are two 50-watt amp modules on each enclosure - one for each drive unit - so these are truly active rather than just powered. The amplifier modules are the well-known ICEpower designs developed by Bang & Olufsen.

One of the big selling points of the Planet LWs is that they are wireless - the connection works at 16-bit/44.1kHz. As usual, wireless doesn't mean there aren't any wires involved, as you still need a mains feed to each speaker. Use either of the supplied transmitting dongles (one USB and the other a 30-pin Apple version) and you link to the speakers directly. The designated left-hand LW is the master: aim the cheap-feeling remote towards this to adjust volume.

Planet of sound

The Elipson Audio Bridge adds aptX Bluetooth, optical and analogue connectivity. These sources connect to the Bridge and it links to the Planet LW speakers wirelessly. The speakers won't work with both the Bridge and the dongles simultaneously, only one at a time.

Set up is easy: establish the wireless link and off you go. Within a few minutes we're listening to music. We start with the Audio Bridge in the set-up, using our reference Naim



The Elipson Audio Bridge remote control is not great: it feels cheap



We listen to *From Finner* by Of Monsters and Men and are pleased with the overall presentation. It's pretty balanced across the frequency range. Bass is solid and reasonably taut, providing a foundation for the rest of the frequency range

NDS /555PS streamer as an analogue source. The results are decent, but not inspiring.

We listen to *From Finner* by Of Monsters and Men and are pleased with the overall presentation. It's pretty balanced across the frequency range. Bass is solid and reasonably taut, providing a good foundation for the rest of the frequency range. The drive units are well integrated and there's combination of stability and control that most passive alternatives would find hard to better.

It doesn't take long for us to think these speakers play things a little too safe, though. There isn't the attack we expect, nor enough of the energy we know is in the song. Greater transparency would be welcome too.

The analogue input is to blame to a large extent, as switching to optical and, to a lesser degree Bluetooth, shows. We wouldn't say the issues go away with the digital connections, but things improve notably - enough for us to have fun listening to a range of music, from Outkast to Elvis.

We power down the Audio Bridge and use the supplied dongles: the USB one with our MacBook and the other with our iPad. If anything, going directly to the Planet LWs adds a little more clarity and sparkle to the performance. Tchaikovsky's *Marché Slave Op.31* is delivered with conviction and decent



USE IT WITH Sony Xperia Z3

This smartphone is a true multi-media powerhouse. An outstanding all-rounder.

scale. Moving the speakers close to a rear wall helps with outright authority without unbalancing tonality much. Bass remains decently articulate in this position too.

We admire Elipson's fresh approach to speaker design. The wireless aspect proves stable, though we have doubts about the quality of the analogue-to-digital conversion inside the Audio Bridge. Even at their best the Planet LW speakers still sound a little restrained, but they're insightful enough to remain interesting to listen to. If the style and convenience appeal take a serious listen.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Distinctive appearance; wireless; good connectivity; balanced and informative sound

AGAINST Presentation is a little too safe; analogue input doesn't sound great

VERDICT Has much to commend it. It looks great, is wireless and sounds pretty decent, too

Also consider Dynaudio XEO 4 £1775 ★★★★★

Pricier, but they deliver a hugely entertaining sound packed with detail and dynamics.



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Panasonic TX-65AX902B | 65in 4K Television | £5000

A stunning but pricey 4K success

Panasonic has had a rocky start to the 4K Ultra HD scene. Its first 4K TV we tested, the TX-58AX802B, wasn't capable of streaming Netflix 4K at the time, which we felt was a glaring omission for a 4K set. That issue has now been fixed, with Netflix 4K in full working order. And the TX-65AX902B shows just what a flagship Panasonic screen can do.

A beautiful way with colours

This 65in screen looks gorgeous. What impresses us most is how beautifully judged the colour is, striking just the right balance between punch and finesse. The picture (in 4K or Full HD) is one of subtle shading imbued with rich, warm tones. The *Guardians Of The Galaxy* Blu-ray has aliens and planets of every hue, and the Panasonic screen revels in delivering each one of them.

Brightly lit scenes show off the Panasonic at its best, with punchy, bright highlights and solid blacks that remind us fondly of plasma screens. In a dark scene, those blacks aren't quite so solid and dark. The slightly patchy backlighting in the corners of our set's screen doesn't help, either.

Switch to a more realistic palette such as that of *Captain America: Winter Soldier* and the 65AX902B takes a confident approach with the steely greys and natural landscapes. Skin-tones are displayed with realism - not too pale, not too ruddy - and there's a three-dimensional quality to the characters that's lovely to see.

Stunning with 4K content

Detail definition, in 4K and Full HD, is excellent. There's depth and subtlety to *Breaking Bad* episodes on Netflix 4K, while stock clips in 4K show how stunning native content can be. Blu-ray films are upscaled with skill, with no discernable noise or pixellation. It's a clean picture, though we wish it were a touch crisper. We like the smooth, natural quality of the Panasonic but the rival Sony KD-65S9005B is more definite in the way it displays edges.

This is a passive 3D set, and it's a comfortable experience. It's not tiring on the eye, but the 3D effect isn't quite as dramatic or as smooth as we'd like.

We would stick to HD as much as possible, as the quality of standard-def programmes doesn't do justice to the 65AX902B's talents - the rival Sony screen offers a slightly cleaner, crisper picture with upscaled content.

Decent sound for a flat-panel

Panasonic's speakers are comfortable to listen to on their own. There's weight and detail to the sound, and voices are heard loud and clear. If you want the full cinematic experience, though, we'd certainly invest in a 5.1 speaker package to match the performance of the 4K screen.

The TX-65AX902B may just be one of the heaviest TVs we've handled in recent years. The screen itself is two-person lift - but so is the hefty stand. Roughly the size of a large encyclopaedia, it offers stable support to the screen, which is slightly tilted back.

This tilted design means that you may need a lower-than-average stand to view it straight on. On our racks, the screen is a little too high and leans away from us - which isn't entirely immersive.

Freetime for catching up

One of the standout features for Panasonic TVs this year is the addition of Freetime, a free TV guide service that lets you catch up with the past seven days of telly. On the 65AX902B it is restricted to channels that have an on-demand app. So any BBC shows are up for grabs through BBCiPlayer, while Freetime does this as well as open up access to 4oD, ITV Player and Demand 5.

Freetime also replaces Panasonic's programme guide interface, giving the TV a breath of fresh air. Gone are the flat greys. Freetime is colourful, sleek and modern. It's faster to use, too, and makes channel-browsing a more appealing experience.

Another neat feature is TV Anywhere. It lets you stream live and USB-recorded content on your smartphone or tablet when you're on the move. Just make sure your location has a good broadband connection.

Using the 65AX902B is swift and intuitive, especially with the standard remote control. It's a nicely made, satisfyingly hefty unit, and it makes quick work of navigating

Get set properly

We recommend properly setting up every set, of course, but when you've invested £5k it would be silly not to go through a THX Optimizer. Many discs have it - and it's a simple process.



USE IT WITH

Guardians Of The Galaxy

Colourful, loud and a fine test of a screen and home-cinema system. Smashing fun

the various My Home Screen panels and shortcuts, and of more mundane matters such as changing the volume.

There's a smaller smart remote too, but we prefer the standard unit. While it fits nicely in hand, using the touchpad isn't quite as intuitive or comfortable to use on a daily basis.

Those wanting to use their smartphone or tablet can download the free TV Remote 2 app. It responds well, is neatly laid out, and

System builder total build £9750

Blu-ray player

Panasonic DMP-BDT700 £500

★★★★★

Your TV needs a top player, and this delivers the crispest detail, punchiest colours and smoothest motion at the price



Home cinema amplifier

Pioneer SC-LX58 £1400

★★★★★

Award-winning Pioneer, whose depth of detail and authoritative precision is hugely enjoyable



Speaker package

KEF R100 5.1 £2850

★★★★★

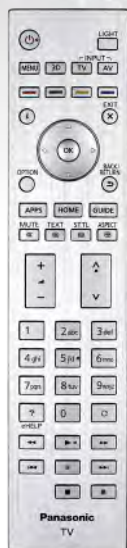
An immensely powerful, dynamic and subtle speaker package that sounds as gorgeous as it looks





Brightly lit scenes show off the Panasonic TX-65AX902B at its best, with punchy, bright highlights and solid blacks that remind us fondly of plasma screens

We're fans of the solidly built standard remote control: it's simple and does a fine job



you can transfer media files from your smartphone to TV with just a single swipe.

The 65AX902B has a decent spread of connections, with four HDMI 2.0 and three USB inputs. The HDMI inputs support 4K passthrough and upscaling, 3D content and ARC. You can play photos, music and video files - including 4K - stored on a flash drive or hard drive, while an SD card slot gives you another way to access media files on your camera. There are both Freeview HD and Freesat tuners built in.

Wi-fi is built in, although we prefer using the wired ethernet socket for a more stable connection when streaming Netflix 4K - essential to reduce buffering issues.

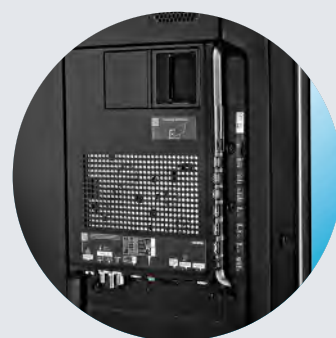
We're impressed with the Panasonic TX-65AX902B. That gorgeous colour balance is hard to achieve at any price, and the 65in screen's insightful, punchy performance is hugely commendable. The sleek new Freetime TV guide adds a splash of style to the user experience, too.

The biggest issue here is price. The Panasonic TV costs a staggering £5000. That's a grand and a bit more than its five-star Samsung and Sony rivals. The Panasonic needs to achieve excellence to justify that premium price tag and best its rivals - but it's not quite there.

In detail



Heavy base, but lean The hefty base unit aids stability, but it also adds a lean to the screen, so placement may be an issue



Inputs You shouldn't have any problems connecting all your kit to this set: all HDMI inputs support 4K and ARC



Touch-pad The now almost obligatory second remote control is here. It's perfectly functional, but we prefer the standard unit.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Gorgeous colour balance; rich detail definition; bright highlights and lush blacks

AGAINST Expensive; inconsistent black depth; backlighting issues

VERDICT A gorgeous screen with stunning colours and punchy detail, but at a high price

Also consider

Sony KD-65S9005B
£3900 ★★★★★

The Sony has crisp detail and better black depth



Arcam FMJ A39 | Stereo amplifier | £1500

Middle child awaiting maturity

Arcam's FMJ family of integrated stereo amplifiers has already tasted success this year, with a 2014 Product of the Year Award for the excellent FMJ A19. Now it's the turn of the range's middle child, the A39, to show us what it can do in the £1500 market.

When it comes to design, it shares a similar look to the rest of the family, with a sturdy black steel and aluminium shell, front-mounted controls and a dimmable display. (A green light will appear above the source you have selected - you simply need to select the corresponding button to choose what you want to hear.)

There are a total of six labelled line-level inputs for hooking up your various bits of kit, alongside a moving-magnet phono stage (which can be bypassed for a further line level in, should you need) and two analogue outs, with both a 3.5mm input and 3.5mm headphone output mounted on the front. There are no digital inputs, but there is an upgrade path offered in the form of a second internal power supply, which can drive products from Arcam's rSeries (including the rDAC, rPAC, rLink and rBlink).

Cool runnings

Inside the A39, Arcam has used a class-G amplifier, which we've previously seen in its home cinema amplifiers. This basically makes the amp capable of big, powerful sound without wasting electricity as heat. The result is not just a more efficient, environmentally friendly amp, but also a much cooler-running one. Even when we pushed it to volume levels unlikely to be used regularly at home, it remained relatively cool to the touch and certainly cooler than its big competitor, the Rega Elicit-R.

It also offers a rather impressive 120w per channel into 8 ohms and 240w into 4ohms too, which should make it capable to drive even the most demanding of price-appropriate speakers.

The power at its disposal is one of the first things you'll notice - the A39 offers an impressively large soundstage and a superb sense of scale to whatever you throw at it. There's real punch here and bass notes are weighty and precise, yet

agile enough to keep the track driving forward with a decent level of precision.

However, while there's plenty of authority in the way it handles tracks, and an eagerness to please with a get-up-and-go attitude, it still can't quite match the Rega Elicit-R for out-and-out rhythmic precision.

Chain reaction

Play Fleetwood Mac's *The Chain* and there's a natural fluidity to the Rega that the Arcam just can't match - the various layers of instruments and vocals don't quite combine and complement one another as seamlessly as they do with its competitor. Switch up the tempo to India Arie's *Ready For Love* and the A39 lacks the Rega's level of insight to deliver every last drop of emotion and nuance in Arie's intimate delivery.

It's not miles off, but at this level it's the small differences that matter, and losing these subtle details makes the Arcam feel a little restrained and impersonal by comparison. The Arcam is very much at home with big-volume, big show-stopper tracks - this is when it

The power at its disposal is one of the first things you will notice about the Arcam A39 - it'll take anything you can throw at it

does its best work dynamically. It's the lower levels of dynamics, the softer, more delicate details that it struggles to show off with quite the same authority, though.

Tonally it's neutral and well balanced, and stereo imaging is stable, keeping a strong soundstage even when tracks get busy. Leading edges aren't always the smoothest, packing impact but without much body, and as such we'd be careful with the quality of tracks you play through the A39: it's not all that forgiving.

Authority figure

However, after saying all this, the Arcam A39 is still a good stereo amplifier with plenty to offer - it just falls down when it's compared to our Award-winner at this price. If scale and authority are high on your must-haves list, then this Arcam is certainly worth an audition. But it needs to take greater consideration of timing and fine detail to earn the full five stars at this price. A worthy effort, nevertheless.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Big soundstage; scale and authority; decently detailed; tonally neutral; stable stereo imaging; weighty bass; unfussy speaker pairing

AGAINST The best out there simply betters it

VERDICT A powerful, authoritative stereo amp, but it needs better timing and detail

Also consider

Rega Elicit-R £1500 ★★★★★

Our Award-winner, the Rega Elicit-R does a better job with lower-level dynamics.

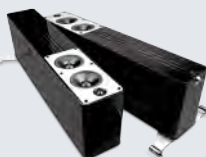


System builder total build £3970

Q Acoustics Concept 40 £1000

★★★★★

A wonderfully engaging pair of floorstanding speakers that will complement the Arcam's scale and authority well.



Rega RP6 £1000 ★★★★★

This multi-Award winning turntable delivers exceptional performance through clever design and engineering solutions



Shure SRH1540 £470 ★★★★★

Dynamic and exquisitely detailed, these Shure's offer a balanced presentation with a fast and nimble manner that can handle even the subtlest of rhythmic shifts.



The A39 shares a similar look to the Arcam family, with a sturdy black-and-aluminium shell



JBL Cinema Base | Soundbase | £300

It's a hit: JBL makes first 'base



Top marks to JBL for consistency. Its debut soundbase, the aptly named Cinema Base, largely mirrors its soundbar equivalent (the SB 350) in the company's new range. If you read last month's copy of *What Hi-Fi?* you'll know that's a good thing. The SB 350 got four stars, and now the Base follows suit, possessing a similarly decent sound, rugged build and smart design.

Priced somewhere in the middle of our two Cambridge Audio and Canton Award winners at a rather tempting £300, it's pretty good value, too, when you consider its strong performance.

Ready for action

Big, dynamic and excellently detailed, its sound is easy to buy into – not least for the action-movie junkies among us.

We unwrap and spin our new *Godzilla* Blu-ray, throwing the JBL straight into the thick of the action. As the chaos gets underway, it's immediately clear that the Base's dual 9cm woofers don't hold back. As the MUTO breaks free from its containment, its stomps bear the heaviness and depth we'd expect from a dedicated subwoofer in a budget speaker package. The bassy sound is floor-rumbling as it reverbs around the room. It can be a little overpowering, mind, so we'd knock it down a few notches to get the best sonic balance.

The Cinema Base is capable of volume that'll make you sit right back in your seat when *Godzilla* growls, and its big, enveloping soundfield does wonders to draw you into the film's havoc and keep you there – even without JBL's surround-sound mode turned on.

More than just loud

Partner that with headstrong dynamics and a solid delivery and you've got a truly engrossing performance.

Our praise subsides momentarily when it comes to the midrange. It feels a bit restrained. Though the Base trumps the cheaper Cambridge Audio TV2 in some areas (dynamics, for one), mids aren't as clear or well projected as they are through the TV2. Dialogue is weighty and reasonably expressive through the JBL – you can hear the exasperation in Bryan Cranston's voice as he shouts at officials – but in lengthy dialogue-heavy scenes, you wish voices were that bit more defined.

Treble stays duly behind the brightness threshold for the most part, but we'd like more a touch more definition and insight at the higher frequencies.

The JBL is a solid performer with music, its handling of a movie track paralleled in a musical setting. It laps up the meaty bassline in Daft Punk's *Around The World* as

JBL's first soundbase has it, but doesn't flaunt it: fulsome sound, sober design

we stream it over Bluetooth, and has the attack and rhythm to get your foot tapping.

We admire the effort JBL has put into aesthetics, even though the result (shiny edges on a matt-black chassis) is muted. The curved front grille saves this from being 'just another' rectangular box, too.

JBL says the Cinema Base is designed for up to 60in tellies, as long as the TV's stand doesn't exceed the unit's 60 x 40cm size.

The Base has an uncommon trick up its sleeve: a USB charging port (not an input) means you can revive your smartphone or portable while, say, watching a movie.

Also picking up points for practicality is the placement of the optical and 3.5mm inputs and HDMI ARC output, around the back. There's plenty of room around the sockets for owners of chunky cables.

The only blip in design is the feeble credit card-style remote, which is all-too easy to lose down the side of the sofa.

Commendable debut

JBL is one of many brands to channel its soundbar expertise into the burgeoning foray of soundbases of late, and the Cinema Base is a decent first effort by the company.

There's little to fault with design, and plenty to applaud with the sound. It might not be the last word in clarity or detail (up top), but its weighty, dynamic presentation makes it an appealing proposition for anyone looking for a decent upgrade in sound. At this price, it demands a listen.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Dynamic and weighty; lashings of bass; smart design; takes most TVs; charging ability

AGAINST Midrange could be clearer; treble needs greater insight; poor remote

VERDICT Delivering a good sound at an appealing price, this JBL is worth a punt

Also consider

Cambridge Audio TV2 £200

★★★★★ It doesn't have the JBL's big, dynamic sound but there's plenty to like in its rich, balanced delivery and it's cheaper, too.



In detail



Remote control The buttons are all there but it's a shame this handset has such a lightweight, flimsy feel



USB port It doesn't function as a standard input but this slot will charge your portable device.



Physical controls In keeping with the overall design, the on-unit controls are neat, discreet and easy to use.

Pro-ject 1Xpression Carbon UKX | Turntable | £575

Music with plenty of Xpression

The platter on the UKX is acrylic, a change from the composite steel-thermo plastic elastomer one used on the standard version

Pro-ject is best

known for its class-leading budget turntables. It has dominated that market for more years than we care to remember, and continues to do so. So successful has the company been in this respect, it's easy to forget it makes some mighty fine products at more ambitious prices too. You can count this latest version of the long-running 1 Xpression among them.

Carbon footprint

The Carbon in the product's name refers to the material used in the supplied arm. It's unusual to find carbon-fibre arms, even at far higher prices, so it's clear Pro-ject is trying hard to offer something special for the price.

There's more to a good arm than just tube material. We're pleased to report the one fitted to the 1 Xpression is a substantially engineered unit with smooth, play-free bearings and a nice solid feel. You'll find an Ortofon 2M Silver cartridge attached to the arm: it's a modified version of the company's much-admired 2M Red moving-magnet, which bodes well.

Pop the cork

The platter on the UKX is acrylic, changed from the composite steel/thermo plastic elastomer one used on the standard version. While it's perfectly fine to place a record directly on the acrylic, Pro-ject also supplies both cork and felt mats too. Each option changes the sonic presentation a little, with the final choice coming down to personal taste and system matching as much as anything else. Just remember to adjust the arm height to compensate for the varying thickness of the mats. We preferred

the direct acrylic option for its extra clarity. Set-up is relatively simple, though newcomers to turntables may find attaching the bias weight a little fiddly. The rest of it is straightforward: add the platter, fit the belt, and attach the counter and bias weights to the arm. Once up and running we're impressed with what we hear. We use two systems: one based around the Arcam A19 amplifier and B&W 685s, and the other our reference Bryston /ATC set-up. Regardless of partnering kit, it's clear this Pro-ject is a great-sounding deck.

Rapid ear movement

It's the sonic clarity that stands out first. Listening to R.E.M.'s *Automatic for the People* we're taken with the high level of detail. This deck digs deeply, and defines notes with class-leading precision. It's a fast, controlled sound that makes tracking low-level instrumental strands easy. The presentation is composed too, staying stable even when things get busy.

Tonally, things are nicely balanced with no part of the frequency range dominating. The Ortofon 2M Silver cartridge comes across as a refined and articulate performer, and has no trouble working into any of the phono stages we tried.

Move onto Orff's *Carmina Burana* and the Pro-ject continues to impress with wide-ranging dynamics and a decent amount of punch. There's also a pleasing

Self-improvement

Improvements on this version includes a better motor and new power supply - the aim being to improve speed stability and reduce any unwanted mechanical energy.

sense of scale and a nicely-layered sound stage - this is a deck that majors on analysis. We can't think of a rival that tells us as much about a recording. However, compared to the likes of Rega's RP3 it can sound a touch clinical, downplaying the rhythmic and forceful aspects of the music a little. This never goes too far though, with the Pro-ject remaining an entertaining listen regardless of genre.

Package of pleasure

We still think the 1 Xpression Carbon UKX is a terrific package for the price. It's balanced and insightful, rivalling the class leaders in overall ability. It's worth serious consideration if you love the idea of spinning some of your favourite vinyl.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR High level of resolution; articulate sound; good cartridge; nice presentation

AGAINST Some rivals sound more enthusiastic

VERDICT Clearly one of the class leaders. Nothing else at this price digs up as much detail or delivers it with such precision

Needs to beat

Rega RP3/Elys 2
£550 ★★★★★

The current class champion remains an excellent choice



It's the sonic clarity that stands out first. Listening to R.E.M.'s *Automatic for the People*, we're taken with the level of detail. This deck digs deeply

FULL SOUND

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New Sony 4K Ultra HD TV

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4K
Ultra HDTV

#Sony4K

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Tidal | Streaming service | £20/month

A new wave of quality streaming

Tidal is a new music streaming service that follows in the footsteps of Qobuz by offering CD-quality lossless music streams (1411kbps), thereby providing a noticeable leap in quality (on paper at least) over the typical 320kbps proffered by the likes of Spotify. In total, Tidal claims more than 25 million music tracks in lossless quality.

Tidal's other big USP is the offer of more than 75,000 HD music videos and curated content, from playlists to interviews to magazine-style features, put together by dedicated teams in the UK and US.

Platform availability

Tidal is available as a web player or desktop download, a free app for Android and iOS, and on Bluesound and Simple Audio wireless systems. Chrome is the only web browser to support lossless playback, but you can download the desktop app to get around this restriction. On mobile, only certain Android devices (with Android 04.04.2004 and above) support CD-quality playback, but 'partnership and integration agreements' are said to be in place - with 34 brands in total - so we should see Tidal coming to more products and devices soon.

First we decide to take a look at Tidal on the web player (using the Chrome browser) and discover that it's intuitive and looks smart. Curated content is at the forefront. The top 'What's new' section has new albums, but much of the page is given over to Playlists - including videos, interviews and features - 'created by Tidal'. These lists showcase new music and old, and are thoughtfully assembled. You can tell the process has involved a human touch.

The desktop app doesn't look as smart and the menus are a little smaller, but the functionality is similar. Hopefully a better desktop app design is in the pipeline.

We switch to mobile and it's much more in keeping with the smart web player experience. We are impressed by Qobuz, but its mobile app experience can be buggy.

Tidal sounds great, and better than the leading lossy services, provided you're using good enough kit

There are no such issues here. Streaming music seems reliable (Tidal recommends a 2MB connection for optimum streaming) and browsing tracks is fast.

Crucially, the Settings tab is where you should select 'HiFi' for the all-important best sound quality, listed at FLAC 1411.



'High' (AAC 320) and 'Standard' (AAC+ 96) are the other two options.

New editorial content is promised daily, with features, videos and those curated playlists on offer. Our only gripe is that this content could be easier to find, though we admit we're largely here for the music.

Sound for the discerning listener

The good news is that Tidal sounds great, and better than the market-leading lossy services, provided you're using good enough kit to listen - if you've got free earphones on a bus you may not hear the difference. Aphex Twin's *Syro* album is a fine test of detail, control and rhythm, and Tidal's FLAC stream delivers a sound with space and scale while revealing the intricate drums and effects with impressive precision.

A listening comparison with Qobuz, the other CD-quality streaming service in the UK, reveals a similar, if not identical, sound. Qobuz delivers perhaps a bit more punch and is better-organised, though we like the space and detail afforded by Tidal.

All told, Tidal lives up to its promise of high-fidelity music streaming. It isn't as exhaustive as Spotify yet, but 90 per cent of our music is there and if your tastes are fairly mainstream you should have no issues.

This new service isn't the finished article, however, and for everything that we liked about it, there are some notes in the 'against' column. Speed is one: it's a little



USE IT WITH
Sony
Xperia
Z3

Our favourite big-screen phone sounds great so will make the most of the smart-looking Tidal Android app.

Social networking

Tidal is not as connected to social media as Spotify, but you can link to Facebook to create your own Tidal profile and can add your Last.fm account on the mobile app. AirPlay is supported from the desktop app.

sluggish to respond. It's also missing support for gapless playback - annoying to lovers of classical and electronic music. It's a problem Spotify had for a long time but has now corrected.

If you value sound quality and stream a sizeable chunk of your music, then we think you should be happy to welcome another option in to the CD-quality streaming market. We are. And we think £20/month, rather than £10/month for lower-quality music, is a fair price to pay - not least when it's as well put together as Tidal.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Good, CD-quality sound; intuitive app; impressive library; useful curated content

AGAINST CD-quality not available on some platforms; a little sluggish; no gapless playback

VERDICT A smart-looking, content-packed service for streaming hi-fi quality music

Also consider

Qobuz £20/month ★★★★★

The only other CD-quality streaming service has its foibles but sounds superb.



LG MusicFlow | Multi-room system | From £300

A speaker family for the whole house

LG is the latest brand to join the multi-room party with its new Music Flow range – the family is made up of H3 (£150), H5 (£230) and H7 (£350) active wireless speakers, an R1 Bridge (£50) and an HS6 Soundbar (£500). Features are in abundance: Bluetooth, built-in wi-fi, DLNA functionality and near-field communication (NFC) across the range. The best bit? All speakers support high-res WAV and FLAC files up to 24-bit/192kHz, topping Sonos, while matching the capability of the pricier, Award-winning Bluesound system.

The price here is the cheapest possible multi-room set-up, consisting of two H3 speakers, but of course you can mix 'n' match. The speakers are primarily for music, but can also be used in a home cinema environment, working with the HS6 soundbar as rear surround channels.

The best bit? All speakers support high-res WAV and FLAC files up to 24-bit/192kHz, topping Sonos

(The Bridge isn't a compulsory purchase for multi-room, but if you forgo it, one speaker in the set-up must have a wired connection to your router.)

LG claims its mesh network technology and dual band wi-fi (2.4/5GHz) promises stable and 'uninterrupted' playback.

The proof of the pudding

So far so good, then – but how good is performance? Ultimately, we can't help but feel a little disappointed with the Music Flow's sound as a whole. Each speaker delivers a fairly detailed and listenable sound that is a bit safe and restrained, lacking the insight, balance and energy of the respective Award-winners at their price.

We find the small H3's sound clear, detailed and of a size that extends beyond its physical proportions. But it struggles to match the Cambridge Audio Go's detail and weight, and overall the presentation is a

little undernourished. Hints of too much brightness in the treble appear as the cymbals in Jamie Cullum's *Trippin' Up* fill the soundfield, too.

Moving up in price and size, we have the weak link in the family: the H5's bottom-heavy character makes Cullum's stark vocals muffled and a tad boomy. We expect more expression, balance and at least an inkling of dynamic aptitude at this price, but the H5 gives us little to chew on as we feed it the dynamic and intricate *The Lord Of The Rings: The Two Towers* soundtrack.

The marginally cheaper Monitor Audio Airstream S200 (£200) blows it away with its clear, lively and remarkably detailed presentation.

Relative merits

The H7 is easily the best of the bunch. It delivers the biggest, most dynamic and expressive sound of the lot – and is best able to pick out the subtlety and variation of the piano in Regina Spekter's *The Flowers*.

You get a deeper – but not particularly better-defined – bassline in a 24-bit/192kHz-resolution file of Fleetwood Mac's *Dreams*, and balance is better than with its smaller siblings. Still, our favourite Geneva Model S Wireless DAB+ one-ups the H7 in almost every way, grasping the genteel, tremulous nature of Alison Krauss's vocals in *That Kind Of Love* in a way the H7 can't.

The HS6 soundbar finds itself in a similar position as its hi-fi counterparts. Load up *The Amazing Spiderman* and a good level of detail is present. The sound of Spidey's web shooter is crisp. The soundfield might not be the biggest we've heard at this price (Yamaha triumphs there) but LG's patented Stereo Field Extension (SFX) – designed to create a larger listening sweetspot and amplify the surround sound effect – seems effective: the sound easily spreads the width of our 65in Samsung telly.

Turning the bass down slightly on the sub and ensuring the EQ is set to 'Standard' (there's 'Cinema', 'Flat Boost', 'Treble/Bass' and our second-favourite 'Music', too) gets

LG's first foray into multi-room systems includes a soundbar for home cinema use



the best balance from the HS6, but we still find the presentation markedly underweight.

The Q Acoustics Media 4 is £100 cheaper and, though it doesn't have the HS6's feature count, has a bigger, more dynamic sound – not to mention greater insight.

Marks for usability

It's a shame about the so-so sound quality across the board, because the Music Flow gets everything else pretty spot-on.

Set-up is straightforward. There's no remote for the speakers: the Music Flow Player app (free, iOS and Android, see above) is the control hub. It's easy to use but can be a little buggy under complex operation.

You can access a list of songs you've 'liked', or get song suggestions according to your 'mood' – on a wet Monday morning we picked 'gloomy' and it whipped up a quick playlist of suitably melancholic music.

A neat trick is the speakers' ability to take over the music playing on an NFC-compatible smartphone or tablet by simply tapping it on the top left of the speaker (or on the right-hand side in the H3's case).

We like the design – the trio of speakers are stylish and well-matched with shiny, silver fascias and a rigid chassis.

The H5 and slightly larger H7 are hexagonal, and friendly looking speakers with smooth surfaces and nicely tapered corners (bar a few rough edges we found on our H5 sample).

LG has gone for basic functionality; there's just a single all-in-one button (for

System builder Total build from £2900

Tablet

Apple iPad Air 2 £400

★★★★★

The best tablet out there? We think so. It has decent storage and works well with the LG Music Flow app.



Television

Samsung UE55HU7500

£2200 ★★★★★

A clear case of big being beautiful. A brilliant 4K set that downscales high- and standard-def really well.



Music Flow Player

This app makes it easy to access music, as well as control speaker playback (one song can play on all speakers or each speaker can play a different song). It's also a gateway into online streaming services.



In detail

1 Add button

Press the 'add' button on each of the speakers' back panels to achieve a multi-room set-up. It links the speakers to one another within the home network so each can be controlled as a 'group', or individually, via the app.

2 & 3 Wi-fi button and ethernet port

There are two ways to stream music over a home network. Either connect each speaker to the source via a wired connection into the ethernet port, or hook-up wirelessly by pressing the 'Wi-Fi' button during initial set-up.



power on/off and input changing) at the centre of a volume dial that is smooth to operate and has well-thought-out ridges to stop your finger slipping off. A small white light sits underneath the input icons to show which is in use, though these can be turned off via the app.

There are also LAN and 3.5mm inputs around the back, as well as buttons to connect the speakers to one another.

Family resemblance

The baby H3 is obviously part of the same family, with its curvy-cornered silver chassis, but has no 3.5mm input - connection is via ethernet or wireless only.

Even the HS6 soundbar looks like it's cut from the same cloth. The silver (and yes, shiny) bar resembles the LG NB4540 (£280), but is slightly wider at 102cm - roughly the width of a 48in TV. That's a good thing, to say the least. Despite its aesthetic similarity to the cheaper unit, its design is still classy enough to match its rivals - the mirror-like metal body, fronted by a hole-patterned grille, is as flat and unobtrusive as you'd want a soundbar to be. The bright text display and fancy-yet-functional remote makes it easy to operate, too. With optical, 3.5mm, USB and HDMI ins and an HDMI output, the HS6 has plenty of options for connecting to your system.

The bar's wireless sub is less familiar: tall, narrow but deep, it's almost entirely wrapped in cloth and attractive by subwoofer standards. It's not one you'd necessarily want to hide away.

LG has gone big on features with its first multi-room model, but the Music Flow goes home with only three stars due to a disappointing performance. Sound quality could be better. The H7 shows promise, and two (or more) of them would be our combination of choice with the Music Flow. But even then, we'd much sooner pick something from the Sonos or Bluesound line-up for top quality.

Rating ★★☆☆☆

FOR High-res support; features; multi-room functionality; stylish, practical design

AGAINST Sound lacks insight and dynamics of rivals; control; app can be buggy

VERDICT A feature-packed package, but one that disappoints with its so-so sound

Also consider

Sonos from £300 ★★★★★

No high-res support, but fine sound from a slick, easy to set up package



WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014

**WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS HIGHLIGHTS 2014**

CELEBRATING THE BEST OF THE BEST

The 2014 What Hi-Fi? Awards was the biggest yet. This year's Oscars of the hi-fi industry, held at the London Hilton on Park Lane, presented 99 Best Buy winners over an unprecedented 24 categories.

Every winner is a class-leader - and the 24 Products of the Year represent the pinnacle of their category. That's a lot of pinnacles - which is even better for you, because it means there's a ton of great kit out there for you to fill your house with...



Headphones

Best portable on-ears up to £100

AKG Y50 £80

What is it?

It's a pair of portable cans that put design and sound quality on an equal footing - and they're all the better for it. Don't be fooled by the looks (something of a departure for AKG, it has to be said) - these pack both style and substance. They are premium from start to finish, with aluminium ear-cups (which house hefty 40mm drivers), comfy leather ear-pads and a neat folding mechanism.

Why did it win?

The fact that they outperform many pricier competitors while still only costing £80 doesn't hurt. And neither does the level of that performance: the Y50s combine balance, insight and space with the kind of punch, rhythmic ability and downright listenability that almost forces toes to start tapping.

To find out more:

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But that's not to say that they can't do subtle, too. The Y50s handle orchestral music with the poise of a top conductor - revealing startling amounts of detail and openness. They're a top pair of headphones.

What the team say

"The Y50s don't put a foot wrong. Don't be fooled by the design: it's just a smokescreen for what is another pair of great-sounding AKG headphones"

Accessories

Best equipment support

Atacama Evoque Eco 60-40 £450

What is it?

It's a thing of beauty, that's what it is. Kit racks don't generally get an appreciative "ooh" out of the team, but this one did - and that's all down to its ultra high-quality build and materials.

The shelves are made from solid bamboo, and come in three shades - light, medium and a sultry dark, and are set off by the glossy black legs (available in a variety of lengths to suit your kit) and shiny steel cone caps and spikes. Even better, it's modular, too: you can add extra shelves for £150 each - so it can grow as your system does.

Why did it win?

It saw our Cyrus CDi/Roksan Caspian M2 reference system deliver a confident, insightful and hugely enjoyable sound - with punchy bass, nuanced midrange and clear, open top-end.

To find out more:

Visit www.atacama-audio.co.uk

Call 01455 283 251



What the team say

"It's pricier than some rivals, but we think it's well worth it for that stellar build quality and materials, not to mention the way it works with our kit"

Stereo speakers

Best floorstanders £1200+

Spendor A6R £2500

What are they?

Revamping an already successful product is always a risk - but for Spendor, this update of the Award-winning A6 speakers has paid off big-time. Visually there isn't a lot of difference - but the innards have been overhauled, and include a new 18cm mid/bass driver and re-engineered crossover.

Why did they win?

Because their performance is exceptional. They're surprisingly deep and punchy for their size, and that provides a solid foundation for the expressive midrange and refined, detailed treble. It all sits together into a really coherent whole, too - there are no sharp edges, and no unbalanced honks or booms.

And if dynamic clout floats your aural boat, then you're in for a treat. The original A6s were no slouches

in this department, but the A6Rs take that ability to a whole new level - doing a great job of contrasting bombastic choruses with nuanced, detailed verses.

Best of all, they're completely unflusterable, whether they're fed full-on classical pieces or weird, on-beat/off-beat fusion.

The A6Rs are a splendid pair of speakers that manage to do a heck of a lot exactly right. Give them an audition and you'll be left in no doubt as to where your money will be going...




What the team say

"The A6Rs show another level of dynamic attack. They keep a strong grip on bouncing basslines, with a low end that's both punchy and agile..."

To find out more:

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Future tech

International CES 2015

Our pick of the key trends likely to emerge at the world's biggest tech show

What Hi-Fi? will be on the ground in Las Vegas from January 4th to bring you all the best coverage from CES.

It's the annual curtain-raiser for the year in technology and we'll have a bigger presence at the show than ever before. As an official CES partner, we'll be hosting the International News Stage with our sister publication, *Stuff*, and we will also be announcing our Stars of CES on Thursday January 9th, the best of the show's specialist hi-fi and home cinema products. So what can we expect to see? Here's our pick of five key trends to look out for across CES.

1 4K FOR EVERYONE

The average price of a 4K TV is now £1600, according to the latest GfK research, with 100,000 4K TVs expected to be sold by the end of 2014. With this figure predicted to double in 2015, largely thanks to 50in+ TVs, expect to see a bigger percentage of 4K TVs in all the big-hitters' ranges for 2015.

We hope to hear more news about content, too. The top streaming providers are now delivering some Ultra HD content, but it wouldn't take you long to watch it, while Sony and Samsung have offered bespoke packages to their customers. But we need more. And what about 4K Blu-ray? Tipped for a 2015 release, an announcement at CES would be ideal.

2 CAR TECH

It's not just the home that's getting smarter, expect plenty of noise from car manufacturers too. We've seen the first cars to integrate streaming music with Rara Music, Napster and Spotify all making their way inside motors. What's more, Apple is now involved with its own CarPlay offering.

We expect to see more tie-ins and, hopefully, better quality services for music on the move and how we can control it. With Ford - creators of Ford Sync with Spotify - giving a CES keynote, it looks likely we'll hear a lot more from the car companies.

Streaming music has usurped the download in the public consciousness in 2014, and we expect to see this trend to continue apace at CES 2015

Stars of CES

2015

WHAT HI-FI?

is the New Black

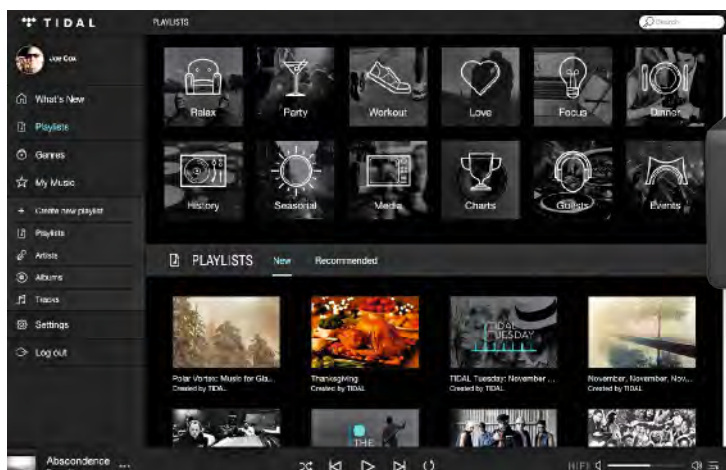
Seasons and new arrivals shake up relationships of Litchfield's prisoners anticipated second season.

and on your interest in: Dusk Till Dawn

1



2



* Amazon unveils the Echo

The retail giant has launched its interesting take on the wireless speaker with a voice-controlled device that's "always ready".
<http://whfcm/EchoSpeaker>



* Clearaudio phono stages

Clearaudio says it has radically reviewed the fundamentals of phono stage design with the £8995 Absolute Phono and Phono Inside.
<http://whfcm/AbsolutePhono>



3 NEXT-GEN TV

Always the biggest draw at the show, it's likely to be a case of evolution rather than revolution in the television world. But expect plenty of headline-grabbing TVs to appear, with more curved, Ultra HD and OLED sets as well as a full range of new 2015 flatscreen models.

We don't expect to see any plasma screens but we should see plenty more 4K LCDs, plus some of the first Quantum Dot displays - which looks likely to be the technology of choice for more affordable panels.

Curved TVs and bendable TVs have sprung surprises in previous years, so we'll be on the look-out for the next tech-twist - and it could be that 8K screens bring the wow factor, after LG showcased an 8K-ready set at IFA in September 2014.

Also expect to see new picture processing technologies to get the best from panels in 2015. Ensuring the best performance from SD and HD content on pixel-packed 4K screens is likely to be a top priority.

4 SUPER-SMART HOME

'Smart' has been a much-used (nay, over-used) word in the consumer electronics world for a good few years now... and we don't expect that to change any time soon. Smart Home technology has its own section at CES for the first time, with the booming multi-room audio market playing no small part. And now Apple is involved, having launched 'HomeKit' in iOS 8 in an effort to make the iPhone the remote control of the future home. We'd expect to see a wealth of apps and products in this market, and we look forward to seeing how multi-room audio and even video develop.

5 SUPERIOR, HIGH-RES SOUND QUALITY

Streaming music has usurped the download in the public consciousness in 2014, and we expect to see this trend continue apace at CES 2015 - hopefully with a renewed focus on audio quality.

CD-quality lossless audio would be a welcome addition to biggest mass-market players, most obviously Spotify, while high-res audio streaming is the logical next step for us, even if this remains a relatively niche market.

We expect to find out more about a new high-res audio offering from Meridian, while Neil Young's Pono service should soon be out of beta and ready to launch. Fascinating times.



Analysis

Gazing into the crystal ball of tech



Editor-in-Chief Andy Clough

I've lost track of the number of times I've been to CES, but the show never ceases to amaze and excite in equal measure. There's an element of hyperbole, of course, but it's also a great showcase for what's in store over the coming year. So I'm going to make a few rash predictions (which I may regret!).

4K picks up momentum

I was never convinced by 3D TV (not least because I hated watching it and it gave me headaches), but I'm pretty sure there's mileage in 4K. Yes, I know there's not much content to watch yet, but that will improve over time. The buying director from one of the big UK retail chains recently told me that next year 80 per cent of the new TVs they stock will be 4K-capable to cope with demand.

One of the big UK retail chains says that next year around 80% of the TVs it stocks will be 4K-capable

High-res streaming on tap

With broadband speeds getting faster and streaming sound quality improving, the music industry may (finally) wake up to the reality of how we listen to music. Services such as Qobuz and Tidal are paving the way with CD-quality streaming, and Meridian could open the door to high-res streaming across multiple platforms. But the additional cost may be a deterrent for many.

Dolby Atmos remains niche

I'll stick my neck out on this one - good as it sounds, consumers will balk at installing yet more speakers into their living rooms and happily live with 2.1/5.1 systems, or even a soundbar. Atmos will remain the preserve of AV enthusiasts. Think I'm wrong? We shall see.



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



* YouTube Music Key

YouTube's own subscription-based music streaming service links with Google Play Music to offer over 30 million tracks. <http://whf.cm/YouTubeMusicKey>

1 Denon CEOL and CEOL Piccolo from £300

Denon has added to its CEOL range with the CEOL N9 and CEOL Piccolo N4. Both can support high-resolution 24-bit/192kHz files, Bluetooth, AirPlay and Spotify Connect. The CEOL N9 features a CD player while the CEOL Piccolo is purely a network connected system. Both are available without speakers. <http://whf.cm/CEOLWireless>



2 Arcam Solo Bar, CDS27 and UDP411 from £800

Arcam says its new soundbar is "something better" than the competition. It features six drive units, aptX Bluetooth, four HDMI inputs and a mic for calibration. <http://whf.cm/ArcamSolo>. The CDS27 CD player and UDP411 Blu-ray player feature Burr Brown DACs and CD/SACD playback. They can also connect to networks to stream stored content. <http://whf.cm/ArcamCDS27>

TOP 5 New launches

3 Paradigm Prestige speakers from £1300

Paradigm's Prestige range of speakers comprises the 95F, 85F and 75F floorstanders, 15B bookshelf and 55C and 45C centre speakers. The new range benefits from Paradigm's Perforated Phase-Aligning Tweeter Lens which protects the aluminium-dome tweeter and acts as a phase plug. The minimalist, non-resonant cabinets are handmade in Canada. <http://whf.cm/ParadigmPrestige>



4 Napster streaming in Audis

£free Audi and Rhapsody have reached an agreement that will see the Napster streaming service being made available on all 2015 models of the A6, A7 and TT cars. Users will have access to a catalogue of more than 32 million songs. Other content will include audio books and tailored playlists. And it can all be controlled via the Audi's in-car media interface. <http://whf.cm/AudiNapster>



5 Loewe's new 4K Ultra HD TV range £tbc

After going through a lengthy restructuring process, Loewe has confirmed its new TV range for 2014/15. In doing so, it has become the first manufacturer to have a range consisting solely of 4K TVs. There are four ranges: Art, Connect, Reference and curved Masterpiece. The sizes for the Art range are the only ones confirmed for now, coming in 40in, 48in and 55in variants. The Art range features 'super-fast' channel changing, triple/dual-channel 'Assist Media 2015' operating system and GUI and Smart TV MediaNet portal. A Smart 'tv2move' feature allows you stream whatever you're watching to a tablet or smartphone. <http://whf.cm/Loewe4K>



airstream A100

...the spread of sound is wonderfully open and wide - far wider than with any rival. And on that spacious soundfield the music is crisp and clear. The level of detail is stunning, and it conveys a tune with a great deal of composure and refinement.

What Hi-Fi? Magazine, December 2014



What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision
August 2014, December 2014



January 2014



July 2014



August 2014



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

THE BRIDGE BETWEEN HIFI & WIFI

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

SOUNDBARS £600-£800

SUPERTEST





BIG SOUND MADE SIMPLE



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

What's on test

Canton DM 900
£700

Dali Kubik One
£800

Focal Dimension
£800

Libratone Diva
£650

Monitor Audio ASB-2
£800

Sonos Playbar
£600

Yamaha YSP-2500
£800

Soundbars have significantly increased in terms of popularity during the last couple of years. No surprise really, as TV companies get ever closer to turning screens into wafer-thin units - the sound suffers, naturally.

What's the solution? Not everyone is able or willing to pack their room with a full surround package. A soundbar is a fine alternative. Here we're looking at high-end soundbars, and on the following pages we put together seven of them, priced between £600 and £800. These handy pieces of high-tech kit promise to save you space, while providing a worthwhile performance-boost to your overall sound quality.

Now you can have your cake and hear it.

The Special One

Tannoy Revolution DC6T SE



Enhanced Dual Concentric™ drive unit with additional magnet providing improved sensitivity, crisper response, wider dynamic range and even faster transient attack than the standard DC6T. Now that really is special!

Special Edition graphic clearly indicating that the DC6T SE owner is a person of demanding and exclusive taste.

Crossover especially re-engineered and optimised to the improved driver complement.

Top-adjustable spikes and large locking wheel making set up especially easy.

Tannoy logo, indicating built by Tannoy and incorporating 85 years of loudspeaker engineering expertise. So clearly very special indeed.

Improved bass driver with a twin-magnet motor system, providing exceptional low frequency control and accuracy.

A very special and substantial plinth to improve stability, stereo focus and sound-staging.

btw ...the speaker is priced at £999 making it a bit of a special bargain.

Recognition for special performance -2012 & 2013 What Hi-Fi Award for Best floorstanding speaker.

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2012

STEREO SPEAKERS

BEST FLOORSTANDER £700-£1500

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
WHATHIFI.COM
AWARDS 2013

STEREO SPEAKERS

BEST FLOORSTANDER £800-£1500



TANNOY®

tannoy.com



Canton DM 900 £700



At this price, soundbars tend to look pretty menacing - many of them are chunky beasts. But not the Canton DM 900. What you get is a short, slim bar that won't block the bottom of your TV, with a separate subwoofer for muscle.

Inside the bar there are two 19mm tweeters and four 50cm drivers. The bar can be wall-mounted, or placed straight on a rack. The sub, meanwhile, has a 23cm downward-firing woofer.

These are well-made boxes. The bar has enough metal to belie its delicate appearance. The sub is guaranteed to win any stubbing contest with your toes. At the back of the bar are analogue RCA, coax and optical connections, and Canton supplies cables for all three.

Long-distance operator

You can go Bluetooth too: aptX-compatibility means you can benefit from higher-quality streaming. There's also a 'sub out' socket for the subwoofer, but you don't have to use it; the sub can also connect wirelessly, with a maximum range of 10m. We're pleased to see a proper remote control included:



it's a weighty device that fits nicely into your palm, and the buttons are smooth. It's not entirely intuitive, however. The EQ, dynamic range control and lip-sync settings are hidden, and you must hold down a specific button to unlock them. Even then, you need the instructions to help decipher them. The tiny display on the soundbar doesn't tell you that 'EQ-3', for instance, is for set-ups on racks. Still, once you're all set up, things go smoothly. Well, almost.

Time, gentlemen, please

Canton recommends 15-20 hours of listening to run in the system. We oblige - but even after a weekend of continuous play, we aren't entirely satisfied with the performance. The sound is thin, and a bit disjointed. The integration between the bar and sub isn't wholly convincing. Bumping up the bass or messing with the EQ doesn't do much, besides thinly masking a lack of balance.

We put on *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* to watch Robert Redford arguing with fellow government officials. The result isn't particularly

convincing - subtlety is lacking, as are dynamics. The sense of indignation in the voices is sanded down significantly. It's not all bad, though. The treble is well balanced, never sounding hard or making us wince at the top end. There's a good sense of space, but similarly priced rivals outclass this.

Pressing the 'virtual surround' button helps to widen the soundfield a little, but it will cost you clarity of voice and reduce subtlety just a little further.

We like the idea of this Canton. The space-saving design of the bar is appreciated, and there are benefits to being able to position the subwoofer as you wish. But at this price, the DM 900 is lacking compared with the competition.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Smart looks; solid build; it's nice to have a proper remote control

AGAINST Thin, ill-balanced sound; lacks subtlety; counter-intuitive settings

VERDICT This is a neat set-up from Canton, but it's too pricey



Dali Kubik One £800



Dali has come up with some great kit over the years, mostly stereo and surround speakers, so we aren't surprised by its move into soundbars.

Dali says the Kubik One is not exactly a soundbar, however, but that it's a system in its own right rather than a mere extension of your TV. Whatever the appropriate nomenclature, one thing is for sure: we think it's brilliant.

Sounds from space

We dive straight in to *Guardians of the Galaxy* and are taken by the size of the sound: a wide, spacious soundstage gives jets and spaceships ample room to manoeuvre. It's an accurate sound, too. Effects ping around with precision, aided by impressive clarity, which also makes the most of speech. There's ample low-end heft as well, but it's nicely controlled. Add good timing and agility, and you have a punchy, dynamic soundbar. Dali hasn't just focused on the sound, however, the exterior is just as appealing. Soundbars don't tend to be particularly attractive, but we think this one is pretty. Those grilles are

removable: red, white or black are standard, but you can also choose from six others, from purple to lime green.

A single piece of aluminium forms the chassis - designed to keep walls thin yet sturdy enough to suppress unwanted resonances. It's heavy and solidly built, with a luxurious finish to match its price.

Pretty looks isn't all

It's not just a pretty face, though. This is a serious bit of kit, fitted with two 25mm soft-dome tweeters and two 13cm wood-fibre drivers. At the back is a fair offering of connections: inputs include two optical and one analogue RCA. We're pleased to see a micro-USB input too, which means you can hardwire a Mac or PC into the Kubik One. Three cheers if you've got a library of high-res tracks on there: the Dali can handle tracks up to 24-bit/96kHz. The Kubik One handles aptX Bluetooth (for higher-quality streaming) too, while a sub-out socket lets you hook up your own subwoofer if you feel the need. You shouldn't have to, however. There's a switch to adjust the bass depending on the position of the

soundbar: 'Neutral' position offers the least bass, and is best when the soundbar is near a wall (there are keyhole-type mounts at the back).

'Bass Boost' is best for filling large rooms, while the halfway point is 'Bass Enhance' which gives a balanced sound in our set-up (on a rack, in front of a TV). At 16cm high, the Dali might conceivably justify its own shelf, however.

We're disappointed to find a plastic 'credit-card' remote, but Dali assures us a 'proper' remote will be brought out, and existing customers will get a free upgrade.

The Dali Kubik One is a massive success, overall. Design and features impress us, and we love how it sounds. It's a gorgeous package. Nice one, Dali.



USE IT WITH

Sony KD-65S9005B

Smarter, more stylish and a better performer than the average 4K television.

Rating ★★★★★

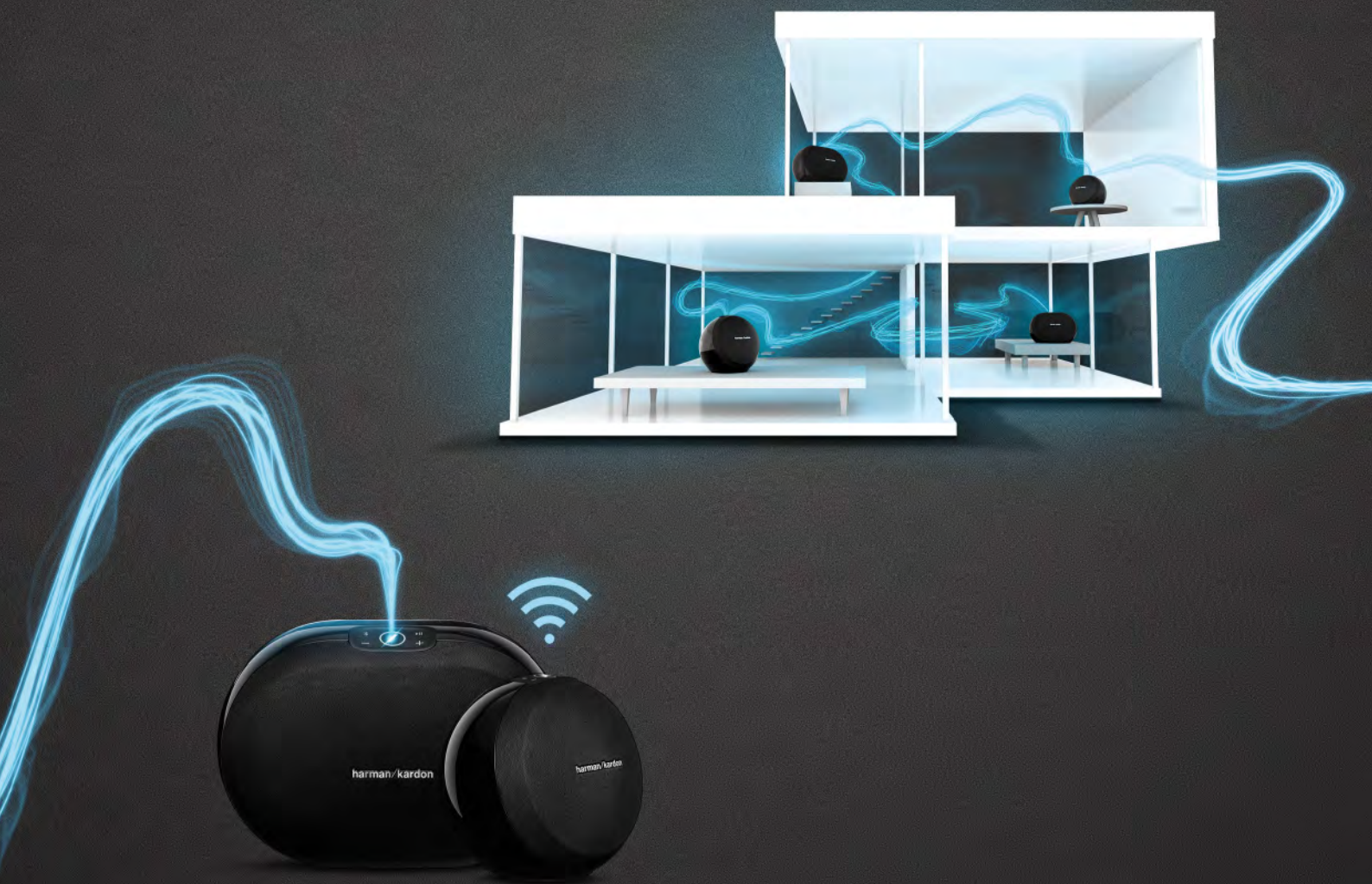
FOR Involving, engaging sound; good number of connections; easy to use; good looks

AGAINST Poor remote (for now)

VERDICT Dali's entry into soundbars is - not surprisingly for a company with such a good hi-fi reputation - a resounding success

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Focal Dimension £800

★★★★★

We first tested the Focal Dimension in our October 2014 issue, and we loved it enough to hand it five stars. But we believe in tough love, so we're dragging it back out to fight. Will it hold its score?

More traditional hi-fi companies are now turning their hand to high-end soundbars. French company Focal is one of the latest to do so, and it seems all that experience with loudspeakers has paid off, because this is a great soundbar.

Into another dimension

The Dimension is far from your typical box – it's huge, 116cm wide, and 11.5cm tall. Those with small racks or tiny TVs need not apply. Focal suggests using it with 50in-plus screens. We agree.

Assuming you have a suitable surface, the Dimension slants back at an angle, propped up by the supplied feet. Alternatively you can spend an extra £300 on Focal's matching subwoofer. The two slot together and become a soundbase for your telly to sit on.

Build quality is very impressive. The chassis is made of a single piece of brushed aluminium, and feels very

The Focal Dimension is huge: a mighty 116cm wide and 11.5cm tall

sturdy. In contrast, the remote control is disappointing: it's a tiny little plastic card. Not what you expect for the money.

Focal makes up for this, to a degree, with a fancy touch panel. Wave your hand over the right-hand side of the bar and this lights up, ready for you to control volume, engage night mode (reduced dynamics) and select input.

Switching the play

Connections are decent: HDMI in, HDMI out (ARC), optical in, 3.5mm in, and sub line out. Unlike some rivals, there's no built-in Bluetooth. Focal does include an external aptX-friendly Bluetooth dongle, which plugs into the 3.5mm input.

Set-up is mostly straightforward, until you get to the selection of switches at the back. These correspond with how and where the bar is positioned, and your listening position. There are also settings for how damped your room is, and whether or not you use a subwoofer. Focal claims to use processing to manipulate the sound and place you in a bubble. Does it work? Well, it's hard for any soundbar to match a traditional 5.1

setup, but you do get an impressive soundfield. The Dimension pumps out a huge sound. It has no trouble filling large spaces: it may not be true surround sound, but it envelops you to a decent degree. It also offers plenty of detail and power. The metallic pings of gunfire are convincing, precise and punchy. The robotic suits in *Edge of Tomorrow* stomp with deep bass. Switch to music with a spot of Dr John over Bluetooth, and the Dimension demonstrates great fluidity and finesse. It's a fun, engaging listen.

Despite tough competition, the Focal Dimension has held its ground – and its fifth star. If you're looking for an expansive sound for your TV, it will do the job very nicely indeed.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Striking design; fun, finessed and exciting sound; impressive bass weight; great with music and movies; has lip-sync adjustment

AGAINST Bluetooth comes via a separate dongle; cramped input panel; cheap remote

VERDICT A high-end, high-quality soundbar

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Stream Xa



Libratone Diva £650



Ever wanted a sheep in your living room? Yes, so have we. But they're not very practical. Instead, we refer you to the Diva, the latest device from Libratone, makers of woolly audio kit.

Like every Libratone product before it, the Diva sports a woolly cover. It's removable, and comes in many colours. You get 'Pepper Black' as standard, along with a voucher code to claim another colour for free (within the EU).

It's easy to remove the upholstery and look at the insides, which feature two ribbon tweeters at the ends, two 75mm midrange drivers, and a 13cm woofer at the centre. There are also clamshell-shaped internal reflectors, designed to raise and spread the sound.

Woolly thinking

Cloth cover aside, the Diva is made primarily of plastic. It doesn't feel as sturdy as some metallic rivals, but it's weighty enough to reassure us of its quality. There are two holes at the back, for a plug-in stand that stops the Diva from falling on its back and rocking like a turtle. Alternatively, you can plug in the



USE IT WITH

Apple iPhone 6

While it might not break any new ground when it comes to specs, its performance is hard to fault.

bundled wall-mount. There's an optical input and a 3.5mm analogue alternative, too, and the Diva has a bunch of wireless tricks up its insulated sleeve. It connects to your home's wi-fi network for AirPlay and DLNA, Spotify Connect and HTC Connect.

Release your inner Diva

Alternatively, you can stream directly to the Diva with Bluetooth - it supports aptX for superior-quality Bluetooth streaming. There's also near-field communication (NFC) for relatively swift pairing. As always, aptX and NFC only apply if your device is compatible.

We had a few issues setting up the unit. The bundled quick-start guide is overly simple and doesn't quite explain everything you need to get things going.

You're supposed to get the Diva set up on your network with the help of the Libratone app (free on Android and iOS) but initially we couldn't get soundbar and app to shake hands. Once connected, the app lets you customise the sound: at the most basic level, you can change volume levels (there is no

supplied remote handset) and apply basic EQ presets. You can also input information about the Diva's height and position in the room, to adjust sound.

How does it sound? Pretty good. The level of agility and punch is enough for us to take notice. There's no harshness to the treble, and bass notes are not boomy. There's a nice sense of space, too.

What we want, though, is greater solidity. Movie soundtracks don't quite have the punch when compared with the Dali Kubik One or Yamaha YSP-2500. We'd also like a bit more subtlety.

Overall, though, the Libratone Diva is a success. Bar a few connection issues, this is a strong one-box sound system. If you want streaming in style, check this.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Agile, exciting sound; good looks

AGAINST Needs greater solidity and subtlety; connection issues

VERDICT If your main concern is music streaming, this is worth investigating. And, of course, stroking



Monitor Audio ASB-2 £800



The Monitor Audio ASB-2 was one of the first premium soundbars on the market. At a time when soundbars offered either features or sound quality, it gave us both. It justified its £1000 price tag, we fell in love, and it went on to win one of our 2013 Awards.

Heavyweight champ

But a lot can change in a year. There are now quite a few premium soundbars, and despite the old champ's new price of £800, it must prove itself once again. Does it have what it takes?

The first thing that comes to mind isn't the ASB-2's performance, but its size: 18cm tall and over 100cm wide. You'll have to clear a shelf below the TV, or put it on a wall. The wall-mounting bracket isn't included, but you get a large rubber pad to stabilise the bar on a shelf. It's also suitably heavy, at more than 11kg. Factor in the classy finish and we're talking serious perceived value.

You certainly get a lot for your money. There are a generous number of connections: three HDMI in, one HDMI out, optical in, coaxial in, analogue RCA

in, 3.5mm in, and sub out. AirPlay and DLNA compatibility means you can stream over your home network, too.

Sadly there's no Bluetooth, but you do get a proper remote control with proper buttons. It brings up an on-screen menu if you're plugged into a TV using HDMI. The menu is where you can tinker with various settings, including EQ levels. As for audio performance, it's time for good news and bad news. The good: all the praise we heaped upon the ASB-2 a year ago remains valid - there's an undeniable abundance of power and weight. This is an authoritative sound.

Crashing and smashing

The sense of scale is impressive: there's a good spread of sound, even without the soundbar's '3D Audio' mode. You also get a superb level of detail, no matter what you watch. From crashing and smashing to sedate and emotive, the ASB-2 offers a subtle performance with drama and excitement. The bad news for Monitor Audio is that the competition is fierce. The ASB-2 doesn't do anything wrong on its own, but put it next to the latest and

brightest and the cracks appear. Focal's Dimension, for instance, sounds a lot more expansive. The Yamaha YSP-2500 offers greater movie excitement thanks to its convincing surround sound. The Libratone Diva and Sonos Playbar can match and beat the Monitor Audio ASB-2's streaming skills.

Then there's the Dali Kubik One, next to which the Monitor Audio is less expressive and detailed than we'd like, especially with voices. The ASB-2's rich, weighty sound now feels thick and heavy in comparison.

And so it is with regret that we must take away the Monitor Audio's fifth star. It's had a great run, but the competition is suddenly ruthless.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Solid build; three HDMI inputs; AirPlay and DLNA; powerful, authoritative sound; good bass despite lack of separate subwoofer

AGAINST Now outclassed by best newcomers

VERDICT Still great, but the fresh competition is ruthlessly capable



Sonos Playbar £600

★★★★★

Sonos has always done things its own way. It doesn't care how many inputs you want. It doesn't care about bouncing beams or 5.1 surround sound. When the Playbar first came out, there was nothing quite like it - and there still isn't.

We've always applauded and respected Sonos for being different. But now there are plenty of similarly priced rivals, it's time to reconsider.

The Sonos way

What is the Sonos way? At heart, it's all about streaming massive amounts of music. That's the Playbar's party trick: it will play everything on your networked computer, with the exception of high-resolution tracks. You can send audio directly from iOS and Android devices. With the help of the Sonos app, you have access to internet radio, Spotify, Last.fm, Napster, 7digital, Aupeo, Deezer... you get the point. Potentially millions of tracks, any time.

Forget your TV, says Sonos, it would seem. There's only one way to get sound from your TV, and that's via the single optical input. All other inputs will have

to go into your TV first, and then to the Playbar. It's a gorgeous unit, nicely made and minimally styled - it can be wall-mounted or laid flat in front of your TV. The built-in accelerometers sense the orientation and adjust the sound accordingly. We think it sounds best with the wider edge facing out, so lay it on the thin edge if you can.

In terms of atmosphere

Set up is very easy using the Sonos app (free on Android and iOS), which holds your hand through every step - even with our occasionally stubborn network we managed to connect right away. But how does it sound? Very good indeed. It's effortlessly better than any TV's sound. The soundstage is impressively wide, and there's plenty of detail and weight. Tonal balance is also convincing.

Elsewhere, it's a matter of atmosphere over impact. The Playbar can handle explosions with enough punch and weight, but that's not its big strength. Instead it's impressive at subtler things: full-bodied voices and good integration. Load up some music and the Playbar

really sings - it's an insightful listen, as separate strands of tracks have their own space on the soundstage, but fit together as a cohesive whole.

Sonos has a nice habit of updating its kit, and this latest revision increases in dynamism, precision and clarity. It was never particularly keen on the lowest bass notes, and this remains the case.

It's clearly a music lover's soundbar - but if you want to improve movie sound, you can add the Sonos Sub (£600), or even two (£250) Sonos Play:3 speakers.

Despite its obvious limitations, we still have a lot of love for the Sonos Playbar. It's the most affordable on test here, for starters. It's beautifully made, and lovely to use as well. A fine product.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Stylish and minimalist; thoughtful little features; detailed and dynamic soundstage

AGAINST Not the most forceful sound; only limited connectivity

VERDICT Time and strong competition hasn't diminished this soundbar

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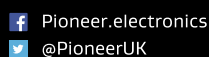


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October 2014

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Yamaha YSP-2500 £800



When you get into this price range, soundbars tend to do a bit of everything. That price tag needs justifying, after all. And so many of them aren't content just bumping up the sound of your movies: they're music systems too.

But not the Yamaha YSP-2500. Its primary concern is how your films sound. Yamaha knows a thing or two about surround sound: its YSP range of soundbars has impressed us, and its latest effort won one of our 2014 Awards.

Low-profile performer

From the front, it's discreet enough. Its low profile means it won't block your TV's picture. Get a little closer and this thing is heftier than you'd think. What it lacks in height, it compensates for with depth - and a wireless subwoofer.

Build and finish quality is impeccable, looking and feeling every penny of its £800. There are 16 speakers under the grille, each powered by 2W of amplification. To the left is a handy display: small, but bright and legible.

The wireless subwoofer is discreet enough to be tucked away in a corner,



The wireless subwoofer is discreet enough to be tucked away into a corner

but the bar itself wants to be right in front of your TV - for the clearest, most open sound, don't hide it in a rack.

While most soundbars are plug-and-play affairs, Yamaha's way is more complicated. Sure, you can plug things in: there are three HDMI inputs, an HDMI output, two optical ins and one coaxial in, along with a pair of RCA plugs. The fun starts when you connect the microphone and run room calibration, just like with an AV receiver. Yamaha's success lies in the way it bounces beams off walls to reflect sound around the room. The more accurate the calibration the more impressive the surround effect.

Effective sound calibration

After demanding you leave the room, the soundbar emits a series of test tones. This is to figure out the surroundings and adjust its performance accordingly. Results are largely accurate, although the detailed menus let you manually tinker with each channel. It works. The soundfield is expansive and genuinely emulates a 5.1 surround system. It puts to shame the 'virtual surround' options

we usually hear from soundbars. There's an impressive sense of height, and sound effects are placed with startling accuracy. Bullets ping and whiz across the room. There's also power and impact: explosions hit hard and you'll wonder when the neighbours will come knocking.

What about the rest? The YSP-2500 is not a master of refinement. For music or more sedate films, the Dali Kubik One manages a more natural experience. The Yamaha's voices are a little harder, too.

Yet this is about as close as you can get to a home cinema surround-sound without getting a home cinema system. Only, sometimes you need something more than just wrap-around surround effects. Sometimes.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Exciting and immersive surround sound; impressive sense of scale; plenty of punch

AGAINST The very best offer subtler, more refined character; dialogue could be warmer

VERDICT Yamaha's done it again: a very talented soundbar with a great surround sound

TEST VERDICT



THE WINNER

Dali Kubik One

£800 ★★★★★

Whatever you want to call it, the **Dali Kubik One** is a class act: great sound, good looks and well connected

At this price, you really have to be quite good to survive. And we're pleased to see most of today's contestants are very good: there are four five-star ratings, two four-stars and a single three-star. Whether you're looking for a big movie sound or for music streaming, you'll find something here.

Leading the pack is the Dali Kubik One. The company may be reluctant to call it a soundbar, but the point is moot: it's a brilliant one. Its sound is immersive and engaging with film and music alike. It offers a good set of connections. And to top it off, it looks lovely. What's not to like? It takes a lot to beat an Award-winner, but that just shows how much Dali has achieved.

Speaking of which, the Award-winning Yamaha YSP-2500 takes a close second place - but that's no indication that we love it any less. It's not an all-round sound system like the Dali, but it is an all-enveloping one.

For movies, its talents are unmatched. We never cease to be impressed by its accurately calibrated effects placement. This is the closest you can get to a full 5.1 set-up without actually being surrounded by speakers.

In third place, we have the Focal Dimension and the Sonos Playbar. The Focal is an excellent

soundbar with great sound and good connections. We love its large, spacious sound and its authoritative delivery. It just loses out when it comes to subtle expression. Oh, and its size might be a little intimidating.

The Sonos is a wonderful streaming system and has price on its side. Sure, it only has one input for your TV - but it also has access to all the world's music, all tied up in a lovely user interface. It will surely bring joy to anyone prioritising bassinets over bullets.

Feature-complete

Time to take one step down to four stars, and we find ourselves in the company of the Monitor Audio ASB-2 and Libratone's woolly Diva. It's the Monitor Audio that has the upper hand here. With its array of inputs and streaming options - and its large, powerful sound - it is the more complete offering.

That's the reason we gave it an Award in 2013. But as the standards have been raised by the likes of Dali and Focal, it has struggled to stay on top.

The Libratone Diva finds itself in an awkward position. Its relative lack of connections can be put down to its streaming abilities, but in that

arena it is entirely outclassed by the Sonos Playbar, which sounds better and is easier to operate. However, we do like its performance and its comparatively low price, and that woolly cover doesn't hurt.

You can Canton it

Finally we get to the Canton DM 900, which gets a decent three-star rating. It's not a bad soundbar by any means. Its sound is perfectly listenable. It certainly fulfils the function of boosting the sound of your TV. And as for connections, it's not too stingy either.

But in this company it's outclassed. For £700, the sound quality pumped out by the class-leaders is far beyond anything offered by this small-bar, fat-sub combination. If Canton can drop the price could do well, but today it goes home with a few bruises.

Now let's get something straight: soundbars aren't supposed to replace a proper speaker set-up. Instead, they're for people who don't have the space or inclination to put boxes and cables everywhere. If you're one of these people, and you have up to £800 to spare, you've got plenty of fine choices here.

**Canton DM 900****£700 ★★★★★**

Inputs Optical, coaxial, analogue RCA • **Outputs** subwoofer • **Wireless** Bluetooth • **Wireless subwoofer** No • **Remote control** Yes • **Dimensions (whd)** 6x 89 x 6.5cm (main unit) 33 x 27 x 27cm (subwoofer)

Sound	■	■	■	■	■
Features	■	■	■	■	■
Build	■	■	■	■	■

**Dali Kubik One****£800 ★★★★★**

Inputs Optical x2, analogue RCA, microUSB • **Outputs** subwoofer • **Wireless** Bluetooth • **Wireless subwoofer** No • **Remote control** Yes • **Dimensions (whd)** 16 x 98 x 10cm

Sound	■	■	■	■	■
Features	■	■	■	■	■
Build	■	■	■	■	■

**Focal Dimension****£800 ★★★★★**

Inputs HDMI, optical, 3.5mm • **Outputs** HDMI (ARC), subwoofer • **Wireless** Bluetooth via dongle • **Wireless subwoofer** optional • **Remote control** Yes • **Dimensions (whd)** 12 x 116 x 12cm

Sound	■	■	■	■	■
Features	■	■	■	■	■
Build	■	■	■	■	■

**Libratone Diva****£650 ★★★★★**

Inputs Optical, 3.5mm • **Outputs** N/A • **Wireless** Bluetooth, AirPlay, DLNA • **Wireless subwoofer** No • **Remote control** No • **Dimensions (whd)** 16 x 99 x 10cm

Sound	■	■	■	■	■
Features	■	■	■	■	■
Build	■	■	■	■	■

**Monitor Audio ASB-2****£800 ★★★★★**

Inputs HDMI x3, optical, coaxial, analogue RCA • **Outputs** HDMI (ARC), subwoofer • **Wireless** AirPlay, DLNA • **Wireless subwoofer** No • **Remote control** Yes • **Dimensions (whd)** 101 x 19 x 17cm

Sound	■	■	■	■	■
Features	■	■	■	■	■
Build	■	■	■	■	■

**Sonos Playbar****£600 ★★★★★**

Inputs Optical, ethernet x2 • **Outputs** N/A • **Wireless** wi-fi • **Wireless subwoofer** optional • **Remote control** no • **Dimensions (whd)** 9 x 90 x 14cm

Sound	■	■	■	■	■
Features	■	■	■	■	■
Build	■	■	■	■	■

**Yamaha YSP-2500****£800 ★★★★★**

Inputs HDMI x3, optical x2, coaxial, RCA • **Outputs** HDMI, subwoofer, headphone • **Wireless** Bluetooth • **Wireless subwoofer** Yes • **Remote control** Yes • **Dimensions (hwd)** 7 x 94 x 14cm (main unit) 44 x 15 x 35cm (subwoofer)

Sound	■	■	■	■	■
Features	■	■	■	■	■
Build	■	■	■	■	■

'BAR OR 'BASE?

Not all soundbars are created equal. Some are massive blocks, mounted on the wall or sitting on a shelf under your TV. Many are slender enough to be placed right in front of the TV without blocking it, but these are usually accompanied by separate subwoofers, which act as the muscle in the sound department. But what if you don't have a spare shelf? Maybe you don't want to drill holes into your wall. Or perhaps you're aghast at the idea of having a big black box on the floor of your living room. In these cases, you should consider a soundbase. These do the same job as a soundbar, but are made flat enough to act as a sonic pedestal for your TV. It's not particularly elegant, but it solves that problem.

SYSTEM BUILDER**TV****Samsung UE48H6400 £700****★★★★★**

Our favourite TV of the year is an ideal screen for your Blu-ray films and Netflix.

**Blu-ray player****Sony BDP-S7200 £220****★★★★★**

A talented disc-spinner with heaps of features and a brilliantly subtle picture.

**Smartphone****Sony Xperia Z3 Free on contract****★★★★★**

If you're streaming music over Bluetooth, do it in style with this superb smartphone.

Total build £1720

Travel Agents



Bose Soundlink On-ear

£220 ★★★★★

Don't worry if you're put off by the flesh-coloured fabric on the Soundlinks, as some of our test team were. There is a darker alternative. Thankfully, the fabric feels good quality.

The Soundlinks are a surprisingly compact pair of cans, designed to sit on your ears instead of enveloping them. They fold up into a petite package too, and come with small carry pouch.

Flick the power switch and a female assistant chirps up to help guide you through the set-up process. She'll tell you the battery level, the source connected and can also let you know who's trying to call before you pick up. That's more than many rivals offer. A big thumbs-up.

Battery life is impressive too. Bose claims around 15 hours of playtime, and that a full charge takes only an hour and a half.

Play Jay-Z's *Big Pimpin'* and there's real intent and swagger to the track. Bass sounds solid and weighty but well judged. There's a good sense of clarity and detail, plus an even tonal balance which lends itself well to all manner of music.

The Philips M2BTs have the edge in terms of overall clarity and dynamics, but the Boses are still talented and deserve to be taken seriously.

VERDICT Bose goes Bluetooth with some success – these headphones are a very decent shout

House of Marley Liberate XLBT

£170 ★★★★★

House Of Marley's Liberate XLBTs allow you to go wireless and help save the planet at the same time. The inserts for each earpiece use wood approved by the FSC (Forest Stewardship Council), while the headband, earpieces and carry pouch all use 'REWIND', the company's own fabric, made from reclaimed materials.

Unfortunately, any feeling of satisfaction disappears the moment you power them up and play music. They're hugely disappointing. Small-scale and compressed, the Liberate XLBTs seem afraid to put their head above the parapet.

Stream Sam Smith's *Money On My Mind* and the normally sprightly piano play lacks any real get-up-and-go. Percussion sounds sombre instead of sparkly. The whole track is delivered like it's wrapped in cotton wool. Bass notes sound loose and ill-defined – and there's a haze to the sound that robs it of any clarity. Play Feeder's *Fires* and the track sounds even more compressed than the 'Extreme Quality' Spotify stream, as if the band's playing inside a wardrobe. It's a shame, because the XLBTs are well made, comfortable and don't heat your ears unduly. But that's scant consolation for inferior sound.

VERDICT The Marleys miss their mark with sub-standard sound quality. Cast your gaze elsewhere

Jabra Revo Wireless

£160 ★★★★★

Tapping and swiping are actions more associated with the touchscreen of a tablet or smartphone than a pair of headphones. The Jabra Revo Wireless 'phones don't have a screen, but they can be controlled through a touch-sensitive surface. Slide your finger clockwise around the outer edge of the right earcup and volume increases. Going the opposite way takes it down. Tapping the front edge twice skips a track, while tapping the rear pings you back.

The whole system works rather well – you feel more confident using this than you do the equivalent system on a pair of JBL S400BTs.

Build quality is okay, but the plastics don't feel that solid. On the positive side, our ears only became lukewarm after prolonged use.

Musically, the Revo Wireless headphones do not offend. Lows don't sound fat or boomy, nor do highs sound sharp or bright. Dynamically they feel restricted though, and while detail levels are okay, our overall opinion is this doesn't make for a very memorable listening experience. Tracks such as Prince's *1999* should sound full of beans, but here this '80s synth-pop classic never really gets out of first gear.

VERDICT The Revos incorporate a clever design but don't quite have the sound quality to back it up

All these Bluetooth wireless headphones make it easy to hear your tunes when you're on the move, but can any of them help you book a trip to music paradise? We've had a listen, and have a view



JBL Synchros S400BT
£200 ★★★★★

Apart from sounding good, headphones need to be a comfortable fit. And this is the first area where the Synchros fail to deliver. The earpads and headband are soft enough, but we found our ears warming up after just a few tracks. The phones also feel quite loose on your ears.

And where the Jabra Revo Wireless integrates touch-sensitive controls with some degree of success, the JBL S400BTs don't execute this feature so well. The insert of the left earcup is a control panel, but it's not always responsive and sometimes misinterprets commands.

There's a 2.5mm jack for the supplied headphone cable, but no in-line mic or control on the cable, which is a bit of a shame.

Bassheads will get a kick from the exciting presentation on offer here. There's a real sense of power, but problems arise when the music calls for greater control and finesse. Emeli Sandé's *Maybe* requires delicacy and a subtle, tender tone. Instead the background kick-drum simply overwhelms the rest of the track.

The JBLs aren't bad headphones, but the bass needs taming and those operational and design issues need ironing out too.

VERDICT A patchy performance from these JBLs: the fit isn't quite right and neither is the sound



Philips Fidelio M2BT
£185 ★★★★★

Headphone pricing is becoming ridiculously unpredictable. Take Philips's M2BT Bluetooth headphones. They were originally reviewed and deemed worthy of a *What Hi-Fi?* Award at £250; as we write this they're being sold online for just £185. Who knows what price they'll be by the time you're reading this review?

What we do know is these are most definitely Award-worthy. It's all about the level of detail, refinement and clarity. There's none of the brightness which can taint wireless sound. Highs are crisp and clean, but not abrasive. Play Tom Odell's *Real Love* and his vocal is beautifully rendered, with real expression and emotion.

Let rip with something more forceful and direct, such as Kings of Leon's *Don't Matter* and the M2BTs pick up the pace, delivering wailing guitars and punchy drum kicks with real verve.

The memory foam earpads are cosy and well balanced, the right-earcup controls practical and the external-noise-sensing, volume-adjusting mic effective. These 'phones offer an attractive blend of excellent build, useful features and fantastic sound quality - they're still the wireless headphones to beat at this level.

VERDICT These Award-winning cans prove their worth time after time - they're a superb buy



SMS Audio Sync by 50 Cent
£160 ★★★★★

Anything Dr Dre can do, 50 Cent can do better. Or not, as the SMS Audio Syncs would suggest...

Out of the box, you're immediately wondering where your money's gone. Build quality is bettered by on-ears costing half as much. The plastics used feel flimsy and lightweight (and not in a good way), and the earpads insubstantial. Combine this with an overly tight fit and we find the Syncs fairly uncomfortable.

You won't be surprised to hear that these 'phones focus a lot of their attention on bass. Delivery is muscular and powerful and there's a sense of aggression, which lends itself well to hard-hitting tunes like 50 Cent's own *In Da Club*. But there's also an unwelcome edge to the presentation. Subtlety and finesse are in short supply. Tracks such as Lily Allen's *Somewhere Only We Know* are sucked of emotion and you don't feel yourself engaging with the music in the same way as with the Bose or Philips sets.

Like the House of Marley Liberate XLBTs, the Audio Sync by 50 Cent suffer from quite a few musical deficiencies. There's little satisfaction to be had by spending this kind of money on headphones that struggle to deliver.

VERDICT Even a heavyweight celebrity endorsement can't save these lightweight Bluetooth headphones

All things considered

AV amplifiers are the engine room of your home cinema, and these two Dolby Atmos-toting high-end heroes are at the cutting edge



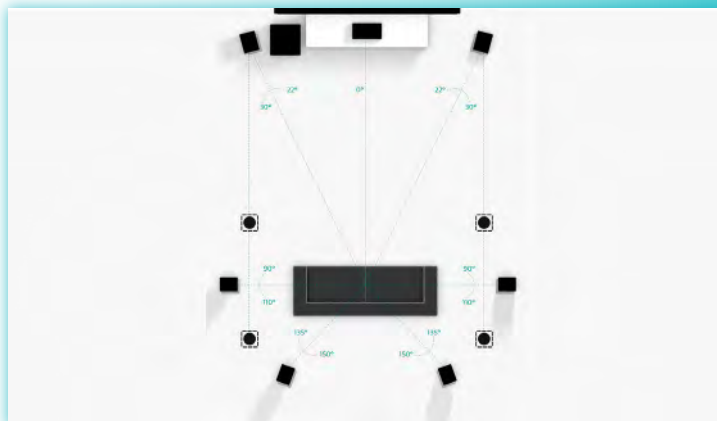
In this formidable head-to-head, we're pitting two powerhouse performers against each other. Pioneer and Yamaha have reputations to uphold, after all. They've dominated this end of the market for years, and each is hoping to offer the ultimate home cinema experience with their flagship AV receiver. Both cost around £2000, both promise a stunning home cinema sound, and both are kitted out with the latest features - including Dolby Atmos.

We've been eagerly awaiting the arrival of these two amplifiers to get our first taste of Dolby Atmos in a home environment.

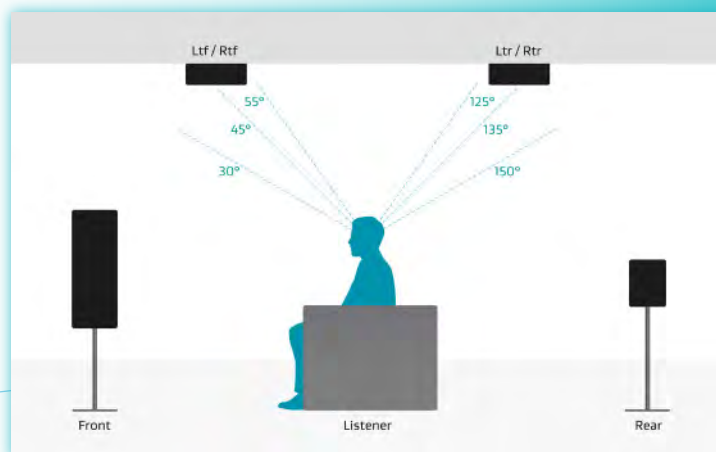
Dolby Atmos adds a whole new dimension to your cinema experience by adding overhead sound to create an immersive, dome-shaped soundfield.



Dolby Atmos



Luckily, you don't have to completely overhaul your existing home cinema system if you want to upgrade to Atmos. You will need a new AV receiver that's capable of decoding Atmos soundtracks - such as the Pioneer SC-LX88 and Yamaha RX-A3040 on test here. But you won't need to replace your Blu-ray player, or your existing 5.1 or 7.1 speaker package. You'll simply need to add matching pairs of in-ceiling or upward-firing speakers to create that dome-like, enveloping Atmos sound.



The maximum ideal lay-out for a home Atmos set-up is 7.1.4 - that is, seven surround speakers, one subwoofer, and four Atmos speakers placed above. However, since Atmos is scalable, you can start off with a minimum of 5.1.2, and then add more speakers if you want to expand. The idea is that the more speakers you add, the greater the detail and immersion.

Whether you choose in-ceiling or upward-firing speakers, positioning them in your room is key for delivering a seamless sound around your room. Upward-firing speakers will need to be angled correctly so that sound bounces off the ceiling at the perfect angle to reach your listening position, and give that Atmos-specific impression of sound coming from above.

Spoiler alert! It works, and it sounds fantastic.

HEAD TO HEAD

FACTS & FIGURES

	Pioneer SC-LX88	Yamaha RX-A3040
Rated power	9 x 250W	9 x 230W
HDMI in/out	8/3	8/2
Dolby Atmos	Yes	Yes
3D	Yes	Yes
4K 60p	Yes	Yes
Wi-fi	Yes	Yes
Auto set-up	Yes	Yes
Dimensions (hwd)	18.5 x 43.5 x 44	19 x 43.5 x 47
Weight	18kg	20kg



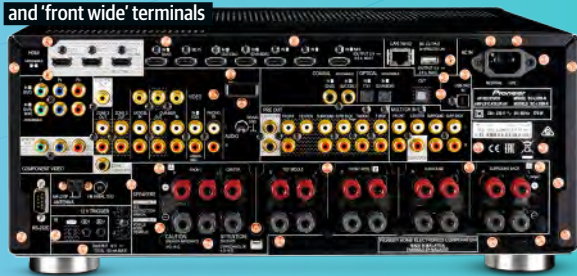
For a full list of specifications and other useful info visit whathifi.com

The SC-LX88 is punchy, taut, and agile. We love its crisp, clean sound and the razor-sharp precision with which it handles a film's soundtrack. It has that satisfying, meaty punch that's missing on the Yamaha



The SC-LX88 builds on Pioneer's traditional AV amp strengths by adding a dollop of controlled heft

Labelling is not great, but the Atmos speakers plug into the 'surround back' and 'front wide' terminals



How to set up

Atmos on the Pioneer SC-LX88

Pioneer hasn't labelled the terminals for Atmos speakers clearly, so you'll have to run the set-up and use the on-screen graphics to make sure the speakers are plugged into the right terminals. We discovered the Atmos speakers need to be plugged into the 'surround back' and 'front wide' terminals. In the speaker system menu, choose the 5.2.4 option for a standard 5.1 speaker

package layout with four added Atmos speakers. This works for a 7.1 system, too, although you can opt to use the 7.2.2 layout if you want to add only two Atmos speakers to your existing seven speakers. You can then assign 'Dolby Sp' status to the added Atmos speakers in speaker settings. Finally, make sure your Blu-ray player audio output is set to 'bitstream' (not PCM) before you start playing an Atmos Blu-ray disc.

Pioneer

SC-LX88 £2200 ★★★★★

WHAT HI-FI?
TEST WINNER


Pioneer goes from strength to strength. The SC-LX88 carries all the hallmarks of a top-end Pioneer receiver - fast, precise, superb layers of detail - and adds a powerful dose of muscle to make things even more exciting than before.

That surge of power isn't the only exciting aspect of this £2200 nine-channel home cinema amplifier. Alongside the extensive streaming, connectivity and file compatibility, the SC-LX88 features Dolby Atmos.

Atmos hits the spot

We dive straight into Atmos mode with a Blu-ray of *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (there are more titles coming with Atmos soundtracks, but we have to contend with this Michael Bay sequel for now) - and are blown away by just how fluid and dynamic Atmos sounds. The soundfield opens up, the added speakers give a serious sense of height, and the way Atmos is encoded means that objects move around the room more organically than before.

It's subtly done. Effects don't jump out at you from above, instead Atmos simply allows a bigger, more spacious soundfield. You get the sense of drones and helicopters sweeping from the middle of the room and hovering above. Bullets ricochet through you rather than around the outskirts of the room where speakers are positioned. And distant chirps of birds really do feel distant and located somewhere above rather than, say, in the front-right speaker. It's a powerful sound and hugely immersive.

It takes us switching down to a standard 5.1 or 7.1 Dolby TrueHD soundtrack to truly appreciate how much Atmos adds to the cinematic experience. The sound is suddenly smaller and you're aware of the height limit imposed by your ceiling.

Impressive in standard mode

But that doesn't mean the Pioneer is a slouch with standard 5.1 or 7.1 set-ups. Its core performance is stunningly impressive and capable, Atmos or not.

While it doesn't sound as huge and grand as the Yamaha RX-A3040, the Pioneer amp gets everything else right. It's punchy, taut, and agile. We love its

crisp, clean sound and the razor-sharp precision with which it handles a film's soundtrack. It has that satisfying, meaty punch that's missing on the Yamaha.

With *X-Men: Days of Future Past* playing, we're sucked into the action from the get-go. There are layers of punchy detail keeping us captivated with every scene and line of dialogue. Voices are clear and direct (unlike the Yamaha) and packed with character, even at lower volumes.

The SC-LX88 has a wonderfully even tonal balance - highs sparkle with no hint of brightness, while the low end rumbles with insight. There's depth and complexity to Magento's metal-bending, excitement to the prison break scene, and the beautiful melody of Jim Croce's *Time In A Bottle* in the slow-motion kitchen scene is stunningly immersive.

Pioneer's acute grasp of rhythm and punch lends itself well when playing music. With a live concert on Blu-ray, the Pioneer delivers the plucks, twangs,

Unlike the Yamaha, aptX Bluetooth is built into the SC-LX88, and there's a type-B USB input for directly connecting your laptop. Wired and wireless connections are available (both are stable) and you can, of course, play songs stored on any NAS device or laptop plugged into your home network. File support is extensive, with high-resolution 24-bit/192kHz WAV, FLAC and AIFF files playable via DLNA and USB. It also supports DSD files.

There are eight HDMI 2.0 inputs and three outputs, all capable of playing Ultra HD 4K and 3D content. SACD discs are also supported, and there's even a phono input for your turntable.

Neat, sleek and a great hulking mass of metal - the Pioneer SC-LX88 ticks all the right design boxes. Available in black or silver, the SC-LX88 is beautifully machined, sturdy, and its large display is pin-sharp and easy to read. The dials are responsive and lovely to use, too, as is the responsive remote-control wand.

We are blown away by how dynamic Atmos sounds. The soundfield opens up, the added speakers give a serious sense of height, and the way it's encoded means that objects move around the room more organically

thumps and vocals with plenty of style and perhaps a bit more oomph than necessary. We'll take that extra solidity over a thin, coarse sound any day.

Playing songs through USB sounds more solid and cohesive than Bluetooth, although both have a decent sense of excitement, detail and agility. Make sure you've switched to stereo mode when listening to music - it makes songs sound more focused. If you're aiming for long listening sessions, though, we would still guide you towards a dedicated stereo amplifier. The same would apply to the Yamaha.

Befitting a flagship product, the SC-LX88 has an exhaustive selection of streaming features and connections. Apple users can stream using AirPlay, while Spotify Connect and internet radio provided by vTuner opens up a world of music discovery - you'd be hard-pressed to run out of things to listen to here.

We just wish the Pioneer came with clear instruction on how to get Atmos speakers up and running with the amp - you have to explore the manual speaker settings. Our biggest complaint is that the back of the panel doesn't state which terminals are for Atmos speakers.

That apart, we can't stop praising the SC-LX88. It strikes a mature balance between subtlety and power, and offers a wealth of features that blow away the competition. It has a captivating sound that will keep you entertained for hours.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Stunning detail and clarity; powerful and precise; wide soundfield; build; supports Atmos

AGAINST Speaker terminals for Atmos speakers are not labelled clearly

VERDICT A staggeringly powerful and entertaining amp that's unrivalled at this price

The Yamaha RX-A3040 has the latest streaming features: Spotify Connect, Napster and vTuner internet radio. Anyone with Apple devices can stream songs over AirPlay, and charge an iOS device with the USB panel



The aluminium-clad Yamaha receiver has a sturdy, well-built chassis, giving a premium feel. It's a hefty unit too

How to set up

Atmos on the Yamaha RX-A3040

Plug your four Atmos speakers into the front and rear-presence speaker terminals (if only using two Atmos speakers, pick the fronts only). In the manual speaker settings, set the amp assign mode to 'Basic' if you have a 5.1 or 7.1 speaker package. Delve into the speaker configuration menu for the layout subfolder, where you can tell the Yamaha if your additional Atmos speakers are

upward-firing (labelled Dolby Atmos SP in the menu), in-ceiling or standard height speakers. Run the auto set-up to ensure your Atmos speakers are being recognised and emitting a tone - the on-screen graphics will show if they're in the right position or not. For the Yamaha to decode an Atmos soundtrack, it needs to be set in the surround mode. Press the 'surround decode' button on the remote and the amp is ready.



Yamaha

RX-A3040 £2000 ★★★★★



The first impression we have from the Yamaha RX-A3040 is one of scale. This nine-channel amplifier sits at the top of Yamaha's celebrated Aventure range of AV receivers, and duly shows off its flagship status with a mammoth soundfield. And that's before we even get to Dolby Atmos.

Play the *Edge of Tomorrow* Blu-ray (with 7.1 DTS-HD Master Audio) and the soundfield is huge. You get a real sense of the scale of the battlefield. The distant sounds of fighting, the helicopters overhead and the bursts of gunfire – all are delivered with plenty of detail.

Transformative sound

Yamaha excels in surround-sound effects, and the RX-A3040 steers the violent whirring of the alien tentacles through each speaker with power and precision. There's a satisfying rumble to basslines, and the quieter moments have space to breathe. If a standard 7.1 soundtrack sounds wide and spacious, then Dolby Atmos sounds even bigger. And taller. We play *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (currently the only Blu-ray film available in the UK with an Atmos soundtrack) and the ceiling of our test room virtually disappears. It's less about what objects you can hear above you, and more about the space that's just opened up for a bigger, more cinematic experience. It sounds more powerful, too.

Trading subtle for 'big'

But it's not all plain sailing for the RX-A3040. It's not quite as punchy as we'd have hoped. Impacts could be stronger and tauter. Compared with the Pioneer, there could be more detail and refinement overall too. It seems that in going for a bigger sound, Yamaha has traded in some of that finer subtlety and agility for an increase in soundfield scale. This affects voices, too, which aren't as direct or nuanced as with the Pioneer, which does a more successful job with its razor-sharp precision and subtler delivery of dialogue.

A rounded-off, smooth approach is in keeping with its predecessor, the 2013 Award-winning RX-A3030, and makes the RX-A3040 an easy listen. It performs well enough when it comes to music, although our misgivings about rhythmic punch

again come to the fore – the stop and start of notes could be more distinct, and songs played via USB sound a tad more solid and cohesive than streamed over Spotify. Yamaha has a variety of fun sound programs (which are more successful than those of its rivals), but we'd pick 'stereo' mode for the most cohesive performance with music.

The RX-A3040 has the latest streaming features: Spotify Connect, Napster and vTuner internet radio service. And anyone with Apple devices get a good deal – you can stream songs over AirPlay, and also plug your iOS device into the front panel USB for playback and charging features. You can even transfer your device's wi-fi settings to the receiver via USB.

For other devices, you can stream music over your home network. Wired and wireless network connections are both stable, and DLNA certification means you can stream songs stored on a laptop or NAS box as long as they're connected to the same network. The Yamaha receiver

buttons and additional inputs are neatly hidden away under the panel.

Whether you have a standard 5.1 speaker package or are setting up the full Atmos experience, it's imperative you run the auto-calibration to optimise the RX-A3040's sound with your speakers and your home cinema room.

Atmos instructions would be nice

And on that note, we do wish the amplifier came with clear, detailed instructions on how to set up Atmos speakers. To get everything up and running properly involves delving into the manual speaker settings to choose the correct speaker configuration, assigning your extra speakers as Atmos, and ensuring the amp is set to surround mode.

The standard remote control is nice in hand, and swiftly changes inputs or volume (the remote's 'surround decode' button is crucial when playing Atmos soundtracks). But for those wanting to use their smartphone or tablet, the AV

Play *Transformers: Age of Extinction* and the ceiling virtually disappears. It's less about what objects you hear above you, and more about the space that's just opened up for a bigger, more cinematic experience

can handle high-res files of up to 24-bit/192kHz in WAV and FLAC formats over DLNA and USB. Android users can also directly stream HD content using the MHL input on the front panel. Unlike the Pioneer SC-LX88, Yamaha doesn't include built-in Bluetooth. It is possible to get, but you'll have to plug in the YBA-11 receiver (around £50) to receive it.

The RX-A3040 has an extensive list of connections: eight HDMI 2.0 inputs are the highlight, all of which support Ultra HD 4K pass-through and upscaling, and Full HD 3D content. There are two HDMI outputs, two dedicated subwoofer outputs, and a host of digital and analogue connections on the back panel. You can plug in older AV kit that don't feature HDMI, with multiple component and composite sockets available, too.

Available in black or titanium, the amplifier has a clean fascia, crisp display, and intuitive control dials. Various control

Controller app is worth downloading and is free for Android and Apple users.

If our judging was based purely on how big and spacious an AV receiver sounds, the Yamaha RX-A3040 would win. It's powerful, but is let down by failing to deliver the subtlest, punchiest and most captivating performance that this money can buy. At this price, that honour goes to the stunning Pioneer SC-LX88. But still, the RX-A3040 is capable of playing Atmos soundtracks admirably. It's well worth an audition.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Wide, spacious and tall soundfield; powerful and accurate surround steering; build and features; easy to use; supports Atmos

AGAINST Could be punchier, tauter and more transparent; no built-in Bluetooth

VERDICT A smooth, yet powerful amp

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Go Deeper



Phablet schmablet

Tablets are shrinking, and the best new models take multimedia performance to a new level. Time to change the vocabulary

Whats on test

Amazon Kindle HDX 8.9 **p60** Apple iPad Mini 3 **p61** Google Nexus 9 **p63**
Samsung Tab S 8.4 **p64**
Sony Xperia Z3 Tablet Compact **p65**



The term **phablet** first hit the public consciousness three years ago when Samsung launched its Galaxy Note smartphone. At 5.3in, it was considered far too big to be a phone, and it took a terrible portmanteau to describe something that wasn't quite phone, wasn't quite tablet.

Move on three years and the market is different. Phones are creeping up in size every year, and at the same rate tablets are shrinking. Whereas at one point the biggest competition was around the 10in market, we're now seeing the biggest growth in and around 8in. And while phones were once little more than 4in, we're now seeing them all the way up to 6in...

Are we entering a post-phablet era? It certainly feels that way. The five tablets over the next few pages offer great multimedia performances, and with screen sizes between 7.9-8.9in, they've got portability to boot too. Phablet schmablet indeed...



Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 8.9 (16GB) £330 ★★★★★

The Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 8.9 is a rather different proposition to other Android tablets, and its merit depends on what you're looking for in a device - for some it will be an excellent choice, for others it could be next-to useless.

For a start, Amazon has placed such a heavy skin over the top of it that you'd never know it was running Android at all. Anyone will need to spend some time getting used to the way it runs.

Along the top there is a menu of shortcuts which you'll use to access most of your content. Swipe up and there's a page for your favourites, pre-populated with a handful of apps such as calendar, camera and Amazon's Silk browser. It is a layout you get used to, but some things can still feel unnecessarily buried in menus.

All play and no work

This is a tablet that puts entertainment first. If you want to edit documents or produce presentations you'll need to look elsewhere. It's built around content and, most specifically, content from Amazon. We'd usually complain about such a heavy-handed approach, but we'd expect anyone considering buying it to already subscribe to a large chunk of Amazon's services, or at least be open to the idea.

You can upload your own content to the Fire, but within every menu you are presented with suggestions for Amazon content. It's everywhere. The snag? All the content you buy

on this tablet will be from Amazon and Amazon alone. There's no access to the Google Play app store like you'd get on a regular Android tablet.

Stock take

The video and music side of things is pretty well stocked but some apps are missing or delayed. That said, despite being a competitor to Amazon's Prime Video service, Netflix is available to download, as are the likes of BBC iPlayer, Spotify, Deezer and Rdio.

When it comes to performance, the HDX 8.9 is no slouch thanks to its 2.2GHz quad-core processor and 2GB RAM. We have multiple tabs on the Silk browser open, a book on the go, jump into a film and downloaded apps, and we never once see it slow up.

For a device so based around content, the HDX 8.9's display is crucial and, thankfully, its 8.9in screen is a stunner, matching the Samsung Galaxy Tab S for resolution at 2560 x 1600 and packing in 339ppi. The screen is bright and colours are rich and vibrant, yet accurate and well balanced. Viewing angles are good too.

Battery life on the Fire HDX 8.9 is extremely impressive, and in our battery rundown test it manages 14 hours and 13 minutes, four hours longer than the iPad.

When it comes to music, the Fire HDX 8.9 offers promising performance too. Plug in some headphones and fire up a WAV CD rip and you're

given a full-bodied, balanced sound. There's a decent amount of detail retrieval, though something like the Sony Xperia Z3 Tablet Compact has a touch more insight.

The main 8MP camera, too, gives good results, with largely accurate colour reproduction and decent detail. Exposure is generally accurate, though indoor strip lighting can throw it.

The design is well thought out, the back panel offering a soft-touch rubberised effect with a tapered-edge design to help with grip.

There's no microSD card slot here, so you'll have to choose your storage at the point of purchase; 16GB, 32GB or 64GB - as ever, we'd recommend going for 32GB as a minimum if you're one for downloading lots of content.

There's a lot to love about the HDX 8.9. In performance terms it's up with the best of them, with a great screen, a good way with music and movies, and a strong battery life. But its closed-in ecosystem isn't going to be for everyone.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Good, practical design; great screen; strong video and music performance

AGAINST No access to Google Play; Amazon ecosystem is heavy-handed

VERDICT A gateway to all things Amazon, it's a strong performer that just feels a little restricted against rivals



Bundled with the mini 3 comes iOS 8.1. It's more stable than iOS 8, adds usability tweaks and, via the Handoff feature, links you more closely than ever with your other Apple devices.

Apple iPad mini 3 (16GB) £320 ★★★★★

The yearly upgrade cycle is now an accepted, if occasionally frustrating, part of being a technophile in today's ever-moving market. Once a year (or even sooner – yes we're looking at you, Sony), a product line will get refreshed or replaced. The iPad mini 3 apparently missed that memo and remains almost identical to the mini 2, save for the addition of Apple's Touch ID fingerprint scanner and the new gold colourway.

If it ain't broke...

It's an odd decision, particularly since the iPad mini 2 remains on sale for £80 less than its newer sibling, and is now a more attractive proposition than ever. That doesn't mean the iPad mini 3 isn't excellent, though. When it comes to design, the aluminium-bodied mini 3 still tops the tablet style charts. It's slender, sits well in the hand, and feels every inch the premium device. It's light too, at 331g. The 7.9in screen is modest in size but its 4:3 aspect ratio really works to its advantage for browsing.

That Touch ID fingerprint sensor is a welcome addition, if not a revolutionary one. It's the most accurate and best implemented scanner on the market and is not reliant on a perfect grip or orientation. As with other Touch ID devices, it doesn't play nice with wet fingers, but you can easily enter your back-up PIN if needs be.

You can also use Touch ID to buy things on iTunes, and users in the US can employ it to

secure online purchases with just their fingerprint, thanks to Apple Pay. For the moment though, that's not a service available in the UK.

As has always been the case with Apple's tablets, the iPad mini 3 is non-expandable, offering on-board storage options of 16GB, 64GB and 128GB. And, while more favourably priced than last year, it's all still a lot more expensive than the cost of a microSD card.

The 1536 x 2048 Retina resolution display is present and correct – and excellent – but it seems a shame that Apple hasn't included some of the new screen tech we've seen added to the Air 2, such as the anti-reflective coating.

The screen is bright enough to take on video outdoors. It can't quite match the retina-searing brightness of the Samsung Galaxy Tab S, but its colour balance is as natural as ever and there are none to top it at this price and screen size. Feed the mini 3 a Full HD movie and that natural balance is supported by a wide colour palette that offers great contrast and plenty of subtlety.

We still love the way the iPad mini sounds, but others are now snapping at its heels. It's clean, refined and well organised, with plenty of rhythmic know-how and a strong handle on dynamics. Detail levels don't quite match up to those on the Sony Z3 Tablet Compact though, and there's no support for high-res music.

When it comes to listening without headphones, the iPad mini 3 offers clarity to its

presentation that many of its competitors can't match. Dialogue is clear and the overall character is largely well balanced.

Apps aplenty

As is always the case with iOS, app selection is superb. Apps designed specifically for the iPad now number nearly 500,000.

When it comes to the iPad mini 3's camera, it packs the same 5MP iSight sensor from its predecessor, and performance is largely similar.

Battery life is as advertised, just surpassing 10 hours for multimedia use, managing 10 hours 15 minutes in our battery rundown test.

The iPad mini 3 is a bit of a tricky one to judge. In many respects, it's last year's tablet with a few non-essential tweaks that come at an £80 premium over the still-with-us iPad mini 2. But it also still manages to more-than hold its own in this company and offers design and performance you can't argue with.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Superb screen; great colour balance; rhythmic; strong app selection; premium design; Touch ID

AGAINST Very similar spec to last year

VERDICT It's almost a case of *déjà vu* with the iPad mini 3 but, despite its lack of any real update, it's still the 8in tablet to be reckoned with

oppo



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“Excellent AV performance”



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BDP-105D



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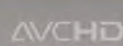
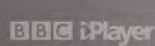


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The Boomsound speakers, at either edge of the Nexus 9 (in landscape) and midway up, are direct and immersive, but tiring for long-term listening. We'd stick to headphones.

Google Nexus 9 (16GB) £320 ★★★★★

The Google Nexus 9 feels like it's having something of an identity crisis. At £320, it's no longer the cheap tablet the Nexus brand originally thrived as, but compare it with the premium tablet market it's now up against and it struggles to compete.

In terms of size, it sits between its two predecessors - the excellent Nexus 7 and the not-quite-as-good Nexus 10 - with a screen size of 8.9in. It feels like a 'medium-sized' tablet rather than large or small, a Goldilocks effect that many will feel is just right, and its aspect ratio matches the iPad at 4:3.

A fairly chunky body

Despite this, when we first picked up the Nexus 9, we couldn't help but be a little disappointed. Considering it's been made by HTC, the brains behind the gorgeous HTC One (M8), it's a shame it hasn't pushed a more premium design here too. At 8mm thick, it feels a little on the chunky side and, while its plastic body feels sturdy enough, there is some flex to it.

Buttons are kept to a minimum on the Nexus 9, with just a volume rocker and power button on the right-hand side. We'd like them to be a little more pronounced for easier use though.

With its £320 price tag, the Nexus 9 is a lot pricier than many were hoping for, but it does come with a suitably boosted spec list to back it up. This includes an Nvidia Tegra K1, a 2.3GHz

dual-core processor with 64-bit architecture supported by 2GB RAM for performance that's smooth and largely stutter-free, and a visually engaging upgrade to Android Lollipop.

Personalised sharing

One of the nicest additions of Lollipop is the implementation of different user accounts, allowing different people using the same tablet to have their own settings, photos and apps.

When it comes to its screen, the Nexus 9 packs the same 2048 x 1536 resolution as the iPad mini 3, yet with a Full HD clip the overall picture looks a little softer than on the Apple. Blacks can't go as deep as the likes of the mini 3 or Samsung Galaxy Tab S either, but the '9' does do a good job with keeping whites pure and bright. Colour balance is largely accurate, with skin tones well judged and no colours overdone, but more detail would really make this a screen to be reckoned with.

The music performance on the Nexus 9 is pretty disappointing to say the least. While most of its competitors have improved in this area, the Nexus has taken a step backwards. Its tonal balance is overly bright, even with the CD-quality rips we tested with, and it lacks organisation. Even something like a fast-paced guitar riff is enough to throw the presentation off, and instruments lack the depth and texture you'll find in the Sony Xperia Z3 Tablet Compact.

When it comes to battery life, the Nexus 9 does redeem itself somewhat, with its 6700mAh battery lasting for 11 hours 47 minutes in our standard test.

We never get too embroiled in the quality of cameras on tablets because we're still not sold on their form factor being suitable for serious photography. But if we were, we'd certainly be looking somewhere other than the Nexus. It simply doesn't deliver pictures you would expect from an 8MP camera, not even able to really nail a decent shot in good light. Shots are either washed out or over-exposed, and there are few options with which to correct matters.

All this comes together to leave us feeling rather underwhelmed by the Nexus 9. While its screen size may well be appealing for its mid-size approach, and its inclusion of Lollipop will be a draw for pure Android fans, when it comes to performance the Nexus 9 simply can't compete with the best at this price.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR 4:3 aspect ratio works well; Android 5.0 Lollipop; fast performance; strong battery life

AGAINST Poor music performance; video short on detail; indifferent design

VERDICT Android 5.0 Lollipop looks great, but the Nexus 9 is uncompetitive in most other areas



Our battery test: a 720p video streamed at half-brightness with wi-fi on - gives us 12.2 hours' use. The Ultra Power-Saving mode turns the screen black-and-white and limits app use.

Samsung Galaxy Tab S 8.4 (16GB) £320 ★★★★★☆

As part of Samsung's current flagship tablet line-up, the Galaxy Tab S 8.4 is quite the on-paper spec warrior. We're talking an Exynos octa-core processor (that's eight - count 'em), 3GB of RAM and a Super AMOLED display with a test-topping 2560 x 1600 2K resolution and 360 pixels in every single inch of its 8.4in screen.

It looks the part too. While its largely plastic construction can't match the premium feel of the aluminium-bodied iPad mini 3, it still feels solid and well made, yet measures in at a super-slim 6.6mm thick and weighing just 294g.

External boost

One thing it does have over its Apple rival is a microSD card slot, which allows you to boost the 16GB on-board storage by up to 128GB.

The fingerprint scanner from the Galaxy S5 has made its way to the Tab S and works in the same way, by sliding your finger over the home button. You can register up to three fingerprints per device. While using TouchID on the iPad mini 3 feels so slick it becomes second nature, it's not the case with the Tab S. It's responsive, but the swiping gesture can be a little awkward in use, and entering a PIN code could well be as quick. The added functionality to authorise PayPal payments this way is a nice touch though.

The screen on the Tab S has to be one of the most visually impressive we've seen on a tablet this size. It beats all its testmates bar the

Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 8.9 (which it matches) when it comes to resolution, but it's the brightness of its Super AMOLED panel that really sets it apart from the competition - colours are punchy, text readable and contrast strong.

With video performance the Tab S doesn't fare quite as well as the Sony Xperia Z3 Tablet Compact or iPad mini 3. Both offer better-balanced colour palettes, with the Tab S still a little too vibrant. It makes for a visually striking picture but not always an accurate one. When it comes to contrast, it's no surprise that the Tab S's AMOLED screen does a great job of producing seriously inky blacks that are noticeably better than those on the iPad.

Sonic improvements

Audio performance is a step up from previous Samsung devices, and we have high-res playback included here to boot. With regular WAV CD rips it's a more precise, better organised performance than we've noted before, with timing improved and more dynamic get-up-and-go. It can't top the Sony for overall rhythmic know-how, but it's a good improvement.

Switch up to a high-resolution track and there's understandably more detail to go at and a touch more subtlety, but once again the high-res-capable Sony just takes it, with a touch more insight and attack. This is all through

headphones, of course - the speakers on the Tab S don't provide the best experience.

Considering how much power it has under the hood, it's no surprise the Tab S whizzes around its menus, jumping in and out of apps without stutter or stumble. We're still not big fans of the TouchWiz user interface though - it remains a touch heavy-handed for our tastes.

The 8MP camera on the Tab S does a fair job of capturing crisp, detailed images, as long as you're in good light. Low-light shots are largely noisy and often not of much use, but the Tab S does have an LED flash. Samsung's Galaxy Tab S 8.4 is certainly the best tablet we've seen from the company to date, and it's up there as one of the best Android tablets we've tested too.

That said, the iPad mini 3 (and the mini 2 for that matter) still show it up when it comes to audio and video, and the new Sony Xperia Z3 Compact Tablet proves that there is a better performance available from an Android slate too.

Rating ★★★★★☆

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

AGAINST Touchwiz is still a little heavy-handed; audio and picture quality don't beat the best

VERDICT This is Samsung's best tablet to date, but some competitors offer better all-round performance



Playstation 4 Remote Play allows you play PS games on your tablet. You'll need to be on the same wi-fi network as your console for the best results, and it's ideal for scratching a gaming itch.

Sony Xperia Z3 Tablet Compact £330 ★★★★★

Sony has had a busy year in the portables market. Not content with launching two flagship smartphones and a family of supporting handsets and wearables, we now have the Sony Xperia Z3 Tablet Compact.

It's Sony's first crack at a small-form tablet, following on from the so-so success of the 10.1in Xperia Z2 Tablet earlier this year. Sony has listened to the feedback from that and has acted accordingly. The chunky bezel and unwieldy design is gone, replaced by a super-slim and light form that makes the Z3 Tablet Compact a great portable companion.

A slimline tonic

At 6.4mm it's even slimmer than one of its biggest competitors, the Samsung Galaxy Tab S, and at 270g weighs 30g less too, meaning it's comfortable to hold for long sessions of movie watching. Despite a mainly plastic construction, the Z3 Tablet Compact still feels sturdy and durable, and is waterproof down to 1.5m, for up to 30 minutes. An 8in screen features on the Z3 Tablet Compact, in the same 16:9 aspect ratio as the Samsung Galaxy Tab S 8.4. Sony has chosen to stick with a Full HD screen here in the same way as it has done on its phones, which might seem a bad move competing with the 2560 x 1600 resolution of the Tab S 8.4. But this is an excellent screen all the same, and Sony's reasoning of not wanting to compromise battery

life for a 2K screen is one we fully support - particularly when the results are as good as this.

Sony's own figures quote around 15 hours for video playback, but on our rundown test, the Z3 Tablet Compact managed 17 hours 6 minutes with no help from any of its (excellent) power-saving modes. That's nearly seven hours more than the iPad - compare it with the 2K-packing Samsung and we have to say we'd take the Z3 Tablet Compact's balance any day.

Reality bites

'Triluminos for Mobile' and 'Live Colour LED' do a fine job at helping with colour accuracy and contrast, but we always jump straight into the menu to turn off 'X-Reality' for mobile - its added processing makes images look overly sharpened. Play a 1080p clip on the Z3 Tablet Compact and colours are punchy and bright, yet manage to remain accurate. General performance is good here, with the quad-core Snapdragon processor and 3GB RAM keeping things moving along without hiccup or delay.

You get 16GB of on-board storage but, like the Samsung Galaxy Tab S, you can expand this via microSD by another 128GB. Sony's interface is something that will take some getting used to and will be down to a matter of taste.

Musically, we've been pretty impressed by Sony's most recent products, and it's no different on the Z3 Tablet Compact - it's taken a

long time for something to come and take the iPad's crown as the best-sounding tablet, but the Sony has done it. There's a richer tone to it than we've heard on Sony smartphones, sounding weighty and full bodied, and closer to the iPad in terms of character than ever before. There's more fine detail here, and a good handling of rhythm and timing. It's one of the best listens we've had on a tablet (helped by the Z3 Tablet Compact being capable of high-res music playback up to 24-bit/192kHz).

When it comes to taking photos, the Sony doesn't do a bad job at all. There's an 8.1MP rear camera, with a 2.3MP front-facer supporting, and we found shots to be sharp and detailed, with accurate colour reproduction.

The Sony Xperia Z3 Tablet Compact is an excellent addition to the Z3 family, offering a great video experience, a superb way with music and startlingly good battery life - all wrapped up in a slim and stylish shell.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Good video performance; strong audio; high-res support; incredible battery life; slim, stylish design

AGAINST A lot of Sony services and apps pre-installed

VERDICT Sony's Z3 family goes from strength to strength with this tablet, with a superb performance Android can be proud of



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THE CONCEPT 40 LOUDSPEAKER

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

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

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



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June 2014



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

What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision,
May 2014

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TEST VERDICT**THE WINNER****Apple iPad mini 3 (16GB)****£320 ★★★★★**

The tablet market is a competitive place to be right now, particularly at this screen size, and it shows. We're seeing manufacturers improving where we thought they couldn't, pushing for more from their screens and audio, updating their designs and improving their battery lives. And oneupmanship certainly makes for an interesting test.

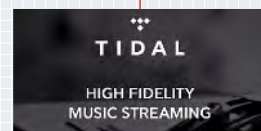
We have to say we were disappointed by the Nexus 9. After a long wait for the successor to the Nexus 7, it arrives but at a premium price with a non-premium performance. The Samsung Galaxy Tab S held its own thanks to a new wave of Samsung products that appear to have

tweaked colour balance and made sound quality a real consideration. There's still some work to be done, but it's a strong four-stars showing for Samsung. Joining it with four stars is the Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 8.9. A great tablet, but so tied into the Amazon ecosystem that it oozes an aura of self-imposed limitation.

Two five stars then, the first to the Sony Xperia Z3 Tablet Compact - quite the tongue twister, but a superb tablet that has the best audio we've ever heard on a tablet. But it's the all-round brilliance of the iPad mini 3 that takes the win. If you have £320 to spend on a tablet and you like iOS, this is where you should spend it.

SYSTEM BUILDER

Use your iPad mini 3 with these three and you're sure to experience it at its best

**Music streaming service****Tidal £20/month ★★★★★**

Streaming's newest member is here and we are big fans. CD quality sound with high-def video.

**Smartphone****iPhone 6 ★★★★★**

iOS 8's Handover feature brings iOS devices closer than ever; answer calls via your iPad.

**Headphones****AKG Y50 £80 ★★★★★**

Superb sound with bold styling, these suit the mini 3's great audio. And for small bucks.

Total build £420

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

Facts & figures

Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 8.9
£320 ★★★★★

Screen size 8.9in • **Storage** 16/32/64GB • **Expandable?** No • **Screen resolution/ppi** 2560 x 1600/339 • **Processor** 2.2GHz quad-core • **Camera** 8MP/720p • **Battery life** 14 hours • **OS** Amazon Fire OS 3.0 • **Dimensions (hwd)** 231 x 158 x 8mm • **Weight** 374g

Apple iPad mini 3
£320 ★★★★★

Screen size 7.9in • **Storage** 16/64/128GB • **Expandable?** No • **Screen resolution/ppi** 2048 x 1536/326 • **Processor** Apple A7 • **Camera** 5MP/1.2MP • **Battery life** 10 hours • **OS** Apple iOS 8.1 • **Dimensions (hwd)** 200 x 135 x 7mm • **Weight** 341g

Google Nexus 9
£320 ★★★★★

Screen size 8.9in • **Storage** 16/32GB • **Expandable?** No • **Screen resolution/ppi** 2048 x 1546/281 • **Processor** 2.3GHz quad-core • **Camera** 8MP/1.6MP • **Battery life** 12 hours • **OS** Android 5.0 Lollipop • **Dimensions (hwd)** 228 x 154 x 8mm • **Weight** 436g

Samsung Galaxy Tab S 8.4
£320 ★★★★★

Screen size 8.4in • **Storage** 16/32GB • **Expandable?** Yes • **Screen resolution/ppi** 2560 x 1600/359 • **Processor** 1.9GHz & 1.3GHz quad-core • **Camera** 8MP/2.1MP • **Battery life** 12 hours • **OS** Android 4.4 KitKat • **Dimensions (hwd)** 213 x 126 x 6.6mm • **Weight** 294g

Sony Xperia Z3 Tablet Compact **£330 ★★★★★**

Screen size 8in • **Storage** 16/32GB • **Expandable?** Yes • **Screen resolution/ppi** 1920 x 1200/283 • **Processor** 2.5GHz quad-core • **Camera** 8.1MP/2.2MP • **Battery life** 17 hours • **OS** Android 4.4 KitKat • **Dimensions (hwd)** 213 x 124 x 6mm • **Weight** 270g

Different Class



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

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Warp Factor

You could soon be looking at televisions in a different way. We are, with two of the best 4K, curved screens in the business – and we've pitted them against each other



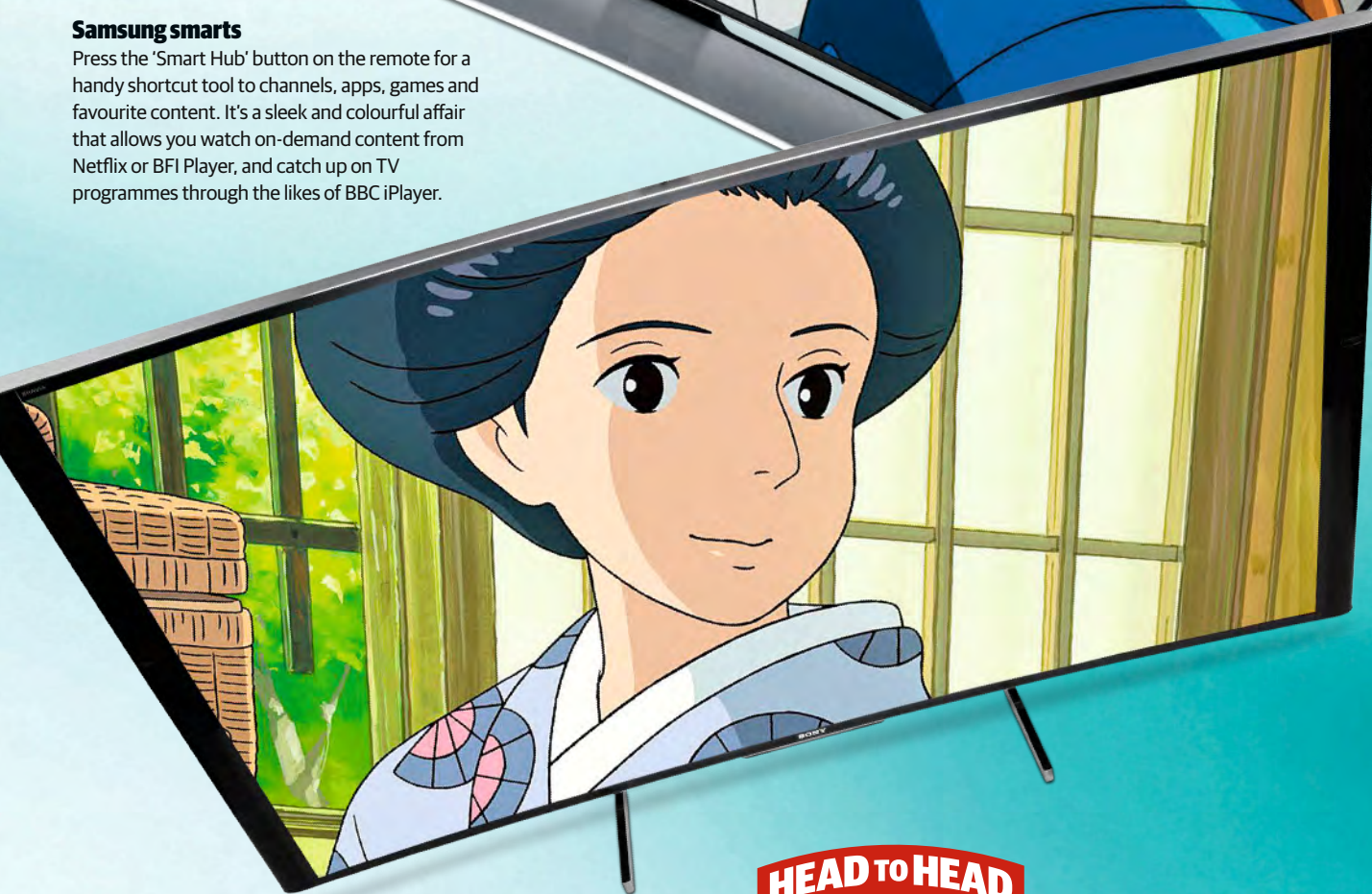
HEAD TO HEAD

Samsung UE65HU8500 £3800 **vs** Sony KD-65S9005B £3900



Samsung smarts

Press the 'Smart Hub' button on the remote for a handy shortcut tool to channels, apps, games and favourite content. It's a sleek and colourful affair that allows you watch on-demand content from Netflix or BFI Player, and catch up on TV programmes through the likes of BBC iPlayer.



HEAD TO HEAD

FACTS & FIGURES

	Samsung	Sony
Type	LED/LCD	LED/LCD
Screen size	65in	65in
4K:	Yes	Yes
3D	Yes, active	Yes, active
Tuners	Freeview HD, Freesat	Freeview HD, Freesat
Smart TV	Yes	Yes
HDMI in	4	4
USB in	3	3
Dimensions (hwd)	85 x 145 x 11cm	87 x 155 x 11.5cm
Weight:	27kg	41kg
Weight	120g	143g

Unlimited pleasure

Sony's 'Music Unlimited' and 'Video Unlimited' services offers a wealth of content, while apps such as BBC iPlayer, Netflix and Amazon Instant Video take care of all your TV and film watching desires. The interface is seriously slick.

Samsung UE65HU8500 **£3800** ★★★★★

If you're in the market for a top-class 4K Ultra HD screen, this Samsung UE65HU8500 should be on your shortlist. The 65in curved-screen dazzles with native 4K content and Blu-rays.

It's a rich, attention-grabbing picture. The Samsung delivers a performance full of punch and panache, with crystal-clear detail and a dynamic colour palette. We fire up a 4K Ultra HD stream of *Breaking Bad* on Netflix and there's a superb amount of detail on screen. Edges of objects, strands of hair, skin texture – each detail is crisply drawn. Whites are bright and clean, though while there's plenty of subtlety coming through from the shadows, we think blacks could be darker.

Blue-sky thinking

The screen's colour balance is on the right side of vibrant. Whether it's a 4K demo reel or the *Guardians of Galaxy* Blu-ray, the colours are full of pizzazz. Blue skies are perhaps a bit too blue, reds and browns are little too rich and robust, but it never looks overtly unnatural or garish. Skin tones are fleshed out, and there's subtlety in gradations and shading. It's not quite as natural as its rival, the Sony KD-65S9005B, but it's nevertheless an alluring approach that's sure to turn heads. That rich colour balance remains regardless of what kind of content you're watching – so we must commend the Samsung's

upscaling talents, as Blu-ray films look fantastic. In *X-Men: Days of Future Past*, we almost forget it's not a native 4K picture. A demo reel may show off how mesmerising 4K content can be, but your Blu-ray discs will look almost as great. The textures of clothes and metal are discernible, the picture is bright and punchy, and wrinkles on faces are well etched, while 3D films retain a bold and dynamic approach too.

Ahead of the curve

Freeview HD channels and DVDs see the inevitable drop in quality, but overall it's still watchable. We'd stick to the HD channels to make the most of that 4K screen, though.

Once again, darker scenes would benefit from more intensity, with those blacks getting more washed out if watching from an angle: the down side of a curved screen. It's very immersive, but only if you're sitting straight in front of the TV. If you have regular family-movie nights, you might also want to look at conventional flatscreens.

The curved screen does look gorgeous, though. It's sleek and sturdy, and just as elegant around the back, with no inputs (apart from the Freeview HD tuner) in sight: connections (four HDMI 2.0 inputs and three USB ports) are housed in a separate 'One Connect' box. It makes plugging in your sources easier (especially if you're wall-mounting the TV),

keeps wiring neat and leaves the way open for Samsung to offer upgrades in years to come. With six speakers fitted inside the TV, it sounds rounded and solid. Detail is good, voices are easy to follow, and it goes fairly loud.

We'd pick up the TV's standard remote control over the curved smart remote. Both fit nicely in hand, but the standard remote is more instinctive to use. You'll need the smart remote to use the motion-sensitive on-screen pointer, or the voice control option.

Alternatively, you can use Samsung's Smart View 2.0 app. It offers basic controls, a second screen to watch the current programme on your smartphone or tablet, and the ability to transfer photos, music and videos from your smart device to the TV. It's functional, and it's free.

Impressive, attractive and entertaining, this premium-quality Samsung UE65HU8500 TV makes us excited about 4K's future.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Superb detail definition; pleasing upscaling; exciting picture; vibrant colours; wealth of smarts

AGAINST Black levels could be stronger; a little unresponsive to commands

VERDICT A feature-packed 4K screen that dazzles with its richly-detailed and vibrant picture

Sony KD-65S9005B **£3900** ★★★★★

WHAT HI-FI?
TEST WINNER

We recently waxed lyrical about the Sony KD-65S9005B's picture and gave it top marks for its subtle, confident performance. The curved 65in screen is an absolute stunner, and we're once again compelled to sing its praises in light of its new Samsung rival.

Where the Samsung UE65HU8500 goes for a bold, eye-popping performance topped off with metaphorical jazz hands, the Sony screen underplays its brilliance.

A natural, subtle picture

It's a remarkably natural picture, with a supremely subtle touch to the way it delivers detail and colour. Even with native 4K demo content playing, the Sony never tries too hard to make you constantly aware that you're looking at a 4K screen. It's happier to deliver the picture as it is, and as a result it's a hugely immersive and engaging screen.

Breaking Bad via Netflix 4K looks cinematic and intimate in equal measure. Detail levels are sky-high, motion is smooth and characters realistically fleshed out. Difficult-to-render things such as skin-tones are delivered well enough to convince.

Blu-ray films look astonishingly refined and crisp. *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* is full of clean lines and bright highlights, while *Guardians of the Galaxy*

bursts with punchy colours and convincing shades of subtlety.

Blacks are invitingly deep and lush, without robbing detail, and offer a strong, convincing contrast that heightens drama. There's a real sense of depth to the Sony's involving picture, which can make 3D films almost redundant (although the active 3D is fairly comfortable to watch).

Sony's upscaler does a good job of handling standard-definition content. Broadcast channels and DVDs look fuzzy, soft-edged and lack the detail definition of their Blu-ray counterparts, but they're still watchable. HD channels and iPlayer shows offer a more defined performance that does justice to the 4K screen.

A decent sound as well

The TV is enjoyable to listen to on its own. The sound is big, solid and crisply detailed. Voices are nuanced and packed with character, and it gives surround sound a decent go too.

There's a generous helping of connectivity, including four HDMI 2.0 inputs that support 4K and 3D, and three USB ports for playing all kinds of media files.

We're impressed by how captivating the Sony screen is. The curved design

definitely aids immersion, but only if you sit right on front of the screen. Those sitting at an angle might find colours a little washed out, but the subtle detail and clarity stay true, thankfully.

High price, top quality

It's a hefty price to pay, but this gorgeous Sony 4K screen is certainly worth it. Its rival, the Samsung UE65HU8500, puts up a formidable fight, to give it its due, and it's a tie between the two when it comes to the amount of detail they both offer.

We're more impressed by the Sony's ability to deliver a subtle picture while still looking punchy and exciting, however. We also love how smooth it is in use. If you're looking for the best premium 4K screen that does it all, look no further than this stunning Sony KD-65S9005B.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Stunning levels of detail; fantastic upscaler for Blu-rays; clean and punchy screen; deep blacks; crisp sound; excellent build and finish; features; lovely to use

AGAINST As with the Samsung, the curve comes at a hefty price

VERDICT A lovely 4K screen that's a dream to use

So slim,
you'll need a
closer look



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SOUND AFFECTS

We cut to the heart of hi-fi by testing some of the best stereo amplifiers on the market. Which will come top of the pile?

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Cyrus 6a
p75

Rega Elex-R
p79

Naim Nait 5si
p76

Creek Audio Evolution 50A
p74

The driving force in any hi-fi system, stereo amplifiers are always a hotly contested category in the *What Hi-Fi?* Awards. This year was no different, with 2014 seeing a trio of new winners. The new Rega Elex-R was one of them, dethroning the Naim Nait 5si to claim the name as the best amp £800-1500. Here, we put the two up against each other again to go all twelve rounds. Will the Naim's full star-set remain untouched?

The 2013 and 2014 Award winners are joined by the 2012 amp champ, too - the Cyrus 6a has managed to keep hold of its five stars in every group test it has graced during the past two years, so can it do this same here? And will the previously unseen Creek Audio Evolution 50A shine enough to shake things up? The answers are only a flick of a page away...



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

Creek Audio Evolution 50A

£800

★★★★☆



Creek Audio have given the Evolution 50A a very smart finish on the case, with a nice clear display

The Evolution 50A is part of Creek Audio's next-generation product range, and the supporting model to its higher-ranging Evolution 100A (£1500).

It's been a few years since we last had the pleasure of testing a Creek Audio amp, and if the 50A is anything to go by, we've been missing out. Performance-wise, we're impressed.

Fast, agile and articulate, the Evolution is bags of fun. Whether it's wallowing in the piano-led rhythms of Nina Simone's *My Baby Just Cares For Me*, or throwing its all into the lively tempo of Daft Punk's *Beyond*, the Evolution's exuberant, full-of-beans delivery zings with pace and precision, and demonstrates a firm grip on timing.

A clear Creek

Its focused, transparent midrange is one of the most expressive we've heard at this price too, proving more than capable of getting across Eminem's charged vocals in *Headlights*. Though detailed, the Creek doesn't forsake subtleties for the bigger picture: *The Fellowship* from *The Lord of the Rings* soundtrack fills its wide-open soundstage. It has the organisation to challenge the Cyrus, with each instrument meticulously positioned. And dynamically the Creek is strong, as it works its way up and down the oscillating composition. It doesn't have as much appetite for the

track's orchestral crescendos as the authoritative Naim Nait 5si and Rega Elex-R, and lacks the bass punch and authority for the drumbeat underpinning Drake's *Take Care*.

A match to light the way

Taking care with system matching would be wise. You'll notice the lean low-end if paired with stand-mounters, but anyone fond of floorstanders should choose rich-sounding towers (say, the Q Acoustic Concept 40s) to flesh out the sound.

The headphone output is decent. Using AKG K701s (£200), we find openness, articulation and rhythmic aptitude, although bass depth still feels deficient through the cans. (A note to potential buyers: the Evolution takes a full weekend's running-in to even out its out-of-the-box thinness.)

The slim unit looks built to last, and has aesthetic appeal with a brushed-aluminium (black or silver) front panel. Its largely symmetrical layout gives it a neat façade: a clear white-on-black OLED display is book-ended by an input selection dial (inputs change with a click) and a slightly larger volume knob. A headphone output and power button also feature on the right-hand side. Oddly, the remote can't power the amp on or off, but we like its design. The amp's lack of digital inputs may bother

some, though a decent choice of analogue connections make it fairly well-equipped. There's a 6.3mm headphone output, a balanced XLR in, and five line-level inputs.

Input one can be turned into a phono input with one of the company's Sequel phono modules (ranging from £125-160, depending on sensitivity ratings) fitted, while input five is an expansion port that can be replaced by Creek's plug-in AMBIT Tuner (£125) or Bluetooth-toting Ruby DAC (£400). Inputs three and four can also be programmed as power amp inputs via the amp's menu, should you choose to hand over volume duties to your source. Creek would, of course, point you to the matching Evolution 50CD DAC and CD player (£950).

The Evolution 50A amp has come into a market dominated by Rega, Naim and Cyrus at this price and holds its own. It isn't the complete product, but it has the entertainment factor for listening to music for hours on end.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Fast, agile delivery; great midrange; times well; good headphone output; smart casework

AGAINST Bass lacks weight; doesn't have solidity or authority of rivals

VERDICT A great performance and fine design in one good-value package

Cyrus 6a

£800

★★★★☆



The Cyrus 6a has become something of a favourite son in the amp world. It won an Award after it appeared in 2012 and – despite being dethroned by the Naim Nait 5si a year later – has kept hold of its five-star status ever since. Until now, that is. In light of the outstanding Rega Elex-R's entrance to the market, this entry-level amp has finally had to step down a tier to four-star respectability.

It does so gracefully, though. The 6a is by no means swept away by the competition during our latest re-visit, and doesn't drop its fifth star without reminding us of what we love about it.

Get on the good foot

Naturally, it does what Cyrus products do best: deliver an articulate, quick-footed sound that's as precise as any at this level. Put it to the test with alt-J's *Something Good* and the Cyrus plays to its strengths. The snappy bassline is delivered with impeccable timing, and each layer of the dense track is given a place and purpose in the presentation.

It wouldn't be much of an exaggeration to label the Cyrus a 'perfectionist' when it comes to organisation – John Williams's intricate *Born on the Fourth of July* theme demands stringent arrangement and the Cyrus duly ups its game, keeping tabs on underlying string sequences and intermittent harps.

There's plenty to applaud in the 6a's cool and calculated manner, though we'd like more fire. Its analytical approach is a trade-off for liveliness, and as a result upbeat songs lack the get-up-and-go to get us foot-tapping as usual. The Creek doesn't quite have the Cyrus's timing, but we find its expressiveness and energy more entertaining.

Monster punch

Yet ease into Eminem's *The Monster* and there's plenty of low-end punch when the bassline kicks in. It's revealing, too, the Cyrus spitting out lyrics with venom and digging out the quips in his rap.

It doesn't possess the dynamic agility of the Rega, nor quite muster the Naim Nait 5si's sense of power and drive, but what it lacks in outright muscle it makes up for in scale. And, typically for Cyrus components, there is a long upgrade path – starting with a factory upgrade from the '6a' to a higher-end Cyrus 8 model (for an added £700). Once that upgrade is done, you can add the PSX-R outboard power supply (suddenly now costing £745), which takes performance to a whole new level.

Elsewhere there are a decent number of analogue inputs, a headphone output and both pre-out sockets (for use with an add-on power amp) and Zone 2 outputs (to, for example, feed a second source to another room). There are twin

speaker outputs for bi-wiring available, too. Anyone familiar with a Cyrus product will recognise the amp's long and narrow aluminium chassis (available in brushed-black or quartz-silver) and dated-looking black-on-green display. We've long been fans of Cyrus's striking signature design, though we're surprised to find the 6a's volume dial a bit wobbly. We don't remember that.

Still in the game

The remote has (thankfully) changed since the amp's first appearance – the new handset is as good as you should expect at this price, with a tall, robust frame and sophisticated backlit buttons.

The Cyrus 6a might not be at the very top of the league anymore – it has been leapfrogged by more exciting and powerful rivals – but it remains a good-value amp. It's fast, insightful and as precise as any stereo amplifier at this level. We're still big fans of it, even if we have to deduct it a star.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR An articulate sound; organised; well-balanced

AGAINST Lacks liveliness of rivals

VERDICT The fast, articulate and agile Cyrus sound is present and correct in the 6a – but it lacks energy compared with newer rivals

The Cyrus 6a has the familiar MC-Bus remote connections, allowing single-handset operations of two or more Cyrus components.

Naim Nait 5si

£925

★★★★★



Next to the headphone output are four input buttons: a band of green light indicates which source is in use. A sole volume dial lies to the left of this.

The 2013 Award-winner may have just lost out to Rega's punchier, more revealing (and pennies cheaper) Elex-R in a tight head-to-head during this year's Awards discussion. But discount the Nait 5si at your peril - especially if hearing your system through headphones is important (the Rega doesn't have a headphone output, remember).

In its own right, the Naim is a superb amp: rich, refined and capable of making your system really sing. It's hard to imagine ever being bored by its temperament. Punchy and energetic, it launches itself into Daft Punk's *Give Life Back to Music*, bouncing along to the funky bassline with attack and rhythmic precision that makes it stand out from most competition.

Weight and scale

When it comes to spending almost £1000 on an amp, you want power and drive (an amp's main duty, after all). In this respect, the Naim delivers. There's genuine muscle behind its performance that feels beyond its 60 watts. Play one of the most dynamic tracks in our music library, John Williams's *The Theme from Jurassic Park*, and the 5si rises to the occasion, giving crashing cymbals weight and conveying a scale that puts you in awe of both the composition and amp.

Yet the Naim's authority isn't at the expense of delicacy: the fine line

between muscle and subtlety isn't an easy one to walk, but the Naim does it well. Picking out bells under the force of the dominating brass and string orchestration is effortless, and at no point do we feel short of background detail either. In fact the resolution on offer is more than pleasing at this price.

A hugely capable amplifier

Everything in the track gels nicely, and the 5si renders dynamic shifts with a good degree of fluidity. It gets precise instrument separation down to a T and, although its musical soundstage isn't of the Rega's expansive proportions, flutes and trumpets have room to breathe.

Make no mistake, this Naim is an extremely capable amplifier, with a striking ability to get under Norah Jones's silky-smooth, sultry vocals, while projecting them with clarity and pinpoint, dead-centre focus. The bass is taut and controlled, and never short of punch or solidity, and up top the higher frequencies have sparkle and don't trail off too early.

If you read the 'Best Systems' test in our October 2014 issue, you'll know pairing the amp with its matching (and terrific) CD player, the CDsi (£995), and a pair of B&W's 683 S2s (£1150) gives you a cracking system. And that's still true - even if the Rega might now be considered an even

better substitute, for its greater transparency and rhythmic flair. There's nothing off-putting as we move away from sound either - as long as you're not expecting digital inputs. Or Naim's usually extensive upgrade path. What analogue connections it does have are fine: four stereo RCA inputs, two DIN connectors and a sonically consistent 6.3mm headphone output that sits on the right-hand side of the tidy façade.

Core asset

We like the Naim's smart-yet-simple look; it has a great build (which happily extends to the remote control, too).

There's no doubting the Nait 5si's talents; it will shine at the core of any system made up of talented-sounding, like-minded electronics. We knew it was a class act when we first heard it. It's been a year since then, yet this hasn't changed our minds. The competition is tough, but this is a five star performer.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Big, brawny sound; huge scale and authority; good level of subtlety; lively, dynamic performer; strapping build

AGAINST Tough competition

VERDICT Dips in the rankings to make way for Rega's Elex-R, but still a sub-£1000 superstar

PLAY LINK

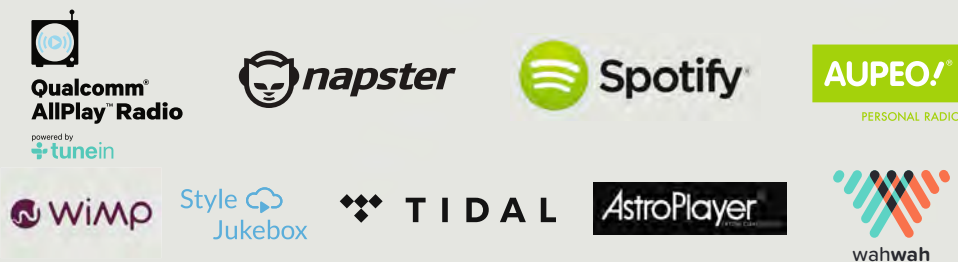
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Rega Elex-R

£900

★★★★★



Rega's latest mid-range amp isn't much to look at but it has made quite an entrance: the Elex-R received a glowing five-star review before making off with a 2014 Award as 'Best amplifier £800-£1500'. The question is, does it have the legs to sit pretty at the top for the long run? If this latest revisit is anything to go by, we'd say 'yes'.

It certainly has the workings of a great amp, borrowing from two of Rega's other Award-winning models. It uses its much-loved smaller sibling, the Brio-R (£480), as a base and borrows circuit elements from the brilliant higher-end Elicit-R (£1600). The result? Another exceptional entry, and one that shines in this mid-range price bracket.

The Elex-R doesn't stray from Rega's typical sonic character: fast, agile and as musical as they come at this level, it laps up the rhythmic clapping beat and caffeinated pace of Macklemore and Ryan Lewis' *Can't Hold Us*.

Disciplined enthusiasm

Its up-for-it, hearty delivery has the muscle and drive to charge through any song we throw at it, as well as having the refinement and discipline to keep the presentation smooth and controlled.

The Elex-R's faithful reproduction of music is nothing short of stunning. There's detail on tap, the Rega revealing a level of subtlety that'll pique your

interest whatever the music. It's as happy picking out finer threads of detail in the convoluted sections of Hans Zimmer's *Mountains* from the *Interstellar* soundtrack - often the first to be overlooked by less scrupulous amps - as it is unveiling variation in dense electric guitar notes in Band of Horses' *NW Apt.*

There's an unmatched level of vocal expression. Nina Simone comes through with a newfound sense of rawness and realism in her rendition of *I Put A Spell On You*. The Creek Audio Evolution 50A nears this level of midrange transparency, but the Rega better captures the nuances in Simone's deep, guttural voice - and with greater solidity.

The Elex-R demonstrates authority and scale better than anything we've heard at this price, including the powerhouse Naim Nait 5si (£925). We've always been fans of the Naim's robust delivery, but the Rega takes things even further.

Dynamic performance is equally enthralling. The Rega revels in the ebbs and flows of the jazzy ballad, proving a touch more agile than the Naim. Its far-reaching range never curbs trumpets and horns, allowing them to soar with real enthusiasm.

Tonally the Rega sits on the lean side of neutral, so a little care with matching wouldn't go amiss. Paired with rich, solid-sounding speakers, such as the

Q Acoustic Concept 40s (£1000), or B&W's more neutral 683 S2s (£1100), it feels right at home.

Traditional values

If it's a traditional amp you're after, you can't go wrong with the Elex-R. It has ample connections (although there's no headphone output) and a terrific MM phono stage that's happy making the most of class-leading £1000 turntables.

Build quality is first-rate, but the remote is disappointing: it's functional but insubstantial, and it lacks the solidity of rival handsets.

You know you've got a good amp on your hands when all you can think of to fault is the remote. Performance-wise, the Elex-R takes things to another level. There are good and great amps around the £1000 mark but put any up against it and odds are the Rega will give us a wider window into any piece of music. We wouldn't be surprised if this were still true a year from now.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Expressive; lively yet organised delivery; hugely revealing; good sense of power and drive; good phono stage; solid build

AGAINST Poor remote

VERDICT A hugely talented amp with the drive, agility and rhythmic precision of a class-leader

Like the best kit, this Rega is modest about its abilities. That plain frontage hides an amplifier of exceptional verve, great authority and scrupulous fidelity.



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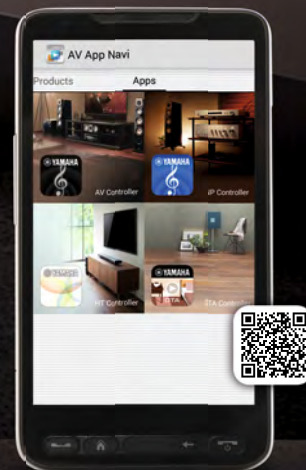
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TEST VERDICT**THE WINNER****Rega Elex-R £900**

★★★★★



Three Award-winners (one current, two previous) and an impressive newcomer – rarely do we have a test with such a wealth of credentials. Yet the Rega Elex-R manages to top them all.

Our newcomer, the Creek, came in as underdog and held its own with four stars. If a system needs an energy boost, the Evolution 50A will give it an espresso hit.

The Cyrus 6a earned four stars, too. For the first time in a test, it's no longer able to compete with the Rega Elex-Rs of the sub-£1000 amp world. Yet it still has a whole lot to shout about.

In terms of Rega-versus-Naim, in our 2014 Awards head-to-head tussle we had a Rega victory. This time around the result is the same. Features-wise the two are

fairly evenly matched: the Naim gets one over on the Rega with a headphone output (and a good one at that), and the Rega responds with an excellent phono stage. No doubt these features will sway some when choosing between them.

But when it comes to performance, it's a little less down to preference. The Elex-R is simply a fantastic performer, outclassing its closest rival with a smidgeon more transparency, dynamism and even the Nait 5si's speciality: power.

Nevertheless, the Nait still has all three qualities in spades, and retains its five-stars. It's a step-up from the Creek and Cyrus for authority, drive and dynamics, and justifies the extra cash. It remains a fine buy at the price.

SYSTEM BUILDER

Perfect partners to bring the best out of the
Rega Elex-R

**Speakers****B&W 683 S2 £1150 ★★★★★**

If you can accommodate them, these towers will blow you away with their scale and power.

**Turntable****Rega RP6/Exact £1000 ★★★★★**

It may have just missed out on an Award this year, but sonically the RP6 is a brilliant match.

**Bluetooth DAC****Arcam MiniBlink £90 ★★★★★**

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Facts & figures**Creek Evolution 50A****£800 ★★★★★**

Power output (watts) 55 • DAC no • Line level in 5 • MM phono in 0 • MC phono in 0 • USB in 0 • Tape loops 0 • Pre-amp out no • Speaker outputs 1 • Tone controls no • Headphone out yes • Remote control yes • Finishes 2 • Dimensions 6 x 43 x 8 •

**Cyrus 6a****£800 ★★★★★**

Power output (watts) 40 • DAC no • Line level in 6 • MM phono in 0 • MC phono in 0 • USB in 0 • Tape loops 0 • Pre-amp out 2 • Speaker outputs 2 • Tone controls no • Headphone out yes • Remote control yes • Finishes 2 • Dimensions 7 x 22 x 36 •

**Naim Nait 5si****£925 ★★★★★**

Power output (watts) 60 • DAC no • Line level in 4 • MM phono in 0 • MC phono in 0 • USB in 0 • Tape loops 0 • Pre-amp out 0 • Speaker outputs 0 • Tone controls no • Headphone out yes • Remote control yes • Finishes 1 • Dimensions 7 x 43 x 30 •

**Rega Elex-R****£900 ★★★★★**

Power output (watts) 72 • DAC no • Line level in 4 • MM phono in 1 • MC phono in 0 • USB in 0 • Tape loops 1 • Pre-amp out 1 • Speaker outputs 0 • Tone controls no • Headphone out no • Remote control yes • Finishes 1 • Dimensions: 8 x 43 x 33 •

The world's most desirable kit

TEMPTATIONS

“Rarely have we heard bass delivered with such resolution”

■ **GamuT D3i/D200i** Pre/power amplifier

■ **£5500/£9300** ★★★★★

Gamut: we wouldn't be surprised if you've never heard of the company. It's Danish, and started life under the Sirius brand name back in the early '80s making amplifiers for studio use. But this is a company that has never really shouted about itself, or its products for that matter. That's a shame, because from what we've experienced it makes some very fine components. You can count the D3i preamp and D200i power amplifier among them.

That may be understating the matter somewhat. This pre/power combination is easily one of the best we've heard and - while expensive - is comparable in performance to alternatives that cost Mercedes money.

You get what you pay for

A high-end bargain, then? Hardly. £15,000 is still a truckload of money but we certainly see this combination as great value as far as top-end amplification is concerned.

This Gamut pre/power impresses the moment the music starts. It sounds clean, crisp and invitingly clear. Detail resolution is superb; we can't think of a rival that tells us more about the recording. Listen to Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* and the production is laid bare, but not in a clinical way. Low-level information that describes the recording venue is easily heard, making the size and type of acoustic space used obvious. The orchestra is arranged with care and precision, with the placement of instruments pleasingly secure.

More than its imaging capabilities, we're taken by the way this pairing renders instrumental timbre. It's done

Let's not understate the matter; this pre/power combination is easily one of the best we've heard and - while expensive - is comparable to alternatives that cost Mercedes money



in a natural, unexaggerated manner that separates the sounds of different instruments (playing in the same frequency band) with ease.

Sensitive yet powerful

We love the way the D3i/D200i combination deals with dynamics too. It has the finesse to deliver low-level variations brilliantly, yet given something challenging - Orff's *Carmina Burana*, for instance - it delivers the crescendos with real intensity and force.

There's more to applaud when we play *The Heist* by Macklemore and Ryan Lewis. The music has plenty of drive



here and a surefooted way with rhythms. The Gamuts deliver attack when required yet have no problem easing back with chilled-out tracks such as *Same Love*. We like the way this pairing handles midrange - it's articulate and fluid in a way most other transistor-powered alternatives barely hint at.

Rarely have we heard deep bass notes delivered with such resolution. This pre/power has no trouble discriminating between different bass instruments or notes, nor does it lack anything in agility at low frequencies. We've heard rivals that produced weightier bass (not that the Gamuts are obviously lacking in this

You won't be disappointed by the quality of build on these units - both exhibit the kind of attention to detail and solidity you'd expect at this price

The Gamuts deliver attack when required yet have no problem easing back with chilled-out tracks

See overleaf for more detail...



respect), but little that has so much insight in this region.

Top level top end

Move to the opposite end of the frequency spectrum and you'll find plenty of bite coupled to an unusual level of clarity. The combo's excellent transparency and insight mean poorer recordings are exposed, but unlike much of the competition these amplifiers don't go out of their way to emphasise those flaws. You'll get an honest and balanced account of the recording.

Move away from sound quality and the Gamuts remain on sure ground.

The preamp offers four line-level inputs, including XLR, and the usual option of balanced or single-ended outputs, which are mirrored on the power amplifier

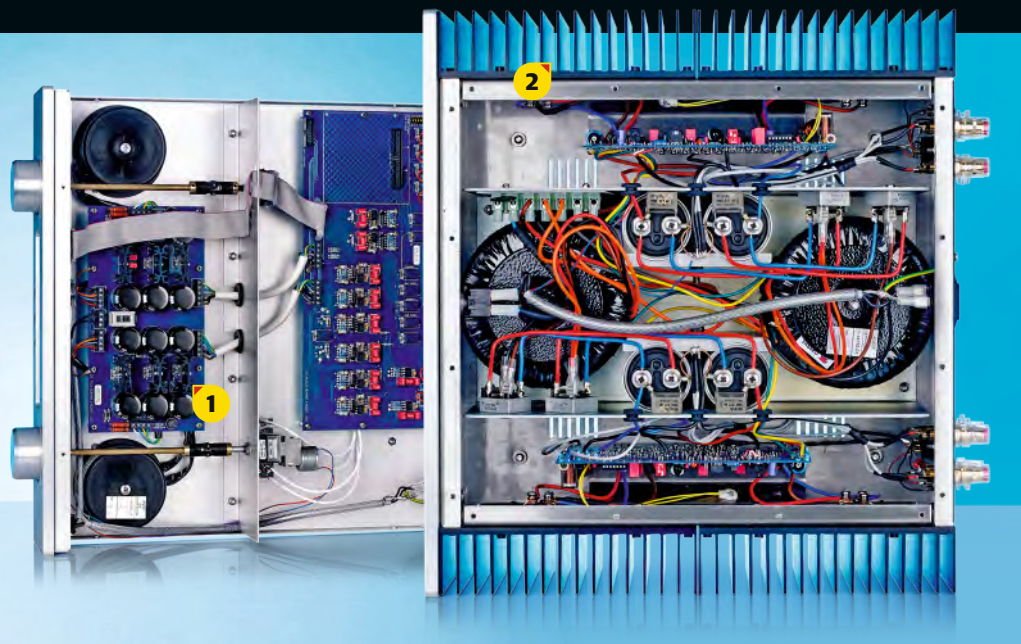


In detail

The dual-mono design of both units keeps the two channels separate from one another, giving each its own mains transformer and smoothing capacitors. It's a weightier solution than a conventional design and it pushes production costs up, but Gamut considers it worthwhile for the gains in noise reduction and stereo separation.

1 Extending the principle of component separation, the preamp houses its power supply board in a compartment at the front, away from the rear-mounted audio board.

2 The D200i can run at high volume levels without getting worryingly hot thanks to extreme heatsinks.



Build quality is as good as we'd hope for at the price and everything feels as if it will last for years. It's hard not to be impressed by the care taken in construction. These aren't cheap products but it's clear where the money has been spent. Our only complaint concerns the remote handset, a cheap-feeling unit that's not intuitively laid out. Gamut has to do better in this respect.

Don't be fooled by the input marked 'Phono' on the D3i preamp. This is a line-level only unit. There are four inputs (including balanced XLR) and the usual option of either balanced or single-ended outputs. Take a look inside and you'll find a dual-mono configuration right down to the power supplies. The idea is to ensure the two channels don't interact unduly, something that would increase distortion and degrade the stereo imaging. The D3i is a large unit as far as preamps go, particularly when it comes to depth, so make sure your equipment support has enough clearance.

The virtue of simplicity

The D200i power amplifier is a simple affair as far as features are concerned. It mirrors the preamp's balanced and single-ended connections, and has two pairs of speaker outputs per channel to make biwiring a little easier.

Under the cover there's another dual-mono configuration with doubled-up power supplies. Gamut's power amplifiers are unusual in using just a single output transistor per channel rather than combining multiple transistors as in conventional designs. Why do this? The company feels the technical compromises involved in

Benno Meldgaard Engineer



The D3i has the same basic construction as its D3 predecessor, using a balanced, single-ended J-fet input buffer, and a special analogue ALPS Volume potentiometer of only 1 Kohm. This helps keep noise and crosstalk to an absolute minimum. The buffer was chosen for its low levels of noise and coloration. The difference is in the power supply section, which has been further fine-tuned for cleaner, faster power delivery.

The key features of the D3i are its genuine dual-mono construction, with separate toroid transformer for each channel, and a very short, high-quality signal path for a very open and natural sound, with very low distortion.

In keeping with Gamut's key amplifier design philosophy, the D200i uses a single mos-fet [transistor] solution in which one ultra-fast output device drives each channel. We believe multiple devices cannot be absolutely aligned and so smear the sonic signal.

In the D200i we use a new ultra-high current mos-fet that handles up to 500A, together with a balanced power supply with much faster and higher power delivery for a lower noise floor and improved dynamics.

As the icing on the cake, we changed the cabling on both units to our own Wormhole cable, to ratchet the performance up another notch.

combining multiple output transistors are too great.

Muscle to match

The D200i will deliver 220W per channel into eight ohms and 400W as impedance halves. The company also claims 700W per channel into a two-ohms load, which suggests the D200i will be happy driving just about any price-compatible speaker.

There's no shortage of quality high-end pre/power combinations, but we find ourselves deeply impressed by this Gamut pairing. Its transparency and resolution are class-leading and we find its fluidity quite addictive. If you want an honest amplifier that doesn't stamp its signature on the recording too heavily we can't think of a better alternative.

Consider if You value transparency, detail and agility above all else

Highlight We love this combination's insight, subtlety and fluid delivery

Gamut D3i Rating ★★★★★

FOR Transparency and detail resolution; agility; fluid delivery; subtle dynamics; stable and expansive stereo imaging; fine build and finish

AGAINST Poor remote handset

VERDICT If you're looking for an insightful and honest preamp the D3i is an fine place to start

Gamut D200i Rating ★★★★★

FOR Immensely detailed sound; articulate presentation; power; finesse; build and finish

AGAINST If price isn't an issue, nothing

VERDICT One of the finest power amplifiers we've heard. The D200i is both analytical and entertaining; that's a rare combination

TECH SPECS

GAMUT D3i

Type Preamp
Line level in 4
Tape loops 1
Outputs Preamp, XLR
Dimensions (hwd) 11 x 43 42cm

GAMUT D200i

Type Power amplifier
Claimed power 220W
Bridgeable No
Inputs Phono, XLR
Dimensions (hwd) 16 x 43 x 47cm
Weight 34kg

It takes two, baby - for true stereo 'wireless' sound.



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WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION

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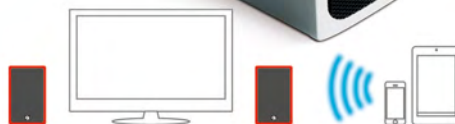
AVFORUMS

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TEMPTATIONS

Bang & Olufsen BeoVision Avant 55

True to form, B&O has pushed the boat out on design. The 55 is beautiful to look at in more ways than one



TECH SPECS

Screen size: 55in

Full HD: Yes

Tuners: Freeview HD

HDMI in: 6

USB in: 2

Dimensions (hwd):

71 x 129 x 10cm

Weight : 55kg

This lovely all-metal structure swivels the TV into the right viewing position with all the grace of a ballerina, its multitude of motors rotating the base as well as the upright

“This is one of the classiest TVs money can buy”

■ Bang & Olufsen BeoVision Avant 55 Television

■ £5995 ★★★★★

Luxury is a quality that's sadly lacking in TVs. Even high-end models from industry giants such as Samsung and Panasonic barely hint at it. Sure, when it comes to features and technology these range-toppers tend to be right at the cutting edge, but that's not what luxury is all about. We think it's a concept that's as much about how a product makes you feel when you use it as about outright performance. It's clear Bang & Olufsen understands this well.

The BeoVision Avant 55 may be a 4K set, but that resolution is not the thing that grabs our attention. Initially, it's the elegant motorised stand. Yes, that's right, the stand. Once programmed, this lovely all-metal structure – yours for a mighty £1195 – swivels the TV into the right viewing position with all the grace of a ballerina, its multitude of motors rotating the base as well as the upright that supports the TV. Ostentatious? Certainly, but useful too if you happen to watch TV from a variety of seating positions. The support also tucks the TV out of the way once you switch off, helping to free a little bit more space in the room. B&O also makes a motorised wall bracket (also £1195) that performs similarly pleasing gymnastics.

Smooth soundbar

The motorised action doesn't stop there. As the TV glides into position, the Avant 55's speaker array lowers into place. It is, in effect, a built-in soundbar. The 55 as a whole uses no fewer than eight drive units, each with a dedicated 60W amp. The drive-unit complement comprises a trio of tweeters, three midrange drivers and two bass units. B&O has a reputation for producing fine-sounding TVs and

with this kind of elaborate specification it's easy to understand why.

The company also understands that, no matter how well the product is built (and it is lovely, with a smartly finished metal chassis) the user's main point of contact is the remote control handset. It's a rather obvious point that many manufacturers simply don't pay enough attention to. It's something that B&O invariably gets right.

Handset heaven

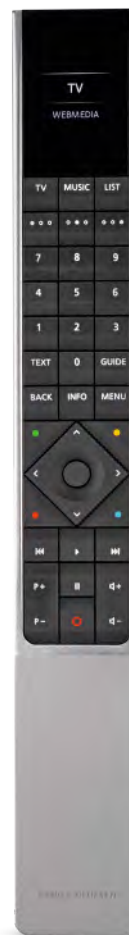
The aluminium-cased unit supplied with the BeoVision Avant is beautifully balanced, nicely weighted and laid out with care. Compared with this, most other TV remotes look and feel as if they belong in a bargain-basement bin.

The Bang & Olufsen proposition doesn't stop there. While most TV purchases involve you trying to wedge a big TV box into your car and getting the thing running yourself, with the Avant things are different. We would certainly expect the dealer to install it for you, though we have no doubt it would be for a charge. The price would depend on how much work is required, but it's something we recommend, because there are a lot of adjustments and features here that are easy to miss for anyone not familiar with the product.

We suspect the combination of motorised stand, gorgeous remote and the theatrics of the retractable speaker coupled to the classy overall appearance will go a long way to opening many people's wallets. We need more though. Looking through the specifications we start to worry for this 4K set.

We notice that it's equipped with only HDMI v1.4 connections, which limits

Not all premium-price products get the remote right, but the BeoVision's handset is an ergonomic triumph



inputs of 4K video to no higher than 30fps. The other issue is that there's no on-board HEVC decoding, making Netflix 4K playback no-go.

So B&O has given us a 4K screen that can't show the only proper 4K source we have at the moment. Clever. And if you can get some outboard video streamer to do the job, the quality of its output could well be compromised by the older-generation HDMI connection used.

Seems like an own goal and, to a certain degree, it is. We're sure there are engineers within the company working to sort these things out. At least we hope they are. So, is this limited 4K capability a deal breaker? Almost, but not quite.

The main sources

The vast majority of source material available is in standard or HD, and will remain so for a number of years to come. It's how the Avant performs with these video standards that concerns us most. Here it's on solid ground.

We start off with a Blu-ray of *Her* and are deeply impressed by what we see. The BeoVision delivers a bold, confident picture with rich, but still convincing, colours. Difficult-to-do things such as skin-tones are rendered with finesse, while bolder colours such as the greens in grass or the blue of a clear sky are delivered with skill.

The Avant's detail levels are excellent – edges of objects are drawn with precision, while long, slow camera pans have a deeply impressive stability.

Move over to *Thor: The Dark World* and we enjoy the B&O's excellent contrast. It can combine dark and light elements in a single frame really well. Black rendition is excellent with this



edge-lit LCD panel delivering proper darkness without overtly glossing over details in the shadows. It's a terrific balancing act few LCD sets manage. There's also subtlety in bright objects - things such as bright sunlight streaming into a dark space come through with uncommon nuance.

The third dimension

Next we try 3D in the form of Martin Scorsese's *Hugo*. The opening scene (the camera tracks over the city and through the train platform) is delivered with confidence. The image is crisp, with excellent depth. There's still a slight element of layered 2D rather than the fully rounded presentation of the very best sets, but the active 3D on this B&O remains stable and easy to watch over longer periods. There aren't any glasses in the box - you'll have to pay extra (around £95 each) which feels mean considering how expensive the set is.

What of 4K? Source material remains scarce, and without the ability to access Netflix we're left with B&O's demo footage showing plants, skyscrapers, coastlines and castles. We find it engaging viewing. Not really, it's as dull as anything, but it looks terrific. You can sit unfeasibly close to the screen and still enjoy a sharp, clean picture. Colours are impressively vivid while still looking natural, and edge definition is excellent. We're also impressed with motion stability, particularly in a clip that pans across London's landmarks. It makes us all the more annoyed by the set's innate engineering limitations.

Raising the standard

It's always going to be hard for standard-definition material to look good on a 4K screen - after all, the set has to guess the output of 19 pixels out of 20. Still, we're pleased with what the Avant manages. The DVD of *Stoker* looks a little soft and blurred with fast motion but remains a decent watch.

We notice similar effects with standard-definition broadcasts, even if the BeoVision still does a fine job with colours and contrast. Move to HD channels and things get markedly better. It's a crisp, clean presentation that suffers low levels of noise.

What of that elaborate sound system? It's as good as we'd hoped for. While no

alternative to a proper surround set-up, the built-in speakers are way ahead of what most TVs manage. There's a decent degree of detail here and it has dynamics expressive enough to communicate the emotional content of voices well.

But that's not the whole story as far as audio is concerned. B&O has built in a 7.1 surround processor that handles the full range of film sound formats (bar Dolby Atmos). Connect the Avant to any of the company's extensive range of speakers and the BeoVision becomes a home cinema hub. It's customisable too, in the sense that, once configured properly, the speaker set-up can be programmed to change if a different viewing position is chosen. That's neat and thoughtful.

Smart, but casual

Smart functionality? Not so smart. There's BBC iPlayer and You Tube, but not much else. B&O will argue that a partnering Blu-ray player or another source is more than likely to have such functionality built-in, and it has a point. But it's still disappointing to note the shortcoming. On the audio side, Spotify and Deezer music services are built in.

So where does that leave us? We are disappointed with the poor execution of 4K more than we are by the lack of smarts. That price tag is pretty high too. But balanced against this is the Avant's fine HD picture and commendable handling of standard-definition material. It sounds excellent, and that's before extra speakers are added to make it the heart of a full home cinema set-up.

We can't overlook the sheer class of the thing either. It really does look and feel special, from that lovely remote and motorised stand right down to the thoughtful arrangement of the menus. This is one of the classiest TVs money can buy, and unfortunately class is a quality that rarely comes cheaply.

Consider if You want a truly luxurious TV and don't mind paying for it

Highlight We love both the remote and the theatrics of the motorised stand

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Luxury build, finish and design; terrific picture with all sources; great sound; built-in 7.1 surround-sound processor; terrific remote

AGAINST Extremely limited with 4K; limited smart functionality

VERDICT The BeoVision is expensive, and flawed in some areas, but we still want one

You can sit unfeasibly close to the screen and still enjoy a sharp, clean picture. Colours are impressively vivid while still looking natural



1 In a neat display of design flair, the BeoVision's speaker array lowers itself into place when the set is switched on. But it's not just for show - the eight drivers sound good too **2** The screen's ample connections sit alongside its motorised stand



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"The new version of the DragonFly costs a third less than the original model, yet it sounds even better. It seems, for now, that there's no competing with that combination."

– WHAT HI-FI? Sound and Vision, Test Verdict, April 2014

"Where the original DragonFly excelled in clarity and detail, v1.2 added a richer, more colorful midrange, improved spatial abilities, and a greater sense of ease. The new DragonFly added the color, texture, body, and soul that the older model missed."

– Stereophile, Stephen Mejias, Mar. 2014

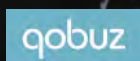
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THE NEXT EVOLUTION OF TELEVISION

Say hello to a new generation of TV as
OLED technology delivers the ultimate display

The first time you watch an OLED television is the first time you realise exactly how amazing a picture can look. The contrast. The colours. The motion-handling. It's all in another league to traditional LED sets.

LG's new curved OLED television has landed. The EC930V is available as a 55in model and its picture will leave you sprawled, goggle-eyed, on your sofa. OLED TV goes beyond with vivid colours, brighter pictures and deeper blacks all racing along 1,000 times faster than a traditional LED TV. It also has great wide-angled viewing angles thanks to a sleek curved design.

The EC930V is crammed with tech to enhance viewing – from the LG Colour Refiner that adjusts colour temperature for consistency and balance, to an infinite contrast ratio and eye-popping 3D.

It also features webOS, LG's celebrated Smart TV platform, and a simple way to switch between broadcast TV, apps, on-demand services and more.

The next evolution of TV is here.

But LG don't want to stop there... The hotly anticipated 4K OLED – a TV that combines the two best screen technologies to produce a picture-perfect display – is available from December this year.

It's the next
evolution of
TV – and it's
available now



3

must-watch Blu-rays for the EC930

Nebraska (2013)

If it's contrast you want, you can't go wrong with a black-and-white film. And if you want comedy, drama, pathos and weirdness, you can't go wrong with *Nebraska*. As compelling as it is beautiful and with the infinite contrast and extreme detail of OLED and ULTRA HD 4K it's even more satisfying. Turn the lights off, bask in the screen and you'll be blown away.

Star Trek (2009)

It's hard to pick just one thing OLED does amazingly. But colour is certainly up there – and few directors use colour quite like JJ Abrams, the man at the helm of the 2009 *Star Trek* reboot. Inky blacks set off vivid, visceral space scenes here – which are made even more immersive thanks to the EC930's curved display.

Saving Private Ryan (1998)

LG's OLED televisions are 1000 times faster than conventional LCD screens. That means super-accurate, super-sharp motion. *Saving Private Ryan*, harrowing though it might be, has some of the most testing action on disc – so it's only fitting that you do it justice with a television capable of displaying it in all its terrifying glory.

PLAY LIST

The movies, music and games to test your system



**Sin City2:
A Dame To Kill For**
Blu-ray
Out now



Bonus content

- Behind the Sin
- Character profiles: Eva Green is the Dame to Kill For/Jessica Alba is Nancy /Josh Brolin is Dwight / Joseph Gordon-Levitt is Johnny
- Makeup Effects of Sin City
- Stunts of Sin City

Duration 102m

Audio English: DTS-HD
Master Audio 5.1

Picture	■	■	■	■	■
Sound	■	■	■	■	■
Extras	■	■	■	■	■

Darkness on the edge of town

Bullets, booze and broads: that's what you'll find in Sin City, where it's always midnight and everyone has a hand in something dirty.

It's been nearly 10 years, but this place doesn't change. If you liked it the first time, welcome back. You didn't? Well, better get out before you're spat out like a bad aftertaste.

For the uninitiated, *Sin City* is a series of graphic novels, now twice adapted into motion pictures that play heavy on pounding basslines and moaning saxophones.

This is a nasty world of crooks and dames, presented with Frank Miller's signature hyper-stylised, ultraviolent panache.

It's an over-the-top noir homage and a sight like no other. Nearly everything is starkly black and white, broken by splashes of bright colour. The novelty factor isn't as strong as it was in 2005, but it will still challenge your TV's contrast.

Witch-green eyes, ruby-red lips - but blood is often white. It's probably a good thing considering how much of it is spilled. There is a lot of violence. Throats are slit and there's a particularly nasty bit involving somebody's fingers.

But it's not just the violence that's gratuitous. There's also a silly amount of nudity. Eva Green almost never puts clothes on, and the girls of 'Old Town' offer a parade of flesh and fishnets. And yet, it never truly feels offensive. Despite the relentlessly grim tone, *Sin City* is never entirely serious.

Noir with a light side

There's more than a degree of camp to everything. The narration is a string of clichés from the dustiest of detective novels, read by subterranean voices. The cast is superb, and clearly having a great time hamming it up with mouthfuls of absolute drivel.

As with the original, *Sin City 2* serves up a handful of slightly intersecting storylines. The opening segment has a thug terrorising a bunch of obnoxious students. Elsewhere, a cocky gambler messes with the wrong people. A *femme fatale* torments her ex-lover. A stripper tries to take down a politician.

Most of these tales are hugely entertaining. Well, not the bits with Jessica Alba, who still has no presence. But that's fine, because Mickey Rourke is great fun and Eva Green is utterly captivating.

What's confusing (read: a narrative mess) is that this serves as both sequel and prequel, and some re-casts feel out of place.

Sin City 2: A Dame To Kill For is much like its predecessor. Either it's a guilty pleasure or it's entirely abhorrent, and only you can decide. If nothing else, it's one stylish peculiarity.

Spotify highlights [Join us on Spotify whf.cm/playlist2014](http://whf.cm/playlist2014)



Fela Kuti: Colonial Mentality An absolutely fulminating piece of jazz-inflected intensity and a hair-raising way to spend 13 minutes 42 seconds.

Pink Floyd: Louder Than Words Fundamentally changed (though not diminished) by time, this is as fitting a way for Pink Floyd to leave the stage as they could have hoped for.

Lorde: Flicker 'Reworked' by Kanye West (in this instance 'reworked' means 'turned into a pitch-black drone-a-thon of portentousness' – but in a good way).

Childhood: Blue Velvet It's not every band that contrives to leave a two-year gap between their debut single and debut album, but then Childhood are not every band.

Music

GAMES, MOVIES
& FORTHCOMING
RELEASES
p94



Download, CD, vinyl



**BELLE AND SEBASTIAN
GIRLS IN PEACETIME
WANT TO DANCE**
Out January 19th
★★★★☆

We all get a bit more accommodating as we get older, a bit more pragmatic and less headstrong. And while Belle and Sebastian may have been inching rather than striding along that path of least resistance, their ninth studio album of a career that's never been less than intriguing finds them at their most open and acquiescent.

Parts of *Girls In Peacetime Want To Dance* sound like they'd do anything to be a Big Hit Single. *The Party Line* and *Enter Sylvia Plath* (perhaps the best title for a song Morrissey never

wrote) are startlingly radio-friendly, sounding exactly like music produced by Animal Collective and Gnarl Barkley collaborator Ben H Allen III ought to: beaty, bouncy and ready for the floor.

The midrange matters

Elsewhere it's recognisably business as usual, albeit with the glossier, friendlier sound the band has been developing ever since appointing Trevor Horn to produce 2003's *Dear Catastrophe Waitress*. Your system must deal with the dynamic pile-up of *Nobody's Empire*, the spaciousness of *The Cat With The Cream* and the delicate fragility of *Ever Had A Little Faith?* with equal dexterity, but as is usual with Belle and Sebastian recordings it's the midrange that demands the real care and attention. There's a wealth of detail, nuance and expression waiting to be revealed. With it, this is an engaging collection of songs. Without, the entire album becomes a little spurious.

Specifications

Duration 61m 16s

Standout track *Ever Had A Little Faith?* "Something good'll happen, wait and see..."



That crucial midrange
will come across in all its
glory with this system

Download, CD, vinyl



**JON HASSELL/BRIAN ENO
FOURTH WORLD VOL 1
POSSIBLE MUSICS**
Out now
★★★★☆

Brian Eno has always had multiple fingers in numerous pies, and when he was approached to collaborate with Jon Hassell he envisaged a producer's role. Hassell, though, was keenly aware of the commercial traction Eno's name might generate (although a trumpeter of some reknown in avant-garde circles, Hassell was unsurprisingly low of profile) and the album was released with a double-billing. Not long after its release, Hassell complained Eno's approach was too 'commercial' and

indicated he was unhappy with the record. This was in 1980. Now, for the first time since 1992, *Possible Musics* is in shops and in download stores.

Mood and texture

Emphatically less about 'songs' and altogether more concerned with mood, texture and literal ambience, *Possible Musics* is a breathy, earthy collection of pieces with a very progressive eye on the idea of 'world' music. It also has an absolute determination to make a trumpet sound like anything but a trumpet. There's more than a gesture towards rhythm and groove in the likes of *Delta Rain Dream* and *Ba-benzele*, but overall the feel is outdoors-y, equatorial and, particularly in the case of the 21-odd minutes of *Charm (Over 'Burundi Cloud')*, abstractly pretty. A system with wide tonal variation, significant powers of detail retrieval, and the ability to express the silences as completely as the sounds is the minimum requirement.

Specifications

Duration 45m 05s

Standout track *Delta Rain Dream* Concise, accessible and (by prevailing standards) strong of structure.



A great set-up for delivering
the atmospheric feel of the
Hassell/Eno collaboration

Listen to it this way

The system

Pro-ject Essential II £210 ★★★★★
Pretty much an all-round perfect budget record player

Marantz PM6005 £300 ★★★★★

Better specified, better made and better sounding than the price even hints at

Q Acoustics Concept 20 £200 ★★★★★

Talented enough to survive multiple upgrades elsewhere in your system

Listen to it this way

The system

Sony Xperia Z3 Tablet Compact £320 ★★★★★

The best-sounding little tablet around

NAD D 3020 £400 ★★★★★

In terms of specification and performance it's everything an integrated amp should be

Dali Zensor 3 £300 ★★★★★

All the scale and energy you need, and more than capable of communicating the NAD's punch



Movie shorts

The Expendables 3

High art this franchise never was, but it's a decent offering if you like your action cheesy and creaky – even if it does shamelessly rely on star power.

Battlestar Galactica

The original series and *Galactica 1980* hit Blu-ray for the first time, and with some new bonus content. Ridiculous, but more fun than the gritty reboot.

Dawn of the Planet of the Apes

A sequel actually made strong by monkeying and CGI. Primate politics are fascinating – cram in the human factor and it's a little messy.

The Inbetweeners 2

Like the TV series? It gets significantly more puerile when the boys go *Down Under*. But when the jokes are relentless, some of them stick.

On-screen

System tester



Hercules Blu-ray Out now

★★★★☆

Hollywood takes another bash at Classical Stuff, now with Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson rocking a loincloth.

It may not be *Gladiator*, but it's not quite the tragedy you might expect. It's saved in part by a fresh approach, which takes the legend and beats it with a club.

Hercules' heroic feats are revealed to be the work of mercenaries with good marketing skills.

The man himself trades on reputation and charisma over actually being god-like.

Wait, charisma? Yes, it's a good turn from Dwayne Johnson, who proves he is more than eyebrows and body slams.

The problem with turning down the fantasy is that things get less fun. You don't get loud, spectacular scenes with serpent fist-fighting or lion-wrestling.

And so you're stuck with a bunch of humans. Most of them are fine. Some of them are very annoying. Not quite legendary, then.



Watch it this way

The system

Sony BDP-S4100 £95 ★★★★★
Astonishing HD pictures for the cash

Yamaha RX-V377 £260 ★★★★★
The perfect entry-level option

Q Acoustics 2000i 5.1 £625 ★★★★★
The scale and punch your movies need

Sony KDL-40W605 £450 ★★★★★
Extraordinary value for money

Games

Dragon Age: Inquisition

PS3, PS4, Xbox One, Xbox 360, PC Out now

★★★★☆

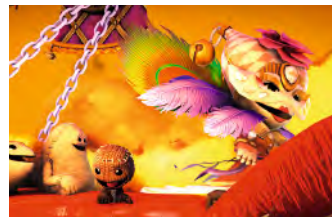


After a disappointing second entry, the *Dragon Age* series is back on track with threequel *Inquisition*. It's on a bigger scale than before, and makes far better use of the system of moral choices that developer Bioware is now famous for. Combat is mostly in realtime but can be paused. An all-round epic RPG.

LittleBigPlanet 3

PS4 Out now

★★★★☆



Sackboy makes his PS4 debut – and he's brought three new, playable friends along, each with a unique ability that switches up gameplay. Creating and playing homemade levels is a big part of the fun again, but the main story is rather short, and it's a big shame the game is so buggy at launch.

Far Cry 4

PS3, PS4, Xbox One, Xbox 360, PC Out now

★★★★☆



If you played *Far Cry 3* you'll know exactly what to expect of this sequel. Sure, you're in the mountains rather than on an island, but it's the same story of an outsider overthrowing a psychotic ruler. There's little truly new here then, but that doesn't mean the action isn't still a heck of a lot of fun.

Grand Theft Auto V

New on PS4, Xbox One, PC Out now

★★★★★



Wait, hasn't *GTA V* been out over a year? Yes, but it's only just made the leap to PS4, Xbox One and PC, and with a full remaster from Rockstar. It was already a technical *tour de force*, and at 1080p and with new textures it now looks utterly stunning. Even better, you can now play it in first-person.

What we are waiting for...

Movies (Cinema) Exodus: Gods and Kings (26th December) Ridley Scott and Christian Bale team up to make *Moses: The Movie*. Potentially offensive, with very apt timing.

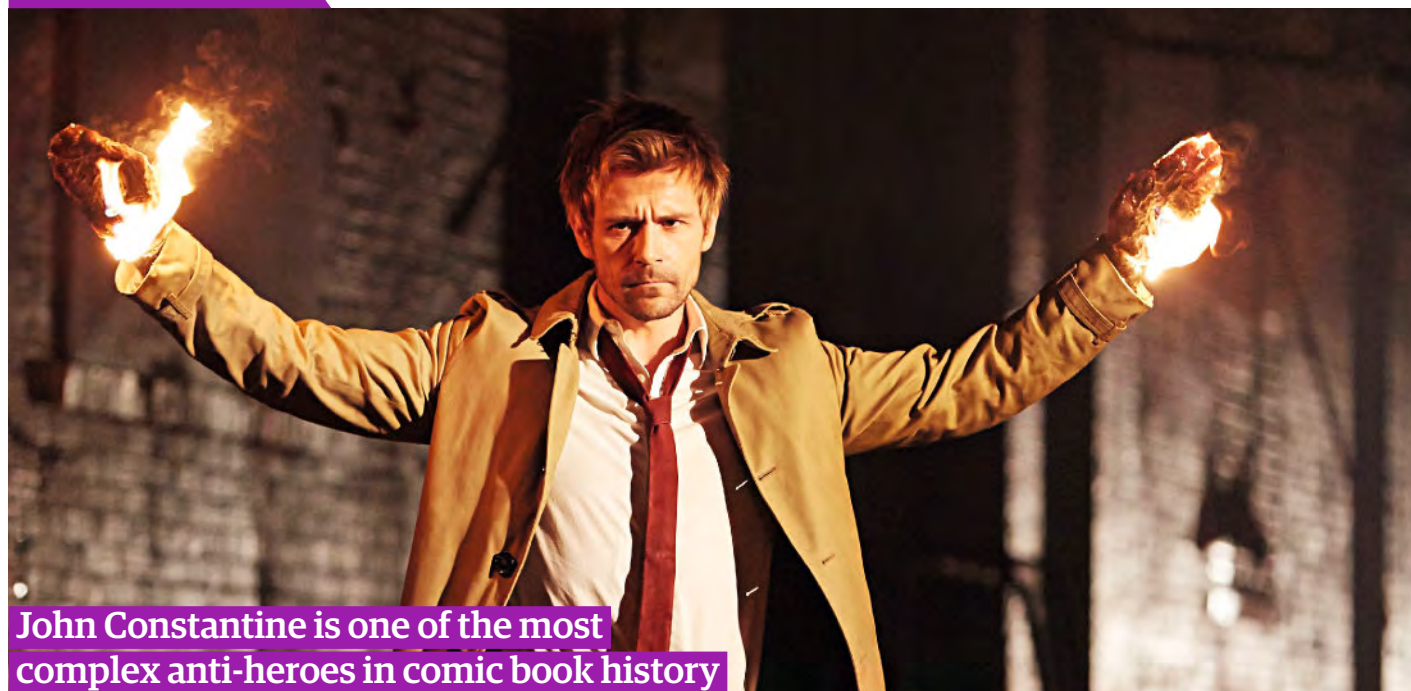
Movies (Blu-ray) A Walk Among The Tombstones (26th January) Liam Neeson's B-movie repertoire expands to murder mysteries. As usual, the solution is Liam Neeson.

Music (Download, CD, vinyl) José González - Vestiges and Claws (7th February) First solo album in seven years for Göteborg's Mr Sensitivity. Office anticipation is high.

Music (Download, CD, vinyl) Étienne de Crécy - Super Discount 3 (19th January) One for all the mums and dads: the third instalment of forward-thinking French house.

December in Hi-Def

The best on the box



John Constantine is one of the most complex anti-heroes in comic book history

Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.

Channel 4 HD - Fridays, 8pm

Is S.H.I.E.L.D. on the brink of discovering an alien city? That seems to be the direction this Marvel espionage series is taking, with Coulson and his team hoping to find said conurbation before Hydra does. Evil Nazi scientist Daniel Whitehall is hot on their heels and he owns the obelisk - they key to entering this fabled city. We also don't think it'll be long before Whitehall realises that the seemingly immortal young woman whom he experimented on has a close relation to Skye.

Constantine

Amazon Prime Instant Video - Saturdays

Fans of *Constantine* may be disheartened to know that filming has stopped at 13 episodes. We hope there's still a chance for the show to be renewed, as there's so much potential. Adapted from the

cult favourite and genre-defining *Hellblazer* comics, the show may not have had the most confident of starts but its true attraction lies in its title character. John Constantine is one of the most interesting and complex anti-heroes in comic book history, and Matt Ryan does a fantastic job in bringing the 'exorcist, demonologist, and master of dark arts' to life. He looks the part, is charming and cocky, and has enough personality to carry the show on his own. The storylines may tread the similar supernatural paths taken by *The X-Files* and *Supernatural* 10 years ago, but they do it with no little panache.

Gotham

Channel 5 HD - Mondays, 9pm

The longer series run has worked in *Gotham*'s favour. The first few episodes were inundated with more characters than we knew what to do with, but 22 episodes

gives them all a chance to breathe, establish their motivations and settle into their world's twisted hierarchy. We're loving the simmering power struggle between the two mob factions, while Oswald Cobblepot and Fish Mooney's scheming and backstabbing remain the most fascinating aspect of the show. Here's hoping that come series finale, it'll be the Penguin emerging victorious and lord of Gotham's underworld.

Doctor Who Christmas Special

BBC One HD

What does the Doctor want for Christmas? That's the question posed at the end of the eighth series. Titled *Last Christmas*, the 2014 festive special sees Nick Frost don the Santa suit and bring the magic of Christmas to the Doctor. We suspect the Doctor isn't in a very seasonal mood.

And what of Clara? It seemed like a final goodbye in the series eight finale, but we know the two friends will reunite for the Christmas adventure. With rumours of Jenna Coleman leaving, will it be their last? Will this leave the Doctor on his own, or will we be seeing a brand new companion step inside the Tardis?

Marco Polo

Netflix - 12th December, 7pm

Think of it as *Game Of Thrones*, but set in Asia. The show follows the travels of Venetian merchant Marco Polo and his life in the courts of Mongolian emperor Kublai Khan. The trailer promises lavish sets and costumes, exotic locations, grand battles, and enough backstabbing and sultriness to make Westeros feel a bit nervous. The 10 episodes cost a reported \$90 million to make, so we're expecting great things from this show. Dragons would help.

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M0115P / M0115D

WIN a home cinema system in our £4000 GIVEAWAY!

1st Prize

Sony KDL-40W605B TV (£450)
Sony BDP-S6200 Blu-ray player (£180)
Yamaha RX-V677 AV receiver (£560)
Monitor Audio Radius R90HT1
speaker package (£1500)



How to win

To win one of these fantastic prizes, you will need to submit a review on *whathifi.com* of a TV, hi-fi, home cinema or portable product you own. **Go to <http://whf.cm/winahomecinema>** and follow the instructions to submit your review.

See www.whathifi.com/competitions/competition-terms-and-conditions for full details - terms & conditions apply. Competition closes January 12th, 2015 at 11.45pm.

Runners-up prizes:

Canton DM50 soundbase
(worth £400)
Q Acoustics Q7000i 5.1
speaker package
(worth £900)



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BUYER'S GUIDE

NEW

Modern TVs, in general, sound pretty poor. That's where **soundbars** and **soundbases** come in. But which is for you?

Most of us store our tunes digitally nowadays. Don't miss our tips on how to get the best from **music via your laptop**



QR (quick response) codes

For full reviews, get a barcode scanner app on your smartphone. Scan these little squares and they'll take you to the relevant section on whatifi.com

All the latest kit, all the latest ratings...

Welcome to the **UK's best guide** to TVs, hi-fi, home cinema and mobile, with star ratings for more than **1500 products**. Where other magazines rely on isolated

writers reviewing in a range of locations, our star ratings are decided by an **expert team** of reviewers working together, in a **state-of-the-art testing facility**.

Within this guide you'll find all our favourite **four- and five-star** products - including **Award-winners** - to help you pick the best kit for your budget.



Kobina Monney, Buyer's Guide Editor

Exciting new additions...



Sony KD-65S9005B, p112

"Smarter, more stylish and a better performer than the average 4K TV"



Bowers & Wilkins T7, p143

"B&W's first Bluetooth effort looks and sounds great"

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Your essential system set-ups

BEST BUYS

GET THE
BEST KIT
FOR YOUR
BUDGET

Home Cinema Systems

BLU-RAY PLAYERS



SONY BDP-S4100
★★★★★
£95

Simply astonishing performance and pictures for less than £100. Smart functionality too: you can't go wrong...

RECEIVERS



YAMAHA RX-V377
★★★★★
£260

This is the perfect entry-level option for those upgrading to five-channel sound on a budget. It's a brilliant buy.

SPEAKERS



Q ACOUSTICS 2000i 5.1 PACK
★★★★★
£625

Our 2013 Award winner produces sound with impressive scale for movies and music.

DISPLAYS



SONY KDL-40W605
★★★★★
£450

If you're after a great all-rounder in both picture quality and smart features, this TV is it. Splendid.

CD PLAYERS



MARANTZ CD6005
★★★★★
£350

This incredibly musical player offers detail in spades, not to mention a great way with dynamics.

AMPLIFIERS



MARANTZ PM6005
★★★★★
£300

A return to form by Marantz in this market, and a fine match for its CD-player sibling.

SPEAKERS



DALI ZENSOR 3
★★★★★
£300

An entertaining and easy listen - an airy, spacious sound with lots of detail, punch and tonal balance.



SONY BDP-S7200
★★★★★
£250

Sony's new Blu-ray offering is a really remarkable achievement. It has huge ability with images and sound.



SONY STR-DN1050
★★★★★
£500

Incredible value, this home-cinema powerhouse has pretty much all the features and ability you want.



DALI ZENSOR 15.1
★★★★★
£980

This package is as entertaining as it is insightful, delivering all the drama and punch we could hope for. Superb.



SAMSUNG UE48H64800
★★★★★
£700

A whole lot of screen for your money - and this is a superb performer as well. A bargain.



CYRUS CDI
★★★★★
£1050

A player that puts detail resolution, agility and dynamic expression above all else. Which is why we love it.



REGA ELEX-R
★★★★★
£900

One of the most talented sub-£1k amplifiers we know. Delivers a fast, agile sound with superb dynamic shifts.



B&W 683 S2
★★★★★
£1150

The sense of scale these floorstanders produce is massive, but they do delicacy and subtlety too. Superb speakers.



PANASONIC DMP-BDT700
★★★★★
£500

A superb Blu-ray player with 4K/60fps capability and 4K Chroma upscaling. A star.



PIONEER SC-LX58
★★★★★
£1400

Mature, powerful, refined - this amp will make you feel as if you're sitting in a large cinema hall.



KEF R100 5.1
★★★★★
£2850

Best Buy for 2013 and 2014, the R100 5.1 is simply superb with demanding film soundtracks - great in stereo too.



SONY VPL-HW55ES
★★★★★
£2800

Superb in 2D, this projector also excels at 3D. Edges are sharp, pictures have depth and stability.



ROKSAN CASPIAN M2 CD PLAYER
★★★★★
£1800

Combines bite, refinement and rhythm better than anything else we've heard at this price.



REGA ELICIT-R
★★★★★
£1600

The best-value premium stereo amp we know: surefooted, with superb timing, it's very revealing too.



SPENDORA 6R
★★★★★
£2500

Attacking, detailed and balanced, these floorstanders demonstrate a winning way with dynamics.

Complete your home cinema system

SET-TOP BOXES

Sky+HD 2TB
£250
Humax HDR-1000S (500GB) £220
Humax DTR-T1010
£230

PROJECTORS

BenQ W1400
£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
£200

REMOTE CONTROLS

One For All Zapper
£10
Logitech Harmony One £125
Logitech Harmony 1000 £280

Grow your hi-fi system

TURNTABLES

Pro-Ject Essential II
£200
Rega RP3/Elys2
£550
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

Cambridge Minx Xi
£60
Denon D-M39DAB
£310
Naim UnitiQute 2
£1150

AUDIO CABLES

QED XT40
£10/m
Atlas Elements Integra £45
Supra USB 2.0
£30

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AWARDS 2014**

Turntables
Best turntable up to £500
Project Essential 2

Turntable/Phono Preamp
Project Essential 2 [RRP £209]
& **NAD PP4** [RRP £169]
£299 Black Finish



Amplifier/DAC
NAD D 3020
£399

Claim Free
AKG Y50 Headphones
Worth £79.95



Digital Sound Projector
Yamaha YSP-3300
£599
Silver Finish

**SAVE
£400**

Also Available:
Yamaha YSP-4300 £769 • SAVE £530



Wireless Speaker System with Dock
B&W Zeppelin Air
£349.95
Lightning
Connector Model

**SAVE
£150**



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**WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014**

Multi-room systems
Best multi-room system up to £500
Sonos

Wireless Streaming Music System
Sonos

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**One year of
music included**

Buy any Sonos player and claim 365 days
of Deezer Premium+ worth over £100



Wireless Streaming Music System
Bluesound

**WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014**

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Multi-room systems
Best multi-room system £500+
Bluesound

HIGH RES AUDIO



TIDAL
Includes three months
of music from Tidal
Worth £60

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CD Player/Amplifier & Speaker Package

NAD C516

NAD C316

Wharfedale Diamond 220

£499

PACKAGE DEAL



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

Stereo speakers
Best stereo speaker up to £200
Wharfedale Diamond 220



Marantz

Music Streaming System
with CD & DAB Tuner

M-CR610

£SSAV

SAVE £100



NAD Amplifier

Also Available:
NAD C356BEE DAC 2.0 £599

C356BEE

£499



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

CD players
Best CD player up to £200
Marantz CD6005

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

Stereo amplifiers
Best stereo amplifier up to £200
Marantz PM6005

Marantz
CD Player/Amplifier

CD6005/PM6005

£SSAV

SAVE £501

CD/Amplifier
Package

Roksan
Kandy K2

£1249

PACKAGE DEAL



SAVE £798

Network Amplifier/DAC & Speaker
Package

NAD D 7050

**PSB Imagine Mini with
Stands**

£799

Speakers in Walnut or Cherry Finish.
Gloss Black or White available £899



PACKAGE DEAL

LIMITED STOCK



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PACKAGE DEAL

Hi-Res Audio Player System & Speakers

Sony HAP-S1

Q Acoustics Concept 20

£999

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

Stereo speakers
Best stereo speaker £200-£400
Q Acoustics Concept 20

**£100
GIFT VOUCHER***
FOR HIGH RESOLUTION MUSIC
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qobuz

MUSIC IS BACK



**Hi-Res
AUDIO**

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Audiolab DAC

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Audiolab M-DAC £539

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Q-DAC

£249

DAC/Headphone Amp

NAD D 1050

£399

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Worth £79.95



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Speakers
**Monitor Audio
Bronze BX2**
£225



SAVE £20

Speakers
**Wharfedale
Diamond 220**
£179

Also Available:
Diamond 210 £135



**WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014**
Stereo speakers
Best standmounter up to £200
Wharfedale Diamond 220



2010i £116.95

SAVE £13

2020i £152.95

SAVE £17

2050i £413.95

SAVE £46

Standard Graphite or Walnut Finishes. Gloss finishes available at additional cost.



**WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014**
Stereo speakers
Best floorstander up to £600
Q Acoustics 2050i

SAVE £70

Bluetooth Speaker
System
**Q Acoustics
BT3**
£279



SAVE £190

Wireless Speaker
System
**Pioneer
XW-SMA3**
£79



LIMITED STOCK

SAVE £320

Wireless Speaker
System
**NAD
Viso 1**
£179



LIMITED STOCK

SAVE £50

Headphones
**PSB
M4U 2**
£249



SAVE £70

Recertified Model

Headphones
**B&W
P3 RC**
£99.99

Also Available:
B&W P5 RC £149.99



LIMITED STOCK



Speakers
**PMC
Twenty-22**
£1970

**WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014**
Stereo speakers
Best standmounter £1200+
PMC Twenty 22

Speakers
**PMC
Twenty-21**
£1485



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SAVE £318



The Yamaha BD-S677 3D Blu-ray Player offers Miracast and advanced network functions. The RX-V677 is a 7.2 Channel Network AV Receiver with Wi-Fi Built-In. It Supports the latest HDMI version, 4K upscaling, AirPlay and HTC Connect. KEF's E305 is a 5.1 Speaker Package based on KEF's new 4.25" Uni-Q driver array combined with a superlative matching sub woofer.

Blu-ray Player/AV Receiver
& 5.1 Speaker Package

Yamaha BD-S677
Yamaha RX-V677
KEF E305

£1399



PACKAGE DEAL



aptX CSF Bluetooth

Canton DM 50 Soundbase

Also Available:
Canton DM 75 £SSAV

£SSAV



aptX CSF Bluetooth

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Best Soundbar

Yamaha YSP-2500 Soundbar

Also Available:
Yamaha SRT-1000 Soundbase £SSAV

£SSAV

SAVE £238

Blu-ray Player/AV Receiver
& 5.1 Speaker Package

Sony BDP-S7200
Sony STR-DN1050
B&W MT-50

£1599

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Blu-ray players
Best Blu-ray player £350-£500
Sony BDP-S7200

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Home cinema amplifiers
Best home cinema amplifier £350-£700
Sony STR-DN1050

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Speaker packages
Best style package £1000-£1400
Bowers & Wilkins MT-50



PACKAGE DEAL

SAVE £450



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Arcam AV Receiver

FMJ AVR450

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DOLBY ATMOS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Best AV Receiver

Pioneer AV Receiver

SC-LX58

Also Available:
Pioneer SC-LX88 £SSAV

£SSAV

SAVE £499



Blu-ray Player & AV Receiver

NAD T 567
NAD T 758

£999

The NAD T 567 3D Blu-ray Player is everything you would expect from NAD; an affordable and solid machine packed with the latest technology and digital innovation. Everything about the T 567 spells quality.

The T 758 is a performance update to NAD's award-winning T 757 AV Receiver and continues their 'simple is better' design philosophy. It's Modular Design Construction gives the ability to easily upgrade the T 758 to include future digital formats, the answer to technology obsolescence.

PACKAGE DEAL

SAVE £150

Subwoofer
PSB SubSeries1
£149



LIMITED STOCK

SAVE £50

Subwoofer
REL T-Zero
£249



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Samsung UHD TV Curved

Ultra High Definition 4K



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SAMSUNG

HU8500 SERIES • CURVED 4K UHD TV

Introducing a breakthrough in TV viewing that will change the way you watch TV forever – the Samsung HU8500 Curved UHD. Wider viewing angles, pure and accurate colour reproduction and a sense of depth never experienced before are only possible on a curved Samsung screen, specifically shaped for UHD viewing at its very best.

55 65 78 FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY



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SONY

S90 SERIES • CURVED 4K UHD TV

The new S90 is Sony's first ever range of curved TVs. Available in two screen sizes: 65in and 75in, the S90 series boasts 4K Ultra HD resolution. Features and specifications include Sony's 4K X-Reality PRO picture engine, Triluminos colour technology, Motionflow XR800Hz, edge-lit LED backlighting, active 3D and a detachable Skype camera.

Sound is provided by Sony's new 4.2-channel multi-angle live speaker system which allows for "expansive, uncompromised 360-degree surround sound". Other features include Sony's Social Viewing for watching with friends over Skype, Live Football Mode, One-touch mirroring and Photo share.

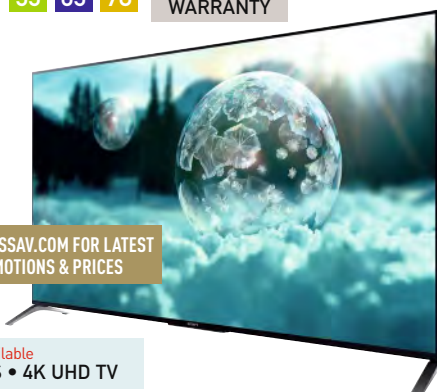
FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY 4K 65 75

SONY 4K

X8 SERIES • 4K UHD TV

The new Sony X8 series 4K UHD LED TV boasts four times more detail than Full HD, 4K gives stunningly natural images, not pixels. Dramatically higher image quality means that you can sit closer to the screen, filling more of your field of view until the screen disappears and you are enjoying an at-the-movies experience.

49 55 65 FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY Also Available SONY X9 SERIES • 4K UHD TV



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SAMSUNG • HU7500 SERIES • 4K UHD TV

48 55 65 75 FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY

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Tunbridge Wells 01892 531543
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LCD, LED & plasma TVs

LCD	Once only in smaller screens; now the most common type of panel
LED	This refers to the kind of backlighting used on an LCD panel
Plasma	The rival to LCD, now usually only seen on larger screens

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Sony KDL-32W706B

Awards 2014: Best 32in TV

"It may not be quite the most accomplished picture out there, but a tempting price puts it right at the top of our wishlist."



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Samsung UE48H6400

Awards 2014: Best 47-52in TV

"It's a subtler, more controlled and balanced picture, and we think that the TV giant has got its approach just right this year."



AWARD WINNER

Samsung UE55HU7500

Awards 2014: Best 52-60in TV

"It looks great across all resolutions and it has plenty of good features. If you're looking to get a 4K TV right now, look no further."

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	Active 3D	Passive 3D	Freeview	FreeSat	HDMI	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500													
Alba AMKDVD22W	130	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A capable set but there are better options for broadcast TV	LED	22	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	1	38x52x17
Celcus LCD40S913FHD	250	02.13/ST	★★★★★	Big screen on a budget: a real supermarket special	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	97x22x66
Finlux 32H8075-T	200	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Decent picture and smart features – cracking value for the price	LED	32	1366x768	●	●	●	●	3	43x73x6
Finlux 40F8073-T	330	03.14/GT	★★★★★	ATV with a sharp, exciting picture at a terrific price	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	55x93x4
Kogan LULED24DVDYA	134	02.13/ST	★★★★★	This versatile little set is fine value for money	LED	24	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	2	38x58x5
Kogan KULED22XXXVA	110	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Cheap and cheerful and all the better for it	LCD	22	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	2	39x54x17
Linsar 22LED906T	230	12.12/GT	★★★★★	A great 22in set with a DVD player and Freeview HD	LED	22	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	2	38x53x4
LG 32LS5600	299	02.13/ST	★★★★★	This budget TV gets the basics right	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	46x75x36
LG 50PA650T	499	01.13/GT	★★★★★	Good picture and price, but we'd like more detail	Plasma	50	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	70x117x5
LG 32LN575V	400	09.13/ST	★★★★★	A decent looking TV with credible smart and streaming features	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	45x74x8
Panasonic TX-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
Panasonic TX-P50X50B	453	01.13/GT	★★★★★	Hard to beat on performance per pound	Plasma	50	1024x768	●	●	●	●	2	72x118x8
Panasonic TX-P50X60B	430	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Compromised, but this Plasma is an admirable effort nonetheless	Plasma	50	1024x768	●	●	●	●	2	72x118x8
Philips 22PFL3517T/12	270	12.12/GT	★★★★★	An accomplished set with Freeview HD and YouTube	LED	22	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	32x51x5
Philips 32PFL4258T	480	09.13/ST	★★★★★	A talented TV with excellent picture quality	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	45x74x2
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	★★★★★	A surprising 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	★★★★★	A stunning, feature-laden TV from Samsung. Recommended	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	54x93x5
Sony KDL-26EX553	400	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Capable enough for a kitchen or child's bedroom	LED	26	1366x768	●	●	●	●	2	41x64x6
Sony KDL-32W653A	430	09.13/ST	★★★★★	Its picture lacks subtlety but this Sony is still a worthwhile option	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	2	44x73x7
Sony KDL-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
Technika 22-212i	168	02.13/ST	★★★★★	Great value, with plenty of features	LED	22	1366x768	●	●	●	●	2	37x54x1
Toshiba 32L6353	450	09.13/FT	★★★★★	A decent TV for the money but response times can be sluggish	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	44x76x7
Toshiba 40L6353	400	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Clunky interface aside, this is a decent TV with a great HD picture	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	54x92x27
Toshiba 40L6453DB	430	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Rivals are slicker, but this Toshiba has an attractive picture	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	57x96x9

£500-£2000

Finlux 42FME2425-T	500	10.14/ST	★★★★★	Sharp picture, decent detail and smart features. Finlux is back on form	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	2	56x96x6
Finlux 47S9100-T	800	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Good picture, decent 3D and a low price. Worth a look	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	67x112x4
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-L32ET5B	530	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Price drop pushes this firmly into five-star territory	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	47x76x5

TELEVISIONS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	Active 3D	Passive 3D	Freeview	Freesat	HDMI	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Panasonic TX-L42ET50B	900	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Good effort, great images, beaten by direct rivals	LED	42	1920x1080						4	60x99x4
Panasonic TX-L42FT60B	1100	08.13/ST	★★★★★	Likeable TV with a fine picture and great features	LED	42	1920x1080						3	56x96x4
Panasonic TX-P42GT50B	1200	10.12/GT	★★★★★	This sensational all-rounder remains a favourite	Plasma	42	1920x1080						4	60x99x5
Panasonic TX-L47AS650B	800	08.14/ST	★★★★★	A talented set, but other TVs have the edge in terms of value	LED	47	1920x1080						3	63x107x5
Panasonic TX-L47ET50B	1300	08.12/ST	★★★★★	This set gets plenty more right than it gets wrong	LED	47	1920x1080						4	66x110x4
Panasonic TX-L47DT65B	1600	06.13/GT	★★★★★	User-friendly set with clean, detailed images. A stunner	LED	47	1920x1080						3	63x107x4
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 42PFL6008	1000	08.13/ST	★★★★★	Impressive picture with comfortable 3D – a strong contender	LED	42	1920x1080						4	56x95x3
Philips 46PFL8007	1700	12.12/FT	★★★★★	A strong start for Philips' new range	LED	46	1920x1080						5	67x104x21
Philips 47PFL6008	1200	06.13/GT	★★★★★	A few niggles but forgivable thanks to its brilliant picture quality	LED	47	1920x1080						3	63x106x3
Philips 55PFL6007T	1500	01.13/FT	★★★★★	This should be on anyone's big-screen shortlist	LED	55	1920x1080						4	74x124x3
Philips 55PFS6609	1200	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Dazzling with HD content, but rivals offer better overall performance	LED	55	1920x1080						4	72x123x4
Philips 48PFS57093	750	08.14/ST	★★★★★	Excels in many areas but its SD performance is an area of concern	LED	48	1920x1080						4	62x108x6
Samsung PS51E550	850	09.12/GT	★★★★★	A pedigree 50in plasma at a steal of a price	Plasma	51	1920x1080						3	72x120x6
Samsung PS51E8000	1700	06.12/FT	★★★★★	A big-screen plasma that should be tried out	Plasma	51	1920x1080						3	71x119x5
Samsung PS51F5500	680	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best budget 47-52in TV, Awards 2013	Plasma	51	1920x1080						3	71x112x27
Samsung PS51F8500	1900	07.13/FT	★★★★★	A top-class plasma screen	Plasma	51	1920x1080						3	74x119x6
Samsung UE40ES6800	950	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Good spec and looks, but the backlight isn't great	LED	40	1920x1080						3	67x92x33
Samsung UE32F6400	500	09.13/ST	★★★★★	Some niggles but a desirable set with excellent catch-up TV features	LED	32	1920x1080						4	44x74x5
Samsung UE40F6500	900	08.13/ST	★★★★★	Not a class leader but offers a lot for your money	LED	40	1920x1080						3	91x60x27
Samsung UE40F7000	1200	08.13/ST	★★★★★	A lovely TV with a great picture and a wealth of smart features	LED	40	1920x1080						4	90x58x24
Samsung UE46F7000	1600	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Great picture coupled with smart features make it one to watch	LED	46	1920x1080						4	59x104x3
Samsung 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

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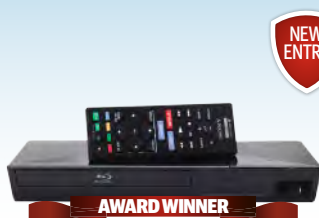
Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	Active 3D	Passive 3D	Freeview	FreeSat	HDMI	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
£500-£2000													
Sony KDL-40HX853	1000	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Best 40-42in TV, Awards 2012.	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	57x94x4
Sony KDL-46HX753	1150	08.12/ST	★★★★★	A must-see TV: superb performer for the price	LED	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	65x108x5
Sony KDL-42W705B	530	08.14/FT	★★★★★	A promising start for Sony's Full HD range. A consistent performer	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	56x96x6
Sony KDL-42W805A	1000	08.13/ST	★★★★★	A great-looking TV with many strengths	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	58x97x6
Sony KDL-46W905	1550	09.13/FT	★★★★★	A very capable TV with stunning detail but the picture lacks vibrancy	LCD	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	65x105x30
Sony KDL-48W605B	700	08.14/ST	★★★★★	A competitive performer with good picture quality	LCD	48	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	68x108x9
Sony KDL-50W829B	900	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Loses a star but this TV is still worth an audition	LED	50	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	66x112x6
Sony KDL-55W955B	1600	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A good TV but we expect more from a flagship set	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	79x124x9
£2000 and above													
Bang & Olufsen BeoVision 11	5250	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A truly luxurious TV that delivers a great performance too	LCD	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	6	89x96x6
LG 55LA860W	2300	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Close but no cigar. A good TV but the competition is strong	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	72x123x4
LG 55EA980W	8000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	A great first OLED effort from LG	OLED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	80x123x19
LG 55UB950V	2300	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Not without its flaws, but this TV is good to look at, great to use	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	123x78x24
LG 65LA970W	5500	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Fantastic to look at, but lacks the detail of depth of rivals	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	3	84x143x41
LG 84LM960V	22500	02.13/FT	★★★★★	Stunning with Ultra High Def, but ordinary elsewhere	LED	84	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	102x190x4
Panasonic TX-L47WT50B	2000	08.12/ST	★★★★★	Stylish, with real areas of expertise	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	63x107x3
Panasonic TX-L55WT65B	2470	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A good performer but there are more capable sets	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	72x123x3
Panasonic TX-P65WT600	5500	12.13/GT	★★★★★	A capable set that handles 4K footage very well	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	86x147x6
Philips 46PFL9706	2300	05.12/GT	★★★★★	A great flatscreen from Philips	LED	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	66x108x4
Philips 50PFL7956T	2000	09.12/GT	★★★★★	The best 21:9 set we've seen: brilliant for films	LED	50	2560x1080	●	●	●	●	4	58x124x3
Philips 55PFL8008	2500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A great TV from Philips	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	72x124x3
Philips 65PFL9708	4500	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Smart features aren't as good we'd like but this is still a strong 4K set	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	5	84x146x4
Samsung KE55S9C	7000	01.14/GT	★★★★★	An excellent first step for large screen OLED TVs	OLED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	78x142x14
Samsung UE55F8000	2500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Can't keep up with the very best. Still a smart, user-friendly set	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	71x122x4
Samsung UE55HU7500	2300	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Best 52-60in TV, Awards 2014	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	75x123x27
Samsung UE65F9000	5000	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented set with few weaknesses to speak of	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	84x146x4
Samsung UE65H8000	3300	07.14/FT	★★★★★	A fine set, but high price and lack of 4K knock it down a star	LED	65	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	89x145x31
Samsung UE65HU7500	3500	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Best 60in+ TV, Awards 2014	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	88x145x30
Sony KD-55X8505B	2100	09.14/GT	★★★★★	An attractive TV with a good set of features	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	79x123x29
Sony KDL-55W905A	2400	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A great-looking TV but a few issues knock it down a star	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	72x124x6
Sony KD-65S9005B	3900	12.14/FT	★★★★★	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 receiver
- Twin HDMI outputs** These are used if you have two displays, say a projector and a TV

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Sony BDP-S5200

Awards 2014: Best Blu-ray player up to £150



AWARD WINNER

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 out	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Up to £500								
LG BP740	200	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Much improved, but needs to better its sound and video performance to match the best				1 1 0 No 4x43x21
Panasonic DMP-BDT230	160	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Great picture and fine sound				1 1 0 No 4x43x18

BLU-RAY PLAYERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		HDMI out	Optical out	Co-axial out	Multichannel out	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Panasonic DMP-BDT260	120	07.14/FT	★★★★★	An impressive new entry with great picture quality	1	0	0	No	4x31x18
Panasonic DMP-BDT330	200	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Lacks in the smart app area but performance elsewhere is terrific	2	1	0	No	4x43x18
Panasonic DMP-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
Panasonic DMP-BWT740	455	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Mightily impressive, this Blu-ray spinner is a multimedia beast	2	1	1	No	6x43x24
Philips BDP3380	80	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A very good performer that lacks some smart features	1	0	1	No	4x41x21
Pioneer BDP-160	120	01.14/GT	★★★★★	This entry-level unit is pretty spartan, but it delivers an impressive performance	2	0	1	No	6x44x25
Pioneer BDP-450	225	01.12/FT	★★★★★	This budget deck is a real rival for the top performers	1	0	1	No	9x44x25
Samsung BD-F6500	130	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Competitive but not the best in class	1	0	1	7ch	4x43x18
Sony BDP-S4100	80	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player up to £100, Awards 2013	1	0	1	No	4x36x20
Sony BDP-S5100	140	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player £100-£150, Awards 2013	1	0	1	No	4x36x20
Sony BDP-S490	110	12.12/FT	★★★★★	An excellent budget Blu-ray player that also does 3D	1	0	1	No	4x43x20
Sony BDP-S5200	95	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player up to £150, Awards 2014	1	0	1	No	4x27x20
Sony BDP-S6200	180	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Plenty of smart features, sharp images and well-rendered 3D. A talented disc spinner	1	0	1	No	4x36x20
Sony BDP-S7200	230	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player £150-£300, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	1	0	1	No	5x43x21
Sony BDP-S790	200	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player £150-£300, Awards 2013.	2	1	1	No	4x43x19
Sony PlayStation 3 (2012)	250	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Super slim PS3 feels less special, but it's still multi-talented	1	1	0	No	6x29x23
Sony PlayStation 4	349	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A great gaming machine that's less spectacular when it comes to home entertainment	1	1	0	No	19x3x3
Xbox One	430	01.14/FT	★★★★★	As ambitious a game console as there has ever been, but yet to fulfil its potential	1	1	0	No	8x33x27

£500 and above

Panasonic DMP-BDT700	500	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player £300+, Awards 2014	2	1	1	7ch	7x45x26
Cambridge Audio Azur 752BD	800	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Features and functions combine in fine style, but audio performance could be a little better	2	1	1	8ch	9x43x31
Marantz UD7007	500	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player £300+, Awards 2013	1	1	1	No	11x44x31
Oppo BD-105D	1000	12.14/FT	★★★★★	If you want a Blu-ray player that does everything, then this is it	2	1	1	8ch	12x43x31
Onkyo BD-SP809	500	04.12/GT	★★★★★	A fine choice, but not an all-rounder	2	1	1	No	10x43x31

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Best Blu-ray player £200-£300
Sony BDP-S7200

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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	ThrowRatio	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	★★★★★	For a first home cinema, this would be a great projector	DLP	1.15-1.5	1920x1080	2200	2	0	1	1	10x31x24 2.75
BenQ W1080ST	850	12.13/GT	★★★★★	A good fit for small-scale home cinema entertainment	DLP	0.69-0.83	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	1	10x31x24 2.85
Epson EH-TW5200	700	11.14/GT	★★★★★	For £700 it's an impressive projector with a few niggles	DLP	1.22-1.47:1	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	0	10.5x30x25 3
Epson EH-TW5910	900	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Best projector up to £1000, Awards 2013	LCD	1.32-2.15	1920x1080	2100	2	0	1	1	14x42x37 6
InFocus IN3118HD	990	05.13/GT	★★★★★	A few niggles but a bright and capable projector	DLP	1.6-1.92	1920x1080	3600	2	0	1	0	10x34x25 3.7
InFocus IN8606HD	650	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Good detail and punch, but rivals have the edge over it	DLP	1.22-1.47:1	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	1	26x28.5x12 3
Optoma HD25	800	05.13/GT	★★★★★	Plenty of features for a budget level projector	DLP	1.5-1.8	1920x1080	2000	2	0	2	2	12x38x31 4.5
£1000-£3000													
BenQ W1400	1000	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best projector up to £1500, Awards 2014	DLP	1.07-1.71	1920x1080	2200	2	0	1	1	12x34x28 4
Epson EH-TW6100W	1600	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best projector £1000-£2000, Awards 2013	LCD	1.32-2.15:1	1920x1080	2300	2	0	1	1	14x42x37 6
Epson EH-TW7200	1900	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best projector £1500-£2000, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	LCD	1.34-2.87:1	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	1	16x47x40 8
Optoma HD83	2400	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Healthily priced, with a solid performance	DLP	1.45x2.28	1920x1080	1600	2	0	0	1	19x49x37 8.4
Philips Screeneo HDP1590TV	1500	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A great idea that's executed well, but not perfectly	DLP	0.321	1280x800	500	3	0	1	0	15x34x29 5
Sony VPL-HW55ES	2800	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Best projector £2000+, Awards 2014	SKRD	n/a	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1	18x41x46 9.6
£3000 and above													
Epson EH-TW9000W	3200	06.12/FT	★★★★★	If you need wireless HDMI, buy this Epson	LCD	1.34-2.87	1920x1080	2400	2	0	1	1	16x47x40 8.5
Epson EH-TW9200W	3000	04.14/GT	★★★★★	A fine projector, but not the showstopper we expected	LCD	1.34-2.87:1	1920x1080	2400	6	0	0	1	14x47x40 9
JVC DLA-X35BE	3000	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Good but not great, this JVC appeals if you like bright pictures	D-ILA	n/a	1920x1080	1300	2	0	1	1	18x46x47 15
Panasonic PT-AT6000E	3000	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Best projector £2000+, Awards 2013	LCD	1.18-2.36	1920x1080	2400	3	0	1	1	15x47x36 8.7
SIM2 C3X Lumis 3D-S	30000	11.11/FT	★★★★★	The best 3D projector we've ever seen	DLP	1.82-2.48:1	1920x1080	3000	2	0	0	1	46x21x46 11
Sony VPL-HW30ES	3000	02.12/GT	★★★★★	Very capable, but there's better for the money	SKRD	1.47-2.18	1920x1080	1300	2	0	1	1	18x41x46 10
Sony VPL-HW50ES	3000	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Shows why home cinema can't be beaten	SKRD	1.64-2.37	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1	18x41x46 9.6
Sony VPL-VW500ES	8500	04.14/FT	★★★★★	Stunningly good with 4K content but pricey nonetheless	SKRD	1.64-2.37	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1	18x41x46 9.6
Sony VPL-VW95ES	5000	01.12/FT	★★★★★	By class standards, it's one of the best projectors around	SKRD	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 pass-through	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £300									
Pioneer VSX-528	285	02.14/GT	★★★★★	A well-equipped budget amp with good surround sound capabilities	5x130	6	1	● ●	17x44x33
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	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier up to £350, Awards 2014	5x70	4	1	● ●	15x44x32

AV RECEIVERS & AMPLIFIERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Channels / power (w)	HDMI in	HDMI out	Networking	3D passthrough	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
£300-£500									
Harman Kardon AVR-171	450	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Could be subtle but delivers a powerhouse performance	7x100	6	2	●	12x44x30
Onkyo TX-NR515	450	11.12/GT	★★★★★	The amplifier to beat in 2012, now beaten	7x130	8	2	●	17x44x33
Pioneer VSX-923	450	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Needs more heft but it's still a confident and compelling amp	7x150	8	2	●	17x44x36
Sony STR-DN840	350	02.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented, energetic amp that delivers plenty of precision and attack	7x150	6	1	●	16x43x33
Sony STR-DN850	400	08.14/FT	★★★★★	An impressive all-rounder at a great price	7x150	5	1	●	16x43x33
Sony STR-DN1030	470	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Gives the best (at this price) a run for their money	7x120	5	1	●	17x43x33
£500-£1000									
Denon AVR-2113	550	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Solid, likeable option for both novices and enthusiasts	7x125	6	1	●	17x44x33
Denon AVR-X2000	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Marks a fine return to form for Denon	7x150	7	1	●	17x43x33
Denon AVR-X2100W	500	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A strong contender but competition at this price is fierce	7x150	8	2	●	17x43x33
Denon AVR-X4000	900	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Decent if you're looking for a sub-£1000 AV receiver	7x125	7	3	●	17x43x38
Harman-Kardon AVR-365	800	03.12/ST	★★★★★	Great looks, but lacks some precision	7x110	6	1	●	17x44x39
Onkyo TX-NR626	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Well-featured but not as compelling or as immersive as rival products	7x160	6	2	●	17x44x33
Pioneer VSX-924	500	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Another good effort but rivals offer more excitement	7x150	7	2	●	17x44x36
Sony STR-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-V673	500	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £350-£700, Awards 2012	7x150	6	1	●	17x44x36
Yamaha RX-V675	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	A powerful and thrilling amplifier for the money	7x150	6	1	●	17x44x36
Yamaha RX-V677	560	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A fun receiver that's not the most balanced, but is endlessly entertaining	7x150	6	1	●	17x43x36
£1000-£2000									
Anthem MRX-510	1700	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Rarely have we seen a multi-channel amp so accomplished with music	7x75	7	2	●	16x44x37
Denon AVR-4520	1970	03.13/ST	★★★★★	An enjoyable, easygoing sound, pipped only in terms of absolute excitement	9x150	7	2	●	20x43x42
Onkyo TX-NR818	1000	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Impressive AV amp with features aplenty	7x180	8	2	●	34x59x55
Onkyo TX-NR838	1000	10.14/FT	★★★★★	A commendable amplifier with a huge number of features	7x180	7	1	●	34x58x51
Pioneer SC-LX56	1300	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £700-£1500, Awards 2012	9x170	8	2	●	19x44x44
Pioneer SC-LX57	1200	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £700-£1500, Awards 2013	9x190	9	3	●	19x44x44
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-A1030	1000	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Not without some niggles, this receiver delivers big-time power and muscle	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
Onkyo TX-NR1010	2000	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Power-packed heavyweight needs a touch more precision	7x200	9	2	●	20x44x59
Onkyo TX-NR3009	2000	04.12/GT	★★★★★	Produces seriously rewarding surround sound	9x200	8	2	●	34x61x60
Onkyo TX-NR3010	2000	03.13/ST	★★★★★	A solid performance but lacks the subtlety to cut it as a complete all-rounder	9x160	9	2	●	20x44x60
Yamaha RX-A3020	2000	03.13/ST	★★★★★	A shot across the bows of the class leaders	9x230	8	2	●	19x44x47
Yamaha RX-A3030	2000	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £1500+, Awards 2013	9x150	8	1	●	19x44x47



Subwoofers

Sealed cabinet _____ Tends to produce the tightest bass but limits outright quantity
 Reflex port _____ A more common design that tends to deliver more bass
 Room equalisation _____ Evens out the subwoofer's response to produce a more balanced sound

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
Klipsch SW-450	330	02.11/GT	★★★★★	Weighty and tight, but loses its way at times	200	25.4	●	●	Downward	2	2	●	●	●	●	●	1	43x36x50
Monitor Audio Vector VW-8	225	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Capable little sub for an entry-level system	100	20	●	●	Forward	2	0	●	●	●	●	●	2	32x28x28
REL Acoustics T-Zero	350	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Small and discreet, but limited by size	100	16.5	●	●	Downward	2	1	●	●	●	●	●	2	24x22x26

SUBWOOFERS continued

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																		
Tannoy TS2.10	430	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Small, but packs a ferocious punch	300	25	●		Forward	1	0	●	●				3	39x38x33
Velodyne EQ-Max 8	495	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Small, but punches well above its weight	180	20		●	Forward	2	2	●	●	●	●	●	1	37x33x38
Velodyne Impact-10	295	07.09/GT	★★★★★	This sizeable subwoofer needs to be more controlled	150	25		●	Forward	2	2	●	●	●		●	4	35x32x37
Velodyne Impact-12	365	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Fine sub, more of a movie than a music classic	165	30		●	Forward	2	1		●	●			1	39x66x45
Velodyne Impact-Mini	435	10.09/FT	★★★★★	Amazingly small sub with fine movie performance	180	16.5	●		Forward	2	2		●	●			1	25x25x30
W'fedale Powercube SPC-10	300	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Nearly a terrific subwoofer - but there are issues	215	25	●		Downward	1	1	●		●			8	38x35x31
£500-£1000																		
B&W ASW610XP	700	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for big bass from a small box	500	25	●		Forward	2	1			●	●	●	4	32x32x37
Monitor Audio Apex AW-12	950	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Beautiful to look at, and punchy too	500	30.5	●		Forward	1	0	●		●	●	●	2	34x34x41
REL Acoustics T-7	650	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A compact sub with authority	200	20	●		Downward	2	1			●			2	30x35x33
Sonos Sub	600	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Sounds great. Makes sense with Sonos Play speakers	n/a	n/a	●		Inward	0	0			●	●	●	1	40x38x16
Tannoy TS2.12	549	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Attractively priced with decent sonics too	500	30.5	●		Forward	1	0	●		●			2	44x43x38
Velodyne EQ-Max 12	825	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Powerful and agile and supremely enjoyable	225	30.5		●	Forward	1	2	●	●	●	●	●	1	45x42x46
Yamaha NS-SW700	500	03.10/FT	★★★★★	Not the most accomplished, but very competent	300	25		●	Downward	4	2		●			●	2	45x41x41
£1000 and above																		
B&W PV1D	1200	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Delivers precision and agility in spades	400	20	●		Forward	1	0			●	●	●	2	34x27x36
Jamo D600	1300	05.12/GT	★★★★★	A brilliant sub that's worth the price	400	38	●		Forward	n/a	0			●			1	56x59x50
Paradigm Seismic 110	1250	10.10/FT	★★★★★	A subwoofer that's deeply impressive in every sense	850	25	●		Forward	2	0			●	●	●	1	34x30x32
Sunfire Subr. SRA2700EQ	2350	03.12/FT	★★★★★	It's not cheap, but it is impressive	2700	25x2	●		Forward	2	0	●		●		●	1	36x113x9
Velodyne SPL-1000 Ultra	1400	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Best subwoofer £700+, Awards 2011	1200	25	●		Forward	1	1	●		●	●	●	3	34x33x34
Wilson Benesch Torus	3000	02.07/GT	★★★★★	The most musical and insightful deep bass ever	200	36	●		Upward	4	1	●		●	●	●	2	45x90x30



Surround speakers

Full size _____ Traditional cabinet design that's big but can deliver a great sound
 Style _____ Compact speakers that make a lot of sense in smaller living spaces
 Bipole/Dipole _____ Surround speaker designs that give a more cohesive soundfield

The shortlist

AWARD WINNER
Q Acoustics 2000i5.1

Awards 2014: Best Traditional Pack up to £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)	Centers speaker (hwd, cm)	Rear speaker (hwd, cm)	Subwoofer (hwd, cm)	Finishes
Up to £500								
Boston Ac. Soundware XS SE	220	12.11/FT	★★★★★	Just as good as its predecessor: a must-hear	11x11x9	11x11x9	11x11x9	31x28x40 2
Canton Movie 130	450	05.12/FT	★★★★★	Likeable and listenable	12x9x10	9x19x10	12x9x10	41x24x42 3
Harman-Kardon HKTS20	450	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Neat, but a conservative listen	22x11x9	11x26x9	22x11x9	36x27x27 1
Jamo 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								
Boston Ac. SoundWare S	510	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Dinky yet substantial-sounding	14x14x14	14x14x14	14x14x14	34x32x44 2
Dali Zensor 1 5.1	980	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	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 KHT3005 HD2	900	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Great build with an expansive sound	25x13x15	13x25x15	25x13x15	38x37x18 1
KEF E305	900	11.13/ST	★★★★★	A room-filling system but there are more dynamic packages out there	26x14x16	16x22x15	26x14x16	32x43x27 2

SURROUND SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Front speaker (hwd, cm)	Center speaker (hwd, cm)	Rear speaker (hwd, cm)	Subwoofer (hwd, cm)	Finishes
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 Q7000	800	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Speaker packages, Awards 2011	24x10x16	12x21x16	24x10x16	37x51x22	2
Q Acoustics Q7000i	900	11.13/ST	★★★★★	Best style package £700-£1000, Awards 2014	24x10x16	12x20x16	24x10x16	32x46x20	2
Teufel Theater 200	799	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Big-screen soundtracks don't come bigger than this	44x20x29	25x44x27	23x16x12	60x38x49	1
Wharfedale 100-HCP	950	11.13/FT	★★★★★	A very good package, but could do with a better centre speaker	32x17x26	17x47x27	32x17x26	39x35x31	7
£1000-£2000									
Acoustic Energy Neo V2 5.1	1200	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Plenty to enjoy if you have a large room	91x20x24	18x48x20	36x18x23	41x36x33	2
B&W 685 Theatre	1200	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £1000-£1500, Awards 2010	23x16x12	34x20x33	27x17x33	26x26x33	6
B&W MT-50	1100	11.13/ST	★★★★★	Best style package £1000-£1400, Awards 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 1	1500	07.10/GT	★★★★★	Preferable in many ways to its pricier big brother	26x14x13	26x14x13	26x14x13	28x26x27	2
Dali Fazon 3 5.1	1699	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Best style package £1200-£2000, Awards 2011	26x14x14	14x26x14	26x14x14	23x16x12	2
Dali Zensor 5 5.1	1499	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £700-£1500, Awards 2012	84x16x27	16x44x28	97x16x23	34x37x38	2
Elipson Planet M 5.1	1300	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Enjoyable looks and sound, just lacking a smidge of detail	15x15x15	15x15x15	15x15x15	39x32x32	3
Focal Dome 5.1	1000	11.13/ST	★★★★★	It's not perfect but this Focal charms nonetheless	17x14x14	17x14x14	17x14x14	40x28x28	3
Jamo D500 THX Select 2	1700	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Exceptional and unbeatable value too	26x45x13	26x45x13	26x45x13	42x40x42	2
KEF Q300 5.1	1880	10.11/GT	★★★★★	An admirable package for the purists	36x21x30	21x63x30	36x21x30	33x34x33	3
KEF T105	1200	04.11/GT	★★★★★	A stealthy package that looks the part	33x14x4	33x14x4	33x14x4	38x37x8	1
Klipsch Synergy B20/SW450	1050	09.11/FT	★★★★★	A vibrant and exciting 5.1 package	32x18x20	15x41x13	14x30x12	43x36x50	1
Monitor Audio Bronze BX2 5.1	1050	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Thrillingly fit for purpose	35x19x26	17x46x17	29x28x11	33x32x33	4
Monitor Audio Bronze BX5 5.1	1215	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Does a good job of filling a big room	85x17x25	17x46x17	29x28x11	33x32x33	2
Monitor Audio Radius R90HT1	1500	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Best style package £1400-£1800, Awards 2014	20x13x14	17x46x17	20x13x14	33x32x33	3
Quad L-ite Plus 5.1 package	1200	12.13/FT	★★★★★	A fine package that's up against some formidable rivals at this price	25x14x18	15x38x17	25x14x18	31x24x24	3
Tannoy Rev. Compact 5.1	1300	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Exceptional sound in the average living room	27x15x16	15x30x16	39x31x34	32x29x29	2
£2000 and above									
Acoustic Energy 3-Series 5.1	2425	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Build, looks and performance combine for an attractive speaker package	90x19x30	19x45x26	30x19x25	36x36x36	2
Acoustic Energy Active Pro 5.1	3035	08.10/FT	★★★★★	A stunning listen that's great value too	22x15x18	22x15x18	22x15x18	35x35x33	1
Acoustic Energy Radiance 5.1	3000	05.09/FT	★★★★★	This 5.1 package has plenty of appeal	92x23x30	19x45x30	32x19x25	41x36x33	2
B&W 683 Theatre	2750	11.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented and entertaining speaker package that doesn't quite captivate	99x19x36	22x59x30	31.5x16x23	33x33x38	2
B&W CM9 Theatre	4200	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £3500+, Awards 2013	102x32x37	22x59x28	34x20x28	32x32x32	2
Cabasse MT-30 5.1	2100	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Looks more assertive than it is, but still likeable	x11x21	16x48x37	41x23x20	42x31x43	2
Dali Ikon 5 MK2	2500	06.14/GT	★★★★★	An exciting speaker package that will thrill film and music fans	81x15x28	15x57x26	38x27x15	45x41x46	2
Dali Ikon 6 Mk2 5.1	2900	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for those with big listening areas to fill	103x19x35	15x57x25	38x27x15	48x41x46	3
Dali Lektor 5.1	2320	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Only just fails to get top marks against its rivals	106x25x37	17x60x18	31x17x22	36x31x40	2
Dali Mentor 5.1	5700	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Powerhouse of a system	103x20x39	20x89x29	32x16x24	37x33x33	2
KEFR100 5.1	2850	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £2500-£3500, Awards 2014	28x18x29	17x53x31	28x18x29	37x33x35	4
M&K 950-Series	5445	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Exceptional system with thrilling sound	41x18x22	41x18x22	26x18x22	60x39x51	2
Monitor Audio Apex	2400	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Best style speaker package £2000+, Awards 2011	25x14x14	14x61x10	25x14x14	34x34x41	2
Monitor Audio PL200AV	11400	08.10/FT	★★★★★	Exceptional in every sense	100x25x28	22x58x29	37x34x36	45x48x47	3
Monitor Audio PL300 AV	13500	10.09/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest 5.1 speaker packages on the market	111x41x47	22x58x29	37x22x28	45x48x47	2
Monitor Audio Silver 6 AV12	2875	06.14/GT	★★★★★	A hugely capable surround package. Worthy of serious consideration	94x35x20	19x50x24	25x31x12	23x16x14	6
Mon. Audio Silver RX6 AV12	2200	10.11/GT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £1500-£2500, Awards 2011	85x19x25	19x50x20	30x12x25	34x34x41	6
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 5.1	2000	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Guaranteed to keep you on the edge of your seat	95x21x32	18x46x23	95x21x30	42x31x36	3
Mordaunt-Short Mezzo 5.1	2300	11.08/GT	★★★★★	Lots of attack, with little respite	100x22x28	18x49x22	35x22x28	32x34x35	2
Paradigm MilleniaOne	2500	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Smooth and detailed, but slightly lacking in attack	20x12x15	20x12x15	20x12x15	34x30x32	2
PMC DB1i 5.1	4675	12.09/FT	★★★★★	Small and sonically brilliant package	29x16x23	16x29x23	29x16x23	55x20x55	4
Tannoy Revolution SEAV	2400	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Despite a few issues with the centre and sub, this is an exciting package	95x20x25	15x31x16	37x20x25	44x43x37	1
Tannoy Revolution Signature	2300	11.08/GT	★★★★★	As thrilling or as calming as you want it to be	85x17x18	17x45x18	27x17x18	37x34x34	2

"The B&W MT-60D is a true all-rounder. It's adept at everything you'd want a 5.1-channel surround speaker package to do: confident in stereo, beautifully built, and versatile when it comes to installation"

May 2012

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"Takes performance to a whole new level."
- WHF? S&V magazine
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headphones
over £50

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SAVE
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MARANTZ MCR610 MELODY MEDIA & TANNOY REVOLUTION DC4 (PAIR)

"This is an excellent all-in-one system" said What Hi-Fi? S&V magazine of the MCR610, while of the DC4s they said "a very capable speaker design with bold character."

Were £649.90 | 5 Year Supercare only £49.95



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MARANTZ PM6005, CD6005 & Q ACOUSTICS 2020i (PAIR)

"Superb sound quality on a budget for your analogue and digital music," commented What Hi-Fi? S&V magazine of the PM6005, while they said of the CD6005, "A fantastic player and immense value for money." The Q Acoustics 2020is were What Hi-Fi? award winners in 2013.

TSP £749.95
5 Year Supercare only £59.95

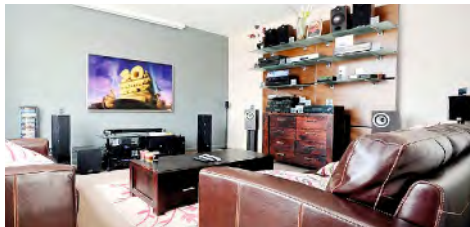
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5 Year Supercare only £64.90

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"The Stream Magic 6 V2 is as captivating as ever."
- What Hi-Fi? S&V mag.

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CYRUS CDI CD PLAYER

"It's no surprise to see a five-star CD player from Cyrus, but the CDI takes things to a whole new level. It's hugely impressive."
- What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision magazine
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- What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision magazine, reviewed at £600.

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Also available in white.



£349.95

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DENON DM39 (SILVER) MINI SYSTEM

"A system that manages to keep things simple and still knock your socks off."
- WHF? S&V mag.

TSP £200

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Also available in black.

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TEAC NP H750/CD H750 & WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 220 (PAIR)

What an amazing deal! Here you're getting the mini system with the maximum spec. Includes a cracking set of Wharfedale Diamond 220 speakers - you really can't go wrong for under £500.

TSP £699.90 | 5 Year Supercare only £59.95



£599.95

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CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 351C CD PLAYER

"This is a fine player for the money."
- What Hi-Fi? S&V mag.

Were £249 | 5 Year Supercare only £19.95

Also available in silver.



£199.95

**SAVE
£400**



TANNOY REVOLUTION DC6T SE SPEAKERS (PAIR)

"These Special Edition speakers ooze fantastic all-round ability."
- What Hi-Fi? S&V mag.

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- Hi-Fi Choice magazine (851A & 851C).

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Winner: speaker (under £100)
Cambridge Audio

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Winner: speaker (under £1000)
Naim

Bluetooth

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A small selection from our headphone range

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AKG Y50 HEADPHONES

"Excelling in sound and style, the Y50s are a cracking introduction to AKG's latest range."
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Buy this & get JBL CLIP for only £19.95 - **SAVE £25**

£79.95

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AKG

SAVE £80

AKG K550 HEADPHONES

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TSP £179.95

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SONY BRAVIA KDL32W706B
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"Impressing us across the board, more than enough to bag five stars..."
- What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision magazine.

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Televisions
Best 48" LED
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QUAD CORE

Freeview HD

SAMSUNG UE48H6400
48" 3D SMART LED TV

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Best 55" LED
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DUAL CORE

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Best 55" LED
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QUAD CORE

Freeview HD

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SAMSUNG UE55HU7500
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BUILT-IN

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SEPTEMBER 2014

Wi-Fi
BUILT-IN

QUAD CORE

Freeview HD

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Best 78" LED
January-December 2014

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★★★★★
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Wi-Fi
BUILT-IN

QUAD CORE

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SAMSUNG UE78HU8500
78" CURVED 4K ULTRA HD 3D SMART LED TV

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- HDTVtest.co.uk.

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Projectors
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★★★★★
AUGUST 2014

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Projectors
Best 3D
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AUGUST 2014

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Yamaha RXV377

YAMAHA RXV377 AV RECEIVER

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PIONEER VSX-924

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SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2014
★★★★★
SEPTEMBER 2014

AirPlay

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UPSCALING

WiFi
Built-in

Internet
RADIO

YAMAHA RXV677 AV RECEIVER

"An endlessly entertaining receiver that's
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AWARDS 2014
Home cinema amplifiers
Best home cinema amplifier up to £1000
Sony STRDN1050

WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014
Speaker packages
Best 5.1 speaker package up to £1000
Tannoy HTS101

SONY STRDN1050 AV RECEIVER & TANNOY HTS101 5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE

"This is a seriously good midrange amp that
balances muscle and subtlety with stacks of
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magazine.

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WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2014
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NOVEMBER 2014



LOWEST
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AirPlay

WiFi
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YAMAHA RXA3040 AV RECEIVER

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WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014
Home cinema amplifiers
Best home cinema amplifier (1000+)
Pioneer SC-LX58

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APRIL 2014
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- What Hi-Fi? S&V mag.
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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

Also consider					Integrated Transport	Co-axial out	Optical out	XLR out	RCA out	Headphone out	Co-axial in	Optical in	AES/EBU in	USB in	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	
Product	£	Tested	Verdict														
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 CD6004	300	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Best CD player up to £500, Awards 2012	●	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	11x44x34	
Marantz CD6005	350	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Best CD player up to £500, Awards 2014	●	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x44x34	
Sansui CDD-201V	200	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Sensibly priced, but not quite an all-rounder	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	7x43x28	
£500-£1000																	
Arcam FMJ CD17	650	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Basic on features, but capable enough	●	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	9x43x29	
Audiolab 8200CD	800	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1000, Awards 2012	●	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	0	1	1	8x44x30	
Audiolab 8200CDQ	950	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Improves on the sky-high performance of the 8200CD	●	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	0	1	2	8x44x30	
NAD C 546BEE	500	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Talented but struggles against the more enjoyable budget Marantz	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	9x44x31	
Cyrus CD Transport	750	01.12/ST	★★★★★	An impressive and affordable CD transport	●	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36	
Cyrus CD6 SE2	700	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Subtly upgraded, with worthwhile results	●	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	8x22x36	
Naim CD5si	995	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	
Yamaha CD-S2000	979	03.09/GT	★★★★★	A beautiful object that's involving to listen to	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	14x44x44	
£1000 and above																	
Audio Research CD6	8050	08.14/FT	★★★★★	In the market for a top-class CD player? This could be the one	●	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	1	1	2	13x48x31	
Burmester 069	35840	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Quite possibly the best CD player money can buy		2	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	16x45x34	
Cambridge Audio Azur 851C	1200	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Impressive sonic presentation but a touch too clinical for our tastes	●	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	1	1	2	12x43x34	
Copland CDA 825	4298	05.13/FT	★★★★★	A hugely capable player with stunning sound quality	●	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	10x43x39	
Cyrus CD 8 SE2	1200	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Best CD player £1000-£1500, Awards 2012	●	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36	
Cyrus CDi	1050	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1500, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	7x22x36	
Esoteric K-05	7495	01.14/FT	★★★★★	A great place to start... if you're looking for your final disc-player	●	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	13x45x36	
Leema 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 CD5 XS	1950	Aw.09/FT	★★★★★	It's an excellent CD player, but faces stiff competition	●	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	7x43x30	
Naim CD555/555PS	18345	10.09/FT	★★★★★	The CD555/555PS has a hefty price tag, but a classy performance	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	11x43x31	
Naim CDX2	3640	02.10/FT	★★★★★	The tweaked CDX2 remains a fine proposition	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x31	
Parasound Halo CD1	5000	07.13/FT	★★★★★	Not cheap but it's a fine CD player with an idiosyncratic design	●	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x44x35	
Primare CD32	2200	04.11/FT	★★★★★	It's massively detailed, but not as engaging as we'd like	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	11x43x38	
Roksan Caspian M2 CD	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	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	

"What Audiolab has achieved, even excelled in, with the 8200CD is a way of making your music sound as it should: clean. And we can't pick holes in that"

March 2014



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

The shortlist



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Audioquest DragonFly v1.2

Awards 2014: Best DAC up to £300



AWARD WINNER

Arcam irDAC

Awards 2014: Best DAC £300-£500



AWARD WINNER

Chord Hugo

Awards 2014: Best DAC £1000+

Also consider

Also consider					USB in	Optical in	Co-axial in	AES/EBU in	HDMI in	Wireless	Headphone out	RCA out	Balanced XLR out	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict											
Up to £500														
Arcam airDAC	400	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Not as good as the irDAC but delivers good sound on a budget	0	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	4x19x12
Arcam irDAC	400	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Best DAC £300-£500, Awards 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	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 Headstreamer	145	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A neat headphone amp and DAC combination	1	0	0	0	0		1	0	0	3x6x7
HRT microStream	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 DAC 1	295	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A good, though not exceptional, wireless DAC	1	0	0	0	0	●	0	1	0	4x14x7
NAD D 1050	400	06.14/GT	★★★★★	For those looking for a desktop DAC, the NAD D 1050 is a brilliant box of tricks	1	2	2	0	0		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	08.13/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
Rotel RDD-1580	600	05.14/FT	★★★★★	Plenty to be impressed with, but the poor quality of its USB input holds it back	1	2	2	0	0	●	0	1	1	5.5x43x32
Sony UDA-1	500	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Not the most musically exciting DAC, but an excellent choice for desktop users	1	2	2	0	0		1	1	0	7x23x26
£1000 and above														
Aesthetix Romulus	6500	06.14/GT	★★★★★	A fine performer that draws in the listener with a smooth and elegant sound	1	1	1	1	0		0	1	1	11x46x45
Antelope Zodiac Gold/Voltikus	3100	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Unique and appealing, it just misses out on a fifth star	1	2	2	0	0		2	1	1	11x17x19
Audio Research DAC 8	4698	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Pricey, but as organic-sounding as you can get	1	1	1	0	0		1	1	1	13x48x25

DACs continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	USB in	Optical in	Co-axial in	AES EBU in	HDMI in	Wireless	Headphone out	RCA out	Balanced XLR out	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
£1000 and above													
Arcam FMJ D33	2000	07.13/GT	★★★★★		3	2	2	1	0	0	1	2	11x43x37
Benchmark DAC HGC	1750	11.14/FT	★★★★★		1	2	2	0	0	1	2	1	5x20x21
Bricasti Design M1 DAC	7000	03.14/FT	★★★★★		1	1	2	1	1	0	1	1	6x43x30
Bryston BDA-1 DAC	2350	06.11/FT	★★★★★		1	2	4	1	0	0	1	1	4x48x29
Burmester 113	2300	07.13/GT	★★★★★		1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	6x20x17
Chord QBD76 HDSO	4995	07.13/GT	★★★★★		2	2	2	2	0	0	1	1	6x34x15
Chord Hugo	1400	07.14/GT	★★★★★		2	1	1	0	0	3	1	0	2x13x10
dCS Debussy	7930	07.13/GT	★★★★★		1	0	2	2	0	0	1	1	7x45x39
McIntosh D100	3000	06.13/GT	★★★★★		1	2	2	0	0	1	0	0	10x45x41
Musical Fidelity M6 DAC	2000	07.13/GT	★★★★★		1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	13x44x39
NAD M51	1500	07.13/GT	★★★★★		1	1	1	1	2	0	1	0	8x44x30
Naim DAC	2150	07.13/GT	★★★★★		2	3	3	0	0	0	1	0	7x43x30
Naim DAC-V1	1250	07.14/GT	★★★★★		1	2	3	0	0	1	1	1	9x21x32
T+A DAC 8	1250	09.13/FT	★★★★★		1	1	4	1	0	1	1	1	9x27x27



Turntables

Turntable The main part of the player that actually spins the record
Tonearm The component that carries the cartridge across the record surface
Cartridge Turns the information in the record groove into sound

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Pro-Ject Essential II

Awards 2014: Best Turntable up to £400



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Rega RP3/Elys2

Awards 2014: Best Turntable £400-£800



AWARD WINNER

Clearaudio Concept

Awards 2014: Best Turntable £800+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	33 1/3 RPM	45 RPM	78 RPM	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
Edwards Audio TT1	380	11.11/FT	★★★★★										1	12x45x36
Pro-Ject Elemental	150	04.14/FT	★★★★★										3	9x43x30
Pro-Ject Essential II	210	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★										3	14x46x36
Pro-Ject 2Xperience 2-Pack	900	12.14/GT	★★★★★										1	13x46x36
Pro-Ject 2Xperience Basic +	600	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★										1	14x46x36
Pro-Ject 2Xperience Classic	750	12.10/FT	★★★★★										3	16x46x36
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
Michell Gyro. SE/TecnoArm A	1478	09.08/FT	★★★★★										1	19x41x53
Michell Orbe SE/TecnoArm A	2675	01.09/FT	★★★★★										2	26x46x53

TURNTABLES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	33.33 — 45 78 RPM	Elec. speed change	Manual operation	Phono amp	Tonearm inc.	Cartridges inc.	USB port	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Origin Live Calypso package	2440	12.11/FT	★★★★★	● ● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	●	1	14x45x38
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/GT	★★★★★	● ● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	●	1	12x45x36
Rega RP6/Exact	1000	12.14/GT	★★★★★	● ● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	●	8	12x45x36
Roksan Radius 5.2	1375	Aw.09/FT	★★★★★	● ● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	●	8	15x45x37
Thorens TD160HD/TP250	1560	10.08/GT	★★★★★	● ● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	●	1	18x43x34
Thorens TD309	1250	06.10/FT	★★★★★	● ● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	●	2	13x47x43
Townshend Rock 7	1500	09.09/FT	★★★★★	● ● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	●	1	15x40x34



Radios

DAB _____ Digital radio signal that now offers coverage across most of the UK
 Internet _____ Allows you to listen to thousands of radio stations from around the world

Theshortlist



Awards 2014: Best Radio up to £100



Awards 2014: Best Radio £100-£200



Awards 2014: Best Radio £200+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	DAB	FM	MW	Internet	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £100									
Aves Air	50	09.13/GT	★★★★★	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	10x6x2
iLuv Vibro Classic II	50	11.12/GT	★★★★★	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	7x23x8
Pure Digital Elan II	99	01.10/GT	★★★★★	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	16x28x9
Pure Digital Move 2500	90	11.11/FT	★★★★★	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	10x6x1.5
Pure Digital Move 400D	90	11.12/GT	★★★★★	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	8.5x15x2.7
Pure Digital One Classic II	65	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	15x21x7
Pure Evoke D2	85	09.13/GT	★★★★★	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	15x21x7
Q2 Internet radio	90	03.11/FT	★★★★★	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	10x10x10
Roberts Duologic	75	01.10/GT	★★★★★	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	15x25x83
View Quest WiFi200	80	01.11/FT	★★★★★	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	73x125x23
£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 Digital Evoke-15 Marshall	120	01.11/FT	★★★★★	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	17x22x12
Pure Evoke F4	180	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	18x21x11
Pure Digital Oasis Flow	170	09.10/FT	★★★★★	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	23x16x14
Pure Digital One Flow	100	11.12/GT	★★★★★	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	15x21x8
Pure Digital Sensia	250	01.10/FT	★★★★★	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	17x28x18
Revo AXiS XS	200	11.12/GT	★★★★★	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	12.5x22x15
Revo AXiS X3	200	01.14/FT	★★★★★	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	12.5x22x15
Revo Domino D3	170	05.10/GT	★★★★★	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	14x22x13
Revo Heritage	230	03.10/FT	★★★★★	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	18x26x10
Revo Pixis	100	09.13/GT	★★★★★	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	13x16x16
Revo SuperConnect	250	09.14/FT	★★★★★	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	18x27x12
Roberts Revival iStream 2	200	12.14/GT	★★★★★	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	● ●	16x26x13

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Yamaha AS501

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Yamaha RN500

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SAVE £20

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SAVE £25

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RRP: £499.00
SAVE: £100.00
£399.00

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Yamaha YSP2500

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RADIO continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	DAB	FM	MW	Internet	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
£100 and above									
Roberts Stream 83i	150	05.10/GT	★★★★★	Good in most areas, but the 83i needs a more balanced sound	●	●	●		21x25x13
Roberts Stream 93i	150	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Best Radio £100-£200, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	●	●		21x24x13
Ruark Audio R1 MkII	160	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best DAB/FM radio, Awards 2012	●	●			18x13x14
Tivoli Alberg+	200	02.14/FT	★★★★★	On the expensive side, but a neat unit nonetheless	●	●		●	11x19x11
Tivoli Model 10+	160	09.13/GT	★★★★★	A good table-top offering at an affordable price	●	●			20x12x12
View Quest Retro 1	100	12.11/GT	★★★★★	A neat, talented portable radio that deserves an audition	●	●		●	16x28x9



Hi-fi speakers

Standmounters Usually smaller speakers that need to be put on a stand, not bookshelves
Floorstanders Larger speakers that tend to go louder and deeper than standmounters
Powered Have built-in amplifiers and need mains power to work

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Wharfedale Diamond 220

Awards 2014: Best Stereo Speaker up to £200
 “If you’re looking for the finest budget speaker around the Diamond 220s are a great place to start.”



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

B&W 685 S2

Awards 2014: Best Standmounter £400-£800
 “They’re the speakers we’d put on to get our friends into hi-fi, and we can’t think of a better reason to recommend the new B&W 685s.”



AWARD WINNER

ATC SCM 11

Awards 2014: Best Standmounter up to £1200+
 “The new SCM11s are a drastic improvement over an already talented performance, and they have the good looks to match.”

Also consider

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 SX-50	130	04.14/ST	★★★★★		●		2	23x16x24
Mission MX1	150	06.11/GT	★★★★★		●		4	28x17x26
QAcoustics 2010i	120	07.12/GT	★★★★★		●		4	23x20x15
QAcoustics 2020i	170	04.14/ST	★★★★★		●		4	26x17x28
Roth Oli RA1	100	12.14/FT	★★★★★		●		2	23x15x15
SoundScience Frankenspiel FS-1	130	07.12/ST	★★★★★		●		1	9x9x9
SoundScience QSB	85	04.11/FT	★★★★★		●		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 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
Boston Acoustics A-25	200	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Classy and likeable speakers	●		3	27x18x23
Boston Acoustics A-26	260	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A beautifully accomplished standmounter	●		2	33x21x27
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	37x20x34
Cambridge Audio SLA-25	200	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Not at all bad, but some rivals are better		●	8	22x15x18
Cambridge Audio SX-60	200	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Impressive speakers but they could do with more refinement	●		2	34x20x27
Castle Knight 2	400	02.11/GT	★★★★★	Good, but not as adaptable as we'd like	●		8	38x20x34
Dali Lektor 1	250	10.09/GT	★★★★★	As musically enjoyable as you'll buy at this price	●		2	26x15x21
Dali Lektor 2	299	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Seriously entertaining speakers and simply stunning at this money	●		2	31x18x22

SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Dali Lektor 3	450	08.09/GT	★★★★★	Bigger isn't always better, as the Lektor 3s prove	●		2	39x20x26
Dali Zensor 1	200	04.14/ST	★★★★★	These brilliant budget standmounters demand a listen	●		2	27x16x22
Dali Zensor 3	300	10.14/GT	★★★★★	If it's entertainment you crave, then these standmounters deliver in spades	●		3	35x21x29
EB Acoustics EB1	470	08.09/GT	★★★★★	You'll have trouble faulting these nifty standmounters	●		2	31x17x27
Epos Epic 1	325	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Punchy and exciting but they can't deliver all-round ability	●		2	31x19x25
Focal Chorus 706V	390	03.11/FT	★★★★★	Thoroughly enjoyable but they may not cut it with dance music	●		3	39x22x29
Focal XS Book	300	07.12/GT	★★★★★	A potent-sounding speaker that brings hi-fi listening to your desktop		●	1	28x11x20
Focal XS Book Wireless	300	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Stacks of detail but not quite the measure of their rivals		●	1	28x11x20
KEF Q300	450	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Not quite at the top anymore, but still fine, engaging standmounters	●		3	36x21x30
Leema Xero	495	07.08/GT	★★★★★	Not a true all-rounder, but loaded with talent	●		5	25x25x16
Monitor Audio Bronze BX 1	200	05.11/FT	★★★★★	Stylish as you like, but not the complete article	●		4	26x17x18
Monitor Audio Bronze BX2	250	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers £200-£350, Awards 2012	●		4	35x19x26
Monitor Audio Silver RX1	425	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Well-made and refined speakers, just lacking the flexibility of its rivals	●		6	31x19x24
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 1XR	250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Still great, but the rivals have caught up	●		1	28x18x27
Mission MX2	200	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Dynamic enough but maybe too exciting	●		4	34x21x31
Mission MX3	350	11.11/GT	★★★★★	Pepky and communicative floorstanders		●	4	82x17x34
Pioneer S-CN301-LR	200	04.14/ST	★★★★★	Polished, insightful and appealing	●		1	23x14x22
Q Acoustics Concept 20	350	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers £200-£400, Awards 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
Q Acoustics 2050i	460	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander up to £600, Awards 2014		●	4	100x32x27
Quad 111 Classic	330	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Impressive standmounters but lack a touch of sparkle	●		4	31x19x24
Ruark Audio MR1	300	06.14/ST	★★★★★	Best desktop speakers, Awards 2014		●	3	17x13x14
Tangent Evo 5	200	05.09/FT	★★★★★	Considered, grown-up and a supremely easy listen	●		2	23x15x20
Tannoy Mercury V1i	150	04.14/ST	★★★★★	A stylish, self-assured pair of speakers that are well worth auditioning	●		2	30x17x26
Tannoy Mercury V4	380	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £350-£700, Awards 2011		●	2	97x20x28
Tannoy Mercury V4i	400	01.14/FT	★★★★★	An exciting and punchy listen, but it comes with compromises		●	1	100x20x28
Tannoy Revolution DC4	380	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Well worth considering if your listening room isn't too big	●		2	27x15x16
Tannoy Revolution DC6	400	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Best standmounter £350-£700, Awards 2012	●		1	36.5x20x25
Triangle Color	470	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Small, but perfectly formed	●		3	29x17x24
Wharfedale Diamond 121	230	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Fabulous sound. For insight and entertainment, the 121s needn't fear any rival	●		7	32x17x23
Wharfedale Diamond 220	200	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers up to £200, Awards 2014		●	4	50x32x41

£500-£1500

Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic	1000	07.11/GT	★★★★★	A classic yes, but not the best around	●		2	30x18x26
Acoustic Energy AE22 Active	899	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Talented active speakers not easily matched	●		1	25x35x30
Audio Pro LV2e	700	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Wireless desktop speakers with a hi-fi flourish			3	98x14x24
Audiovector Ki1 Super	800	04.12/GT	★★★★★	These pint-sized speakers lack far-reaching dynamics, but are easy to live with		●	5	98x14x24
Audiovector Ki3 Standard	1200	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Packed with resolution and speed		●	5	98x14x24
ATC SCM11	1200	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best standmounter up to £1200, Awards 2014		●	2	38x21x25
AVI ADM9.1	1125	07.12/GT	★★★★★	A simple way to make the most of your music	●		5	30x20x26
B&W 683 S2	1150	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £600-£1200, Awards 2014		●	2	99x19x36
B&W 685 S2	500	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best standmounter £400-£800, Awards 2014. Product of the Year		●	2	35x19x32
B&W CM8	1250	08.11/FT	★★★★★	Stunning in some ways but not the last word in integration		●	4	96x25x30
Cabasse Minorca MC40	720	02.11/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for those who like finger-snapping ability		●	2	40x23x28



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"Among the finest speakers I've heard at any price"
Sam Tellig, *Stereophile* Nov 2014

"However it's been achieved, we can't help but marvel at the sound from the D7's. Spondor D7's set the standard for speakers at this price"
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WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014

Stereo speakers
Best Floorstander £1000+
Spondor D7

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SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (WxHxD, cm)
£500-£1500							
Cambridge Audio Aeromax 6	900	10.14/FT	★★★★★		●	2	98x24x34
Dali Ikon 1 MK2	530	05.14/GT	★★★★★		●	3	33x15x26
Dali Ikon 6 MK2	1200	09.10/FT	★★★★★		●	3	100x19x36
Dali Lektor 6	750	12.08/FT	★★★★★		●	3	26x16x14
Dali Lektor 8	1200	04.10/FT	★★★★★		●	2	106x27x37
Dali Mentor Menuet	900	07.12/ST	★★★★★		●	2	25x15x23
Dali Zensor 5	549	11.11/GT	★★★★★		●	2	84x16x27
Dali Zensor 7	729	06.12/FT	★★★★★		●	3	98x21x31
Dynaudio DM 2/6	535	02.10/FT	★★★★★		●	2	29x17x24
Dynaudio DM 2/7	600	08.09/GT	★★★★★		●	1	36x22x27
Dynaudio DM3/7	1300	01.11/FT	★★★★★		●	2	96x20x27
Dynaudio Excite X14	945	12.13/ST	★★★★★		●		29x17x26
Dynaudio Xeo 3	1365	07.12/ST	★★★★★		●	2	28x17x26
EB Acoustics EB2	669	09.10/GT	★★★★★		●	2	45x23x30
Eclipse TD508 Mk3	960	10.13/GT	★★★★★		●	3	29x18x27
Edwards Audio SP1	550	12.12/FT	★★★★★		●	4	31x17x25
Elac BS243	1050	07.11/GT	★★★★★		●	5	29x17x22
Elac BS 142	600	05.14/GT	★★★★★		●	1	26x16x26
Elac FS 147	1100	07.14/AT	★★★★★		●	1	95x22x30
Elipson Planet L	600	02.12/FT	★★★★★		●	3	40x42x43
Epos Epic 5	750	10.12/FT	★★★★★		●	2	92x21x32
Epoz AktiMate Blue	600	09.14/FT	★★★★★		●	3	32x21x31
Guru Junior	800	12.13/ST	★★★★★		●	3	28x18x24
Focal Aria 906	760	12.13/ST	★★★★★		●	2	30x30x28
JBL Studio 530	650	07.12/GT	★★★★★		●	1	47x21x22
KEF LS50	800	12.13/ST	★★★★★		●	1	30x20x28
KEF R100	600	05.14/GT	★★★★★		●	4	28x18x29
KEF X300A	600	09.13/FT	★★★★★		●	1	28x18x24
Kudos X2	1450	03.11/GT	★★★★★		●	6	78x17x21
Leema Xone	995	10.09/FT	★★★★★		●	6	85x14x21
MAD 1920	1350	09.12/FT	★★★★★		●	5	28x19x23
Martin Logan Motion 15	795	12.13/ST	★★★★★		●	2	29x13x24
Mission SX2	700	04.13/GT	★★★★★		●	5	38x23x37
Monitor Audio Bronze BX5	500	07.13/GT	★★★★★		●	4	85x17x25
Monitor Audio Gold GX50	950	12.13/ST	★★★★★		●	5	30x17x26
Monitor Audio Silver 1	500	05.14/FT	★★★★★		●	6	31x19x26
Monitor Audio Silver 6	1000	12.13/FT	★★★★★		●	6	89x19x24
Monitor Audio Silver RX2	630	10.12/GT	★★★★★		●	6	37.5x23x30
Monitor Audio Silver RX6	800	12.09/GT	★★★★★		●	6	91x28x31
Monitor Audio Silver RX8	1050	06.10/FT	★★★★★		●	6	96x28x39
Monitor Audio SoundFrame 1	900	02.12/GT	★★★★★			2	54x39x9
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 6	600	01.10/FT	★★★★★		●	3	95x21x30
Mission MX-5	600	07.12/GT	★★★★★		●	4	100x25x39
Mission SX1	700	12.12/FT	★★★★★		●	5	31x19x29
Neat Iota	695	10.13/GT	★★★★★		●	5	13x20x17
Neat Motive 2	945	07.12/GT	★★★★★		●	4	77x16x20
Neat Motive SX2	1395	07.14/ST	★★★★★		●	4	77x16x20
Neat Petite SX	1250	01.12/ST	★★★★★		●	6	31x20x18
PMCD B1i	1050	12.11/ST	★★★★★		●	4	29x16x23
PMC Twenty 21	1485	10.13/GT	★★★★★		●	4	33x15x28
PSB Imagine Mini	600	05.14/GT	★★★★★		●	5	23x14x21
Opera Mezza	850	04.13/GT	★★★★★		●	3	32x20x33
Q Acoustics Concept 40	1000	07.14/ST	★★★★★		●	2	97x17x29
Quad 9AS	600	07.14/FT	★★★★★		●	●	30x15x21.5
Quad 12L Classic	500	11.11/FT	★★★★★		●	4	34x21x28
Rega RS3	780	07.12/GT	★★★★★		●	3	80x22x25
Revolver Music 3	650	06.10/FT	★★★★★		●	4	39x21x28
Revolver Music5	1300	02.10/FT	★★★★★		●	4	93x25x32
Ruark Acoustics Sabre III	899	06.09/GT	★★★★★		●	2	34x20x27
Roksan Kandy K2 TR-5	750	06.09/GT	★★★★★		●	1	37x19x28

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Marantz CD5005

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Amplifier
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WAS: £199.00
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SAVE £30



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SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Standmount	Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Spendor S3/SR2	850	07.11/GT	★★★★★	A little less than the sum of their parts	●			4	31x17x18
Tangent Evo E45	650	12.09/GT	★★★★★	For those who like an exciting and exuberant listen		●		2	100x15x26
Tannoy Precision 6.1	900	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Rhythmic, detailed speakers but a lack of solidity leaves them sounding unbalanced	●			2	33x22x26
Tannoy Revolution DC6 SE	700	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Responsive with a good sense of cohesion. Could do with a little more spark	●			1	37x20x24
Tannoy Revolution DC6T	799	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £700-£1500, Awards 2011		●		1	95x26x29
Tannoy Revolution DC6T SE	1000	07.14/ST	★★★★★	Best floorstander £800-£1500, Awards 2013		●		1	100x31x28
Tannoy Rev. Sig. DC4	600	07.12/GT	★★★★★	DC4s are still appealing across the board	●			2	27x17x18
Totem Rainmaker	1095	06.10/FT	★★★★★	Hugely musical, and a pleasure to listen to	●			4	36x17x23
Triangle Color 123	600	08.12/FT	★★★★★	A brilliant desktop speaker package				3	14x14x14
Triangle Comete Anniv.	950	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for injecting energy into your music	●			1	42x20x34
Vienna Ac. Haydn Grand	1000	10.10/FT	★★★★★	Beautifully built, they pack a sweet sonic punch that's focused and purposeful	●			5	36x17x27
Wharfedale Denton	500	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Relaxed yet engaging sound has a lot of appeal	●			1	32x20x31
Wharfedale Diamond 155	500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Class leaders when it comes to sound, but let down by average build quality	●			7	94x20x31
£1500 and above									
Acoustic Energy Reference 1	1500	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Terrific all-rounders for the money	●			1	31x19x28
ADAM Aud. Classic Compact 3	2800	06.10/GT	★★★★★	For those who like their music ear-poppingly loud	●			1	44x23x29
ADAM Audio Tensor Gamma	12500	05.09/FT	★★★★★	Quite possibly the best speakers we've seen in a decade		●		2	108x32x34
Audiovector S1 Avantgarde	2950	03.10/FT	★★★★★	At their best these are stunning, but not for all tastes	●			5	37x19x28
Aurosas VS	1650	04.11/FT	★★★★★	When they're good, these Aurosas's are great		●		3	108x22x27
Analysis Audio Omega	14500	08.11/FT	★★★★★	These planar floorstanders are a sonic treat	●			1	168x61x6
ATC SCM 100A	11615	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Massively talented and proportioned	●			4	107x40x56
Beauhorn Rhapsody B2	2750	10.07/FT	★★★★★	Outlandish shape but treat them right and you'll be deeply rewarded	●			98	120x34x75
B&O BeoLab 9	5060	05.07/FT	★★★★★	Work not just as style but in hi-fi terms too	●			4	78x40x430
B&O 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 Helicon 300 Mk2	2100	02.08/FT	★★★★★	Excellent midrange; woolly bass	●			2	44x21x40
Dali Mentor 6	2200	02.07/FT	★★★★★	Dynamic floorstanders that are really fast and agile	●			1	40x8x15
Dali Rubicon 2	1600	11.14/GT	★★★★★	A great pair of standmounters that deliver an expressive and enthusiastic sound	●			4	35x20x34
Dynaudio Confidence C1	5325	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Set up with care, the C1s are quite exceptional	●			4	45x20x43
Dynaudio Excite X32	1765	02.09/GT	★★★★★	These pack an eloquent, expansive sound	●			4	92x17x27
Dynaudio Focus 110A	1700	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Fun, flexible and hugely capable active speakers	●			6	31x17x32
Dynaudio Focus 160	1800	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Just do the job and don't intrude on the entertainment	●			6	35x20x29
Dynaudio Focus 220 Mk II	2630	10.09/FT	★★★★★	These Dynaudios are fine speakers; all they lack is a little star quality	●			4	98x21x30
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
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
GamuT M'inen TM3	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
Jamo R907	5500	04.09/FT	★★★★★	The innovative R907s are stunningly capable speakers	●			1	119x44x19
JBL Studio 580	1500	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Hugely capable floorstanders for the money	●			2	107x25x35
KEF Reference 207/2	12000	10.08/FT	★★★★★	Big, bold and stunningly built, they major on bass	●			4	123x40x69
Kudos Cardea C30	5650	07.10/FT	★★★★★	Ideal if musical enjoyment is your top priority	●			7	112x20x27
Linn Akubarik	15600	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Deeply impressive engineering but its presentation veers towards the clinical	●			200+	105x35x45
Monopulse 42A	2000	07.09/GT	★★★★★	Odd appearance apart, there's an awful lot to like about these Monopulses	●			10	108x23x25
Monitor Audio Gold GX200	2300	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Pretty looks and excellent refinement	●			2	90x17x30
Mon. Audio Platinum PL300	6000	03.08/FT	★★★★★	Its been a long time coming, and it is well worth the wait	●			3	111x41x47
Naim Ovator S-400	3650	10.13/GT	★★★★★	The most rounded Naim speaker we've heard	●			5	106x33x35
Neat Ultimatum XLS	4500	09.12/FT	★★★★★	An entertainer of the highest order if partnered with care	●			9	38x22x37
Opera Callas	2375	01.09/FT	★★★★★	Arguably the best standmounter at this price level	●			3	37x23x34

SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
£1500 and above							
PMC Fact 3	4100	08.11/FT	★★★★★	Hugely capable but a touch overcontrolled	●	4	54x16x30
PMC Fact 8	4700	04.10/FT	★★★★★	These PMC floorstanders are quite simply magical - even at this price	●	4	103x15x38
PMCPB1i	5850	09.09/GT	★★★★★	Simply excellent speakers: big, bold and accomplished	●	1	108x20x40
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 D28	3250	07.07/FT	★★★★★	Another excellent pair of floorstanders from ProAc	●	6	108x20x29
ProAc Response D30R	4750	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Superb all-rounders	●	6	104x22x31
ProAc Response D40/R	6125	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Articulate and dynamic, a top-class pair of floorstanders	●	6	120x21x34
ProAc Studio 140 Mk2	1650	12.10/FT	★★★★★	An entertaining and dynamic performer	●	4	104x19x28
Quad ESL-2812	6500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Won't be to everyone's tastes but these electrostatic speakers truly excel	●	1	107x69x38
Quad ESL 2905	6000	01.07/FT	★★★★★	A truly world-class speaker	●	1	143x70x39
Roksan Darius S1	5000	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Excellent pair of performers and one of the most enjoyable stand-mounters we've heard	●	2	38x20x38
Sonus F. Cremona Auditor M	2690	06.08/FT	★★★★★	One of the best standmounts money can buy	●	2	35x20x37
Sonus F. Liuto Monitor Wood	1649	01.10/FT	★★★★★	These are classy and natural standmounters	●	2	35x19x34
SP Acoustics SP1 Signature	14950	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Able to challenge the very best at this exalted level	Any	106x35x46	
Spendor A5	1695	03.11/GT	★★★★★	The most accomplished speakers for this money	●	4	79x17x25
Spendor A6R	2500	02.14/GT	★★★★★	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
Totem Mani-2 Signature	4600	12.10/FT	★★★★★	When it comes to outright enjoyment we can't think of any rival speakers we prefer for this money	●	4	42x21x31
Triangle Magellan Cello SW2	6699	05.10/FT	★★★★★	A speaker dedicated to actually enjoying music	●	2	114x42x37
Triangle Signature Delta	4900	07.14/FT	★★★★★	If you value excitement and entertainment, put these speakers at the top of your shortlist	●	3	123x37x39
Vivid Audio V1.5	5250	11.09/FT	★★★★★	They might look odd, but these are a must hear	●	5	113x26x24
Wharfedale Jade-5	1650	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Floorstanders that pack immense power and poise	●	3	106x25x40
Wilson Audio Duette	11000	10.08/FT	★★★★★	One of the best pairs of speakers we've ever heard	●	Any	47x23x35
Wilson Audio Sophia 3	16500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Expensive, but they deliver a stunning sound full of detail, dynamics and drive	●	7	105x35x48
Wilson Benesch A.C.T	8800	08.07/FT	★★★★★	Good looking, solid and superb sounding floorstanders	●	1	108x23x37
Wilson Benesch Trinity	4700	03.08/FT	★★★★★	An awful lot of technology and ability for the money	●	4	108x24x30



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

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

AMPLIFIERS continued

AMPLIFIERS continued					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)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict															
Cambridge Audio Azur 350A	250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A budget amp with a decent grasp of timing	45	●	6	0	0		1	2	●	●	●	2	9x43x34	
Cambridge Audio Azur 351A	300	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Worth considering if you prefer an energetic approach	45	●	5	0	0	●	1	2	●	●	●	2	9x43x34	
Cambridge Audio Azur 651A	450	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Meaty and powerful, but not the most refined	75	●	5	0	0		1	●	2	●	●	●	1	12x43x35
Cambridge Audio Topaz SR10	230	06.10/FT	★★★★★	This affordable stereo receiver has plenty to offer	85		5	1	0		1	2	●	●	●	●	1	11x43x34
Cyrus 6a	800	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £600-£1000, Awards 2012	40		6	0	0		0	●	2		●	●	2	7x22x36
Denon PMA-710	350	07.10/GT	★★★★★	The most enjoyable Denon amp we've heard in ages	50		5	1	0		2	●	2	●	●	●	2	12x43x21
Denon PMA-720AE	350	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Entertaining and capable, but sonically stubborn	50		4	1	0		1	●	1	●	●	●	2	12x43x31
Icon Audio Stereo 25	500	01.09/FT	★★★★★	The Stereo 25 is superbly made for the money	30		3	0	0		0		1				1	22x32x31
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	10x44x29
NAD C356BEE	600	10.10/FT	★★★★★	A party animal of an amplifier	80		7	0	0		2	●	2	●	●	●	1	13x44x34
NAD C356BEE DAC	695	01.12/FT	★★★★★	A good amplifier with a great DAC	80	●	8	0	0	●	2	●	2	●	●	●	1	13x44x34
NAD D 3020	400	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	10.14/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-9030	300	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Proof that Onkyo knows how to build good stereo gear	65		4	1	0		1		2		●	●	2	14x44x33
Onkyo A-9050	350	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Lean presentation, but there's plenty to like	75		5	1	0		1	●	1	●	●	●	2	14x44x33
Peachtree iDecco	999	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for a digital based set-up	40		1	0	0	●	1	●	1		●	●	1	13x38x29
Pro-ject Stereo Box S	200	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A small amp that's worth investigation	40		2	0	0		0		1			●	2	4x10x10
Pioneer A-70	800	05.13/ST	★★★★★	Excels in many areas, falls short of class-leading	90		3	1	1	●	1	●	2	●	●	●	2	14x44x36
Rega Brio-R	480	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £400-£600, Awards 2012	50		4	1	0		1		1			●	2	8x22x31
Rega Elex-R	900	11.14/FT	★★★★★	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-S300	195	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Solid performer but you can get better for a little more money	60		6	1	0		1	1	●	●	●	2	15x44x39	
Yamaha A-S501	360	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Solid performer but you can get better for a little more money	60		6	1	0		1	1	●	●	●	2	15x44x39	
£1000 and above																		
Audio Analogue Class A Int. SE	9190	06.11/FT	★★★★★	A fantastic, and sonically rounded performer	50		5	0	0		1		1		●	1	33x45x41	
ATC SIA 2-150	2379	02.10/GT	★★★★★	One of the best amplifiers at this price level	150		4	0	0		1	●	1		●	●	1	14x44x35
Bryston B60R	2600	07.09/FT	★★★★★	The Bryston B60R may be unassuming, but has quality	60		4	0	0		1		1		●	2	5x43x28	
Cambridge Audio Azur 851A	1200	12.12/GT	★★★★★	For scale, power, build and style, this is hard to beat	120		8	0	0		1	●	2	●	●	●	2	12x43x39
Chord Elec. Cyan Click HP	4215	07.10/FT	★★★★★	Stylish, and astonishingly well built too	100		2	0	0	●	0					●	2	6x34x15
Creek Evolution 5350	1025	06.10/FT	★★★★★	There's lots to like here, but better available elsewhere	120		5	1	0		0	●	2		●	1	1	9x43x34
Cyrus 6XPd	1250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A sturdy DAC-toting amp that's a cracker	40	●	6	0	0	●	1	●	2		●	2	2	7x22x36
Cyrus 8a	1350	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Everything we've come to expect and love about Cyrus	70		5	0	0		1	●	2		●	2	2	7x22x36
Cyrus 8 DAC	1400	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Meticulous and engaging amp and DAC combo	70	●	6	0	0	●	0		2		●	2	2	7x22x36
Cyrus 8 XPd	1500	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Sets a sky-high standard at the price point	70		5	0	0	●	1	●	1		●	2	2	7x22x36
Cyrus 8XP	1250	11.09/GT	★★★★★	The Cyrus 8XP misses nothing out in sonic thrills	70		6	0	0		1	●	1		●	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	2	7x22x36
Dartzeel CTH-8550	16858	05.10/FT	★★★★★	Well engineered - but with a colossal price tag	200		7	0	0		1	●	1		●	2	1	17x44x34
Denon PMA-2010AE	1700	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Listen to this amp in full flow and it's a monster	80		4	1	1		2	●	2	●	●	●	1	18x43x44
Devialet 110	4490	02.14/FT	★★★★★	An exceptional all-rounder	110	●	1	1	0	●	0		1			●	1	4x38x38
Devialet D-Premier	11450	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A fresh look at amp design	240		2	1	1		1	●	1	●		●	3	4x40x40
EAR Yoshino V12	7000	07.13/FT	★★★★★	This terrific integrated amp needn't fear any rival at this price	50		5	0	0		1		1				1	14x42x14
Heed Audio Obelisk i	1300	06.12/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £1000-£1500, Awards 2012	35		5	1	0		0	●	1			●	2	9x22x36
Karan Acoustics KA I180Mk2	5995	09.13/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest amps we've heard	180		4	0	0		1		1			●	2	9x50x34
Lavardin IS Reference	2950	01.10/FT	★★★★★	Amazing: its rivals sound mechanical in comparison	30		4	0	0		1		1				1	8.5x43x35
Leema Tucana Mk II	3595	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier £2000+, Awards 2010.	148		7	0	0		1	●	1		●	2	2	10x43x36
Leema Elements	1395	12.12/GT	★★★★★	Solid choice, wide connection range and optional DAC	56	●	3	0	0	●	0	●	1		●	2	2	9x22x28
Myrrad MXI2080	1000	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Assiduous, precise presentation	80		6	1	1		1	●	1		●	1	1	9x44x38
NAD C 390DD	2250	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Novel thinking delivers an alternative to the favourites	150		1	0	0	●	0	●	2	●	●	●	1	13x43x39

£1000 and above

Audio Analogue Class A Int. SE	9190	06.11/FT	★★★★★	A fantastic, and sonically rounded performer	50		5	0	0	1	1				●	1	33x45x41
ATCSIA 2-150	2379	02.10/GT	★★★★★	One of the best amplifiers at this price level	150		4	0	0	1	●	1			●	1	14x44x35
Bryston B60R	2600	07.09/FT	★★★★★	The Bryston B60R may be unassuming, but has quality	60		4	0	0	1	1				●	2	5x43x28
Cambridge Audio Azur 851A	1200	12.12/GT	★★★★★	For scale, power, build and style, this is hard to beat	120		8	0	0	1	●	2	●	●	●	2	12x43x39
Chord Elec. Cyan Click HP	4215	07.10/FT	★★★★★	Stylish, and astonishingly well built too	100		2	0	0	●	0	1			●	2	6x34x15
Creek Evolution 5350	1025	06.10/FT	★★★★★	There's lots to like here, but better available elsewhere	120		5	1	0	0	●	2			●	1	9x43x34
Cyrus 6XPD	1250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A sturdy DAC-toting amp that's a cracker	40	●	6	0	0	●	1	●	2		●	2	7x22x36
Cyrus 8a	1350	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Everything we've come to expect and love about Cyrus	70		5	0	0	1	●	2			●	2	7x22x36
Cyrus 8 DAC	1400	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Meticulous and engaging amp and DAC combo	70	●	6	0	0	●	0	2			●	2	7x22x36
Cyrus 8 XPD	1500	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Sets a sky-high standard at the price point	70		5	0	0	●	1	●	1		●	2	7x22x36
Cyrus 8XP	1250	11.09/GT	★★★★★	The Cyrus 8XP misses nothing out in sonic thrills	70		6	0	0	1	●	1			●	2	7x22x36
Cyrus DACXP Signature	3000	11.13/FT	★★★★★	With the Signature upgrade, the DACXP remains a fine product	70		2	0	0	1	●	1			●	2	7x22x36
Dartzeel CTH-8550	16858	05.10/FT	★★★★★	Well engineered - but with a colossal price tag	200		7	0	0	1	●	1			●	2	17x44x34
Denon PMA-2010AE	1700	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Listen to this amp in full flow and it's a monster	80		4	1	1	2	●	2	●	●	●	1	18x43x44
Devialet 110	4490	02.14/FT	★★★★★	An exceptional all-rounder	110	●	1	1	0	●	0	1			●	1	4x38x38
Devialet D-Premier	11450	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A fresh look at amp design	240		2	1	1	1	●	1	●		●	3	4x40x40
EAR Yoshino V12	7000	07.13/FT	★★★★★	This terrific integrated amp needn't fear any rival at this price	50		5	0	0	1	1					1	14x42x14
Heed Audio Obelisk i	1300	06.12/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £1000-£1500, Awards 2012	35		5	1	0	0	●	1			●	2	9x22x36
Karan Acoustics KA I180Mk2	5995	09.13/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest amps we've heard	180		4	0	0	1	1				●	2	9x50x34
Lavardin IS Reference	2950	01.10/FT	★★★★★	Amazing: its rivals sound mechanical in comparison	30		4	0	0	1	1					1	8.5x43x35
Leema Tucana Mk II	3595	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier £2000+, Awards 2010.	148		7	0	0	1	●	1			●	2	10x43x36
Leema Elements	1395	12.12/GT	★★★★★	Solid choice, wide connection range and optional DAC	56	●	3	0	0	●	0	1			●	2	9x22x28
Myryad MXI2080	1000	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Assiduous, precise presentation	80		6	1	1	1	●	1			●	1	9x44x38
NAD C 390DD	2250	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Novel thinking delivers an alternative to the favourites	150		1	0	0	●	0	2	●	●	●	1	13x43x39

AMPLIFIERS continued

AMPLIFIERS continued

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)
£1000 and above																	
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 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
Plinius Hautonga	4455	07.11/FT	★★★★★	A powerhouse of an integrated amplifier	200	5	1	1		2	●	1		●	2	12x45x50	
Plinius Hiato	6759	08.09/FT	★★★★★	If you're after a top class amplifier the Hiato is for you	300	5	0	0		1	●	1		●	2	17x45x45	
Quad II Classic Integrated	4500	04.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine integrated amplifier with a hefty price tag	25	3	1	1		1	1			1	20x31x38		
Rega Osiris	5998	06.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine amp that makes sense partnering its Isis sibling	162	6	0	0		1	1			●	1	12x44x35	
Rega Elicit-R	1600	10.13/GT	★★★★★	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	
Sony TA-A1ES	2000	04.14/FT	★★★★★	Not quite a flawless effort but talented enough in key areas	80	5	1	1		0	1			●	1	13x43x42	
Synthesis Shine	2449	07.10/FT	★★★★★	This valve design needs sensitive speakers to fly	40	5	0	0		1	1			●	4	16x32x22	
T+APA 3000 HV	9900	11.13/FT	★★★★★	A truly impressive piece of kit despite its polite disposition	300	6	0	0		0	1			●	1	17x46x46	
Unison Research Preludio	2295	02.10/GT	★★★★★	Rubs shoulders with the very best at this price	14	4	0	0		1	1			1	20x40x38		
Unison Research S6	2995	05.11/FT	★★★★★	In the right system, the S6 is truly magical	33	5	0	0		1	1			●	2	21x35x49	
Unison Research S9	6995	02.10/FT	★★★★★	We can't help but love this quirky valve amplifier	35	4	0	0		0	1			●	1	25x41x57	
Unison Research Simply Italy	1495	09.12/FT	★★★★★	A well-engineered valve amplifier at a sensible price	12	5	0	0		1	1			●	2	26x19x35	
Unison Research Triode 25	2350	08.14/FT	★★★★★	An absolutely superb amplifier from Unison Research	45	5	0	0	Opt	1	1			●	1	20x30x45	



Preamps

Preamps are also known as control units. On a most basic level, they perform two functions: source selection and volume control. Most powered preamps also amplify the signal slightly in order to make matching to a power amplifier easier. Some include phono stages.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Balanced out	Headphone out	Tone controls	Remote control	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £5000													
Audio Research LS17	3399	01.09/FT	★★★★★	This top quality product should serve you for decades	7	0	0	1	●	●		●	14x48x31
Audionet Pre 1 G3	3525	01.10/FT	★★★★★	As revealing as amplifiers get for the money	5	0	0	1	●	●		●	7x43x31
ATC CA-2	1058	12.09/FT	★★★★★	A matchless preamp when paired with the P1 power amp	5	0	0	1	●	●		●	9x44x32
Cyrus DACXP+	2550	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Massive ability in a small box	2	0	0	1	●	●		●	7x22x36
Cyrus Pre XP d	1300	02.10/GT	★★★★★	Works wonders when coupled with the matching 8 power amp	6	0	0	0	●	●		●	7x22x36
Heed Audio Obelisk pre/px	2230	04.13/FT	★★★★★	A superb-sounding preamp, but Heed needs to make it feel more luxurious	5	0	0	1	●			●	9x22x33
Lavardin C62	3471	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Belongs near the top of any shortlist	6	0	0	1	●				9x43x31
Leema Pyxis	3995	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A versatile, enjoyable preamp	5	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	11x44x31
Linn Akurate Kontrol	4200	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Part of the Linn Akurate system - and truly awesome	4	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	9x38x38
NAD C165BEE	650	08.10/FT	★★★★★	A brute of a preamp	4	1	1	0		●	●	●	8x44x29
Naim NAC 152 XS	975	02.10/GT	★★★★★	It's good, but could do better with dynamics	5	0	0	0	●				7x43x30
Quad Elite Pre	850	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Doesn't blow us away, but it's still worth consideration	6	1	1	1	●			●	7x32x31
Quad QC-twenty four	1000	06.13/FT	★★★★★	Pleasant listen but works best with Quad's valve power amps	5	0	0	2	●				9x30x22
Rotel RC-1580	995	03.10/FT	★★★★★	A likeable, fully featured performer that delivers much for the money	5	1	1	2	●		●	●	10x43x34
Townshend Allegri	1895	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Basic features, but terrific sound	6	0	0	0	●				5x13x31
£5000 and above													
Audio Research LS27	6500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	A fine preamp but struggles to shine in comparison to the Reference 75	6	0	0	1	●	●		●	13x48x34
Aesthetix Calypso Signature	6400	03.11/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest preamps on the market today	5	0	0	1	●	●		●	11x46x45
Bryston BP26DA	5050	08.06/FT	★★★★★	A must-hear preamp. Lacks style but built to last	5	0	0	1	●	●	●		6x49x28
Burmester 808 MK5	22242	02.13/FT	★★★★★	A beautifully constructed, highly versatile preamp for serious devotees	Opt	Opt	Opt	Opt	●	●		●	95x48x33
Chord Electronics CPA 8000	25500	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A magnificent preamp, but not quite the masterpiece its price demands	8	0	0	2	●	●	●	●	31x42x36
Chord Electronics Indigo	8670	11.09/FT	★★★★★	A far sighted design mixing useful features with great sound	6	0	0	0	●	●	●	●	36x42x9
Krell Phantom II	12000	11.12/FT	★★★★★	A hugely capable preamp that is able to dig deeply into any recording	8	0	0	1	●	●		●	10x44x46
McIntosh C2500	7495	01.14/FT	★★★★★	A refined and entertaining preamp that needs a little care in partnering	8	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	19x44x46
Naim NAC252/Supercap	9070	11.08/FT	★★★★★	Makes a magical combination with the NAP250 power amp	6	0	0	0	●				9x43x31
Plinius Tauto	6325	09.08/FT	★★★★★	A mighty amplifier in every sense of the word	4	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	16x45x48



Power amps

These are effectively the powerhouse of the system. They deliver the high currents necessary to make a loudspeaker work. They can be configured as a stereo unit, or monoblocs, where the circuitry for each channel is housed separately. Don't judge a power amp by its output level.

Our recommendations

Our recommendations										
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
Audionet Amp 1 V2	4850	01.10/FT	★★★★★	As revealing as amplifiers get for this kind of money	Stereo	200	1	1	18x43x32	28
ATC P1	1566	12.09/FT	★★★★★	A matchless power amp when paired with the CA-2 preamp	Stereo	150	1	1	14x44x35	26
Bryston 2B SST	2925	08.06/FT	★★★★★	Big, strong and very powerful	Stereo	100	1	0	49x13x41	14
Chord Electronics Maxx	990	05.11/FT	★★★★★	This could be a sign of hi-fi to come	Stereo	20	1	0	7x16x4	0.4
Chord Electronics SPM 1050	3990	10.07/FT	★★★★★	Very fast and punchy, exciting and stable sound	Stereo	200	2	2	13x42x36	15
Croft Polestar 1	800	06.07/FT	★★★★★	Great buy if you want sound quality not quantity	Stereo	25	1	0	11x22x33	6
Cyrus 8 Power	850	02.10/GT	★★★★★	Performs with panache, we'd spend our cash here	Stereo	60	3	0	7x22x36	5
Cyrus Mono X300	2500	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Exceptionally fluid and agile. Recommended	Stereo	235	1	1	7x22x36	7
Cyrus Mono X300 Signature	2750	10.13/FT	★★★★★	A deceptively compact monobloc that surpasses the Mono X300	Mono	225	1	1	8x22x37	6.5
Heed Audio Obelisk ps	1350	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Engaging and a pleasure to listen to, even if it's not the classiest in terms of finish	Stereo	50	1	0	9x22x33	6
Leema Hydra II	3595	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A top class power amplifier for the money	Stereo	160	1	1	11x44x31	33
NAD C275BEE	820	08.10/FT	★★★★★	A great power amp, best matched with the C165BEE preamp	Stereo	150	1	0	13x44x35	15
Naim NAP 155 XS	1115	02.10/GT	★★★★★	It's a good performer, but not the last word in dynamics	Stereo	60	0	0	7x43x30	7.5
Naim NAP 250	3050	11.08/FT	★★★★★	Paired with the NAC252 preamp it's magical	Stereo	80	0	0	9x43x32	16
Plinius P10	3390	09.07/FT	★★★★★	Makes a terrific amp when partnered with the Plinius M8 preamp	Stereo	200	2	1	12x45x40	14
Quad Elite Stereo	700	11.10/FT	★★★★★	The Elite power amp paired with the Elite Pre is well worth consideration	Stereo	80	1	0	7x32x31	6.25
Quad QSP	1200	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Needs to be auditioned - a confident listen	Stereo	140	2	0	15x33x27	14
Rotel RB-1582	1095	03.10/FT	★★★★★	Great when paired with the RC-1580 preamp	Stereo	200	1	0	14x43x41	33
£5000 and above										
Aesthetix Atlas	7600	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Sophisticated brute - pair with the Aesthetix Calypso	Stereo	200	2	2	19x45x46	33
Audio Research Reference 75	8495	03.13/FT	★★★★★	A fabulous power amp, match it with care and you'll have sonic magic	Stereo	75	0	1	22x48x50	21
Audio Research VS115	5395	02.09/FT	★★★★★	Ignore the looks and enjoy the sound	Stereo	120	1	1	20x45x21	29
Burmester 911 Mk3	32800	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Awesome price, awesome bit of kit	Stereo	535	0	1	22x48x48	31
Chord SPM 14000 MkII	24480	01.13/FT	★★★★★	An awe-inspiring monobloc, yet not quite as sonically rounded as we'd like	Mono	700	1	1	31x48x69	75
Krell Evolution 402e	18500	11.12/FT	★★★★★	The Evolution 402e is world-class. It isn't cheap, but quality such as this never is	Stereo	400	1	1	25x44x56	61
Lavardin AP150	7686	12.10/FT	★★★★★	For sound quality and musical enjoyment, the C62 with the AP150 is hard to beat	Stereo	50	1	0	14x43x31	12
Marantz MA-9S2	5000	02.08/FT	★★★★★	Right up there with the very best power amplifiers	Mono	300	2	1	45x46x20	37
Plinius SA-REF	12650	09.08/FT	★★★★★	As enticing an amplifier as you can get	Stereo	300	1	1	28x51x54	57
Quad II eighty	6000	06.13/FT	★★★★★	A capable monobloc amp that should be considered	Mono	80	1	0	21x43x18	57

"The Aesthetix Calypso pairing is an astonishingly capable piece of hi-fi. In overall terms, it remains the best we've heard at this price level or anywhere near it"

March 2011



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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	Docktype	Aux	Power(w)	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500									
Audyssey South of Market	350	04.11/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	n/a	23x13x28
B&W Z2	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	18x32x10
Epoz AktiMate Micro	260	09.13/GT	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	24x15x20
Epoz AktiMate Mini	350	07.12/GT	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	30x19x21
Epoz AktiMate Mini+	360	08.13/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	40	30x19x21
Gear4 AirZone Series 1	200	04.12/ST	★★★★★	●		iOS	●	n/a	18x33x19
JBL OnBeat Venue LT	200	03.13/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	30	13x42x14
Klipsch iGroove HG WWI	110	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	30	14x40x16
KitSound Boom Dock	100	12.10/FT	★★★★★			iOS		60	15x42x28
Logitech S715i	80	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	20	6x39x13
Logitech UE Air Speaker	300	06.12/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	n/a	17x53x15
Orbitsound T12v3	299	12.11/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	180	10x61x11
Philips Fidelio Primo DS9	300	09.11/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	50	18x51x21
Philips Fidelio Primo DS9010	400	08.11/GT	★★★★★			iOS	●	100	21x56x23
Pure Digital Contour 100Di	100	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	20	18x31x15
Pure Digital Contour 200i Air	200	09.12/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	36	23x37x18
Revo K2	300	02.12/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	33x11x11
Ruark Audio R2i	280	09.09/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	20	12x34x18.5
£500 and above									
B&W Zeppelin Air	500	12.11/ST	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	150	17x54x21
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



Monitor Audio Airstream S200

Awards 2014: Best Wireless speaker £150-£300



Dali Kubik Free

Awards 2014: Best Wireless speaker £500-£750



Naim Mu-so

Awards 2014: Best Wireless speaker 750+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	Aux	Charging	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £1000									
Audio Pro Allroom Air One	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●		20x31x19
Bayan Audio SoundBook	150	01.14/GT	★★★★★			●	●	●	9x16x4
Bose SoundLink Mini	170	01.14/GT	★★★★★			●	●	●	5x18x6
Bose SoundLink III	260	12.14/FT	★★★★★			●	●	●	13x26x5
Bluesound multi-room system	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★			●	●	●	n/a

WIRELESS SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		AirPlay Bluetooth Aux Charging Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
B&W A5	400	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Not the loudest but delivers a potent, punchy sound	● ● ● ● ●	18x30x20
B&W A7	700	12.12/FT	★★★★★	If you use AirPlay, the A7 demands your attention	● ● ● ● ●	22x36x16
B&W T7	300	12.14/FT	★★★★★	B&W's first Bluetooth speaker is a resounding success	● ● ● ● ●	12x21x5.4
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 Bluetone 100	200	10.14/GT	★★★★★	A bold, engaging performance from a speaker that lacks a little clarity	● ● ● ● ●	118x35x12
Cambridge Audio Minx Air 100	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★	A worthy option but it can't match the best when it comes to sound	● ● ● ● ●	18x35x12
Cambridge Audio Minx Air 200	430	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Majors in excitement, detail and power – a real entertainer	● ● ● ● ●	45x22x17
Cambridge Audio Go	120	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker up to £150, Awards 2014	● ● ● ● ●	24x12x6
Cambridge Audio Minx Go	100	08.13/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker up to £150, Awards 2013	● ● ● ● ●	23x24x6
Dali Kubik Free	645	03.14/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £500-£750, Awards 2014	● ● ● ● ●	31x15x15
Denon Envaya DSB200	170	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Overcooked bass aside, this is one of most powerful sounding portable speakers we've heard	● ● ● ● ●	14x26x5
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
Harman/Kardon Go+Play	280	05.13/FT	★★★★★	These wireless active speakers deliver good sound	● ● ● ● ●	24x50x23
Jawbone Big Jambox	260	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Great for bass and sound, lacks a little finesse though	● ● ● ● ●	9x26x8
iLuv MobiOut	70	05.13/GT	★★★★★	A small unit that boasts a likable sound	● ● ● ● ●	0x0x0
JBL Charge	120	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A punchy and energetic sound is let down by some coarse and harsh treble	● ● ● ● ●	18x7x7
JBL Flip	100	05.13/GT	★★★★★	A great value bluetooth speaker	● ● ● ● ●	0x0x0
JBL Flip 2	100	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Good performer for the money, but has issues with volume and battery life	● ● ● ● ●	6.5x16x16
JBL OnBeat Rumble	230	10.14/GT	★★★★★	A chunky, fun unit that's starting to sound a little unrefined against more recent competition	● ● ● ● ●	17x45x22
Libratone Zipp	370	10.13/ST	★★★★★	Stylish, portable and fully-featured. Libratone hits the jackpot with the Zipp	● ● ● ● ●	26x12x12
Libratone Loop	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★	An enjoyable-sounding speaker with some unique looks	● ● ● ● ●	33x33x8
Loewe AirSpeaker	500	03.13/GT	★★★★★	Fussy set up issues aside, this is one incredibly capable speaker	● ● ● ● ●	24x13x24
Logitech UE Boombox	200	12.12/GT	★★★★★	It's not faultless, but for the money it's difficult to argue with this	● ● ● ● ●	16x39x8
Logitech UE Mobile Boombox	75	05.13/GT	★★★★★	Limited functionality but a good choice for portable users	● ● ● ● ●	6x7x11
Monitor Audio Airstream S200	200	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £150-£300, Awards 2014	● ● ● ● ●	27x12x14
Monitor Audio Airstream S300	250	10.14/GT	★★★★★	It only supports iOS devices but this speaker sounds fantastic	● ● ● ● ●	15x47x15
Monitor Audio Airstream WS100	250	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Cracking speakers. A desktop force to be reckoned with	● ● ● ● ●	13x12x12
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
Panasonic SC-NA10	130	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A speaker that oozes class and subtlety. Watch out for the cabinet vibrations, though	● ● ● ● ●	10x20x3
Philips Fidelio E2	300	06.14/ST	★★★★★	Classy, versatile speakers but you'll need some room to accommodate them	● ● ● ● ●	30.5x16x16
Philips Fidelio P9	240	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Hard to find fault with this Bluetooth speaker	● ● ● ● ●	12x29x5
Pioneer XW-SMA4	350	12.12/GT	★★★★★	Bags of features, solid build and smart design – just watch that bass	● ● ● ● ●	21x36x17
Pure Jongo S3	170	06.13/FT	★★★★★	Great sound and easy portability make this a real gem	● ● ● ● ●	13x13x14
Pure Jongo S3 (pair)	340	06.14/ST	★★★★★	A tad disappointing as a pair; rivals offer a more insightful performance	● ● ● ● ●	13x13x14
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
Roth OLi POWA-5	250	06.14/ST	★★★★★	Updated and better than before but rivals still have in edge in terms of sound	● ● ● ● ●	27x18x21
Samsung M5	230	10.14/FT	★★★★★	A talented speaker with a clean, open and fun sound	● ● ● ● ●	14x34x17
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 Play:1	170	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Another strong addition to the Award-winning Sonos multi-room family	● ● ● ● ●	16x12x12
Sonos System	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Best multi-room system £500+, Awards 2014	● ● ● ● ●	n/a
Sony RDP-XA700	285	03.13/GT	★★★★★	With a bit more definition and a bit less bass this could have been the speaker for us	● ● ● ● ●	18x40x16
Sony SRS-X3	130	07.14/GT	★★★★★	A hugely confident performer but its tonal balance won't be for everyone	● ● ● ● ●	7x19x7
Sony SRS-X9	600	06.14/FT	★★★★★	A do-it-all speaker with superb sound quality	● ● ● ● ●	13x43x13
Sony SRS-BTM8	85	05.13/GT	★★★★★	Classy, cleverly designed speaker that can handle large volumes.	● ● ● ● ●	19x25x9
Tangent Classic	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★	A speaker with a big sound and plenty of bass	● ● ● ● ●	23x60x32
Ultimate Ears Boom	170	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Loads of fun to listen to, the Boom is exciting, attractive and packed with features to boot	● ● ● ● ●	16x6.5x6.5

"The engineers at Dali have struck gold with the Kubik Free, and have used their speaker expertise to great effect. It's another five-star product to add to their collection"

March 2014

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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



Awards 2014: Best portable on-ears up to £100
“Excelling in sound and style, the Y50s are a promising start for AKG’s latest range.”



Awards 2014: Best portable on-ears £100-£200
“If you have just under £200 to spend on a pair of portable on-ear headphones, this is a most worthy candidate.”



Awards 2014: Best portable on-ears £200-£300
“They’re easily some of the best portable on-ear headphones we’ve heard at this price.”

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-CK550	49	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Smooth and weighty with lashings of detail	●	Closed			8
Audio Technica ATH-CK55i	45	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Big on bass, these cans are no shrinking violets	●	Closed			6
Audio Technica ATH-T400	50	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Nicely balanced pair that just lack the wow factor of the class leaders	●	Closed			260
Apple EarPods	25	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A big upgrade of Apple’s original earbuds, but there are better rivals	●	Open			10
Beyerdynamic DTX101iE	65	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £40-£80, Awards 2013	●	Closed			11
Beyerdynamic DTX71iE	54	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Detailed and with supreme tone control	●	Closed			11
dBLogic EP-100	25	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A dramatic, enjoyable musical performance	●	Closed			117
Digital Silence DS-321D	60	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Admirable noise-cancelling buds	●	Closed	●		11
Etymotic Research MC5	57	01.12/GT	★★★★★	A likeable sound for the money	●	Closed	●		17
Grado iGrado	49	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Fabulous iPod upgrade: these are unbeatable at the price	●	Open			85
Jays a-Jays Four	50	12.11/FT	★★★★★	The Jays combine looks and performance to alluring effect	●	Closed			14
Jays t-Jays Two	67	09.11/ST	★★★★★	A sure-fire winner for those who like their bass	●	Closed			8
Ministry of Sound MOS003	30	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Tidy, well balanced and nicely made	●	Closed			15
Mix-Style inner headphones	30	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Punchy, controlled and balanced	●	Closed			13.5
Panasonic RP-HTX7	35	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears up to £50, Awards 2012	●	Closed			153
Philips CitiScape Downtown	55	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Fun, stylish and great to use on an everyday basis	●	Closed			174
RHA MA-350	30	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Nicely made from quality materials, with impressive sound to match	●	Closed			48
Sennheiser CX 300-II	30	09.10/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ear headphones up to £50, Awards 2010	●	Closed			4
Sennheiser CX281	35	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Enjoyable enough, but a touch quiet	●	Closed			16
Sennheiser CX495	35	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A brilliant upgrade bargain	●	Closed			4
Sennheiser HD 202	26	02.11/FT	★★★★★	Great sound for the money and a bargain buy	●	Closed			130
Sennheiser HD 218	40	11.09/FT	★★★★★	For closed-back cans, the Sennheisers are very good – but not the best	●	Closed			224
Sennheiser MM 70i	50	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Nice features for the money	●	Closed			12
Sennheiser PX100-II	40	11.10/FT	★★★★★	An improvement over the previous model, very good open-backed cans	●	Open			80
Skullcandy Full Metal Jacket	65	07.10/FT	★★★★★	An extremely likeable pair of in-ear ‘phones	●	Closed			13
Slick Distributions SD50	30	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Features and price make it easy to forgive minor sonic flaws	●	Closed	●		71
SoundMagic E10	35	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears up to £40, Awards 2013	●	Closed			11
SoundMagic 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-570LP	30	08.10/GT	★★★★★	Comfortable, all-round, on-ear headphones	●	Closed			110
Sony MDR-AS40EX	24	03.09/GT	★★★★★	Sporty headphones that sound weighty and clear	●	Closed			6
Sony MDR-EX500LP	45	09.10/GT	★★★★★	Display good solidity and weight – well worth an audition	●	Closed			7
Sony MDR-EX650AP	60	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £50-£100, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	Closed			9
Vivanco Airc. Studio Monitors	50	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Capable - but should be approached with caution	●	Closed			n/a

HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	In-ear On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling Wireless	Weight (g)
£70 and above							
AKG K3003i	1000	04.12/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		10
AKG K370	73	12.10/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		4
AKG K450/HA450	180	09.11/ST	★★★★★	●	Closed		120
AKG K545	210	12.13/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		280
AKG K550	99	02.12/ST	★★★★★	●	Closed		305
AKG K551	230	02.13/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		305
AKG K812	1100	10.14/FT	★★★★★	●	Open		390
AKG K845BT	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed	●	292
AKG Y845BT	110	12.14/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed	●	150
AKG Q701	250	09.14/ST	★★★★★	●	Open		235
AKG Q460	140	02.11/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		120
AKG Y50	80	09.14/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		190
Audeze LCD-3	1725	02.14/GT	★★★★★	●	Open		548
Audio Technica ATH-A500	140	02.10/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		290
Audio Technica ATH-AD700X	190	04.14/GT	★★★★★	●	Open		265
Audio Technica ATH-A900X LTD	390	09.14/ST	★★★★★	●	Open		340
Audio Technica ATH-ANC1	80	06.10/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed	●	100
Audio Technica ATH-CKX9iS	75	01.14/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		10
Audio Technica ATH-ES55	90	09.11/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		120
Audio Technica ATH-ES7	140	02.11/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		160
Audio Technica ATH-ES88	230	02.12/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		130
Audio Technica ATH-EW9	159	10.07/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		33
Audio Technica ATH-M50	130	02.13/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		284
Audio Technica ATH-M50x	130	12.14/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		285
Audio Technica ATH-W1000	650	09.11/ST	★★★★★	●	Closed		350
Audio Technica ATH-W1000X	650	07.10/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		350
Audio Technica ATH-WS55i	89	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		165
Beyerdynamic DTX102iE	75	08.14/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		11
Beyerdynamic DX160iE	86	11.14/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		32
Beyerdynamic Custom One Pro	170	10.13/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		290
Beyerdynamic DT880	200	06.09/GT	★★★★★	●	Open	● ●	340
Beyerdynamic DT990 Premium	290	09.14/ST	★★★★★	●	Open		290
Beyerdynamic DTX80	80	12.10/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		12
Beyerdynamic MMX 101iE	95	01.14/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed	●	11
Beyerdynamic T1	880	11.10/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		350
Beyerdynamic T50P	230	02.12/ST	★★★★★	●	Closed		174
Beyerdynamic T51i	245	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		174
Beyerdynamic T51P	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		174
Beyerdynamic T70	456	11.11/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		330
Blackbox M10	90	12.10/FT	★★★★★	●	Open	●	180
Blackbox M10-RB	99	04.12/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed	●	180
Blackbox i10	80	12.10/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed	●	25
Bose AE2w	200	02.14/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed	●	150
Bose MIE2i	120	09.11/ST	★★★★★	●	Closed		19
Bose QuietComfort 15	280	04.12/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed	●	227
Bose QuietComfort 25	270	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed	●	198
B&W P3	170	08.12/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		130
B&W P5	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		195
B&W P7	330	09.14/ST	★★★★★	●	Closed		290
Denon AH-D600	200	11.13/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		365
Etymotic Research HF2	180	08.09/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		26
Etymotic Research HF3	134	09.11/ST	★★★★★	●	Closed		11
Focal Spirit Classic	250	09.14/ST	★★★★★	●	Closed		310
Focal Spirit One	200	04.12/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed		225
Focal Spirit One S	225	12.14/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed		180

"AKG's K550s are particularly adept at teasing out the fine details at the back or at the edge of the soundstage, and give a vivid, high-resolution insight into a mix"

February 2012

HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	In-ear On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling Wireless	Weight (g)
£70 and above							
German Maestro GMP 8.35 D	150	10.12/ST	★★★★★		● Closed		220
Goldring NS-1000	100	03.10/GT	★★★★★		● Closed	●	183
Grado GR10	399	09.11/ST	★★★★★		● Closed		9
Grado GR8	300	04.10/GT	★★★★★		● Open		9
Grado GS1000i	1000	10.09/GT	★★★★★		● Open		312
Grado PS1000	1700	09.11/ST	★★★★★		● Open		500
Grado SR125e	150	12.14/GT	★★★★★		● Open		363
Grado SR325e	300	09.14/ST	★★★★★		● Open		330
Grado SR325is	300	09.11/ST	★★★★★		● Open		330
Grado SR60i	80	02.10/GT	★★★★★		● Closed		125
Grado SR80i	100	04.14/GT	★★★★★		● Open		200
Grado iGi	90	01.12/GT	★★★★★		● Closed		12
Harman/Kardon CL	170	09.12/FT	★★★★★		● Closed		195
Jamo IN40i	90	09.11/ST	★★★★★		● Closed		11
Jamo wEAR IN20m	70	06.11/FT	★★★★★		● Closed		13
KEF M200	150	10.13/FT	★★★★★		● Closed		12
KEF M500	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★		● Closed		208
Klipsch Image One	140	05.11/GT	★★★★★		● Closed		138
Klipsch Image X7i	170	04.13/GT	★★★★★		● Closed		16
Klipsch Image X10i	219	09.11/ST	★★★★★		● Closed		320
Klipsch Mode M40	290	02.13/FT	★★★★★		● Closed	●	356
Klipsch S4i	90	12.09/GT	★★★★★		● Closed		12
Klipsch X11i	200	11.14/GT	★★★★★		● Closed		10
Logitech UE 9000	300	03.13/GT	★★★★★		Closed	● ●	378
Lindy Premium Headphones	75	09.11/ST	★★★★★		● Closed		225
Martin Logan Mikros 70	150	04.13/GT	★★★★★		● Closed		13
Monster Beats by Dre iBeats	80	03.11/GT	★★★★★		● Closed		n/a
Monster Beats Pro by Dre	350	09.11/ST	★★★★★		● Closed		299
NAD Viso HP50	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★		● Open		453
NAD Viso HP20	130	11.14/GT	★★★★★		● Closed		n/a
Nocs NS400 Titanium	80	01.12/GT	★★★★★		● Closed		12
Onkyo ES-HF300	180	10.13/GT	★★★★★		● Closed		240
Oppo PM-1	1100	07.14/FT	★★★★★		● Open		395
Panasonic RP-HC101	82	04.12/GT	★★★★★		● Closed	●	79
Parrot Zik	300	07.13/FT	★★★★★		● Closed	● ●	352
Phonak Audeo PFE 022	80	03.11/GT	★★★★★		● Closed	●	14
Phiaton MS300	150	02.12/ST	★★★★★		● Closed		140
Philips Fidelio L1	230	05.12/FT	★★★★★		● Closed		272
Philips Fidelio M1	125	10.13/GT	★★★★★		● Closed		166
Philips Fidelio M1MKII	180	12.14/FT	★★★★★		● Closed		166
Philips Fidelio M1BT	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★		● Closed	●	500
Philips Fidelio M2BT	250	11.14/FT	★★★★★		● Closed	●	190
Philips Fidelio S1	70	01.14/GT	★★★★★		● Closed		14
Philips Fidelio X1	200	04.14/GT	★★★★★		● Open		430
PSB M4U1	219	11.13/GT	★★★★★		● Closed		340
PSB M4U2	300	10.12/ST	★★★★★		● Closed	●	362
Sennheiser CX880i	90	01.12/GT	★★★★★		● Closed		11
Sennheiser HD 380 Pro	110	02.10/GT	★★★★★		● Closed		220
Sennheiser HD25-1 II Adidas	190	09.11/ST	★★★★★		● Closed		140
Sennheiser HD 558	130	04.14/GT	★★★★★		● Open		260
Sennheiser HD 598	190	02.12/ST	★★★★★		● Open		270
Sennheiser IE 8i	260	03.11/GT	★★★★★		● Closed		18
Sennheiser IE 80	270	02.11/FT	★★★★★		● Closed		5
Sennheiser IE 800	600	09.13/FT	★★★★★		● Closed		8
Sennheiser MM 400-X	150	10.12/ST	★★★★★		● Closed	●	105
Sennheiser MM 70s	70	01.14/GT	★★★★★		● Closed		13
Sennheiser Momentum	260	11.13/GT	★★★★★		● Closed		190
Sennheiser Momentum On-ears	170	10.13/GT	★★★★★		● Closed		160
Sennheiser PXC 310 BT	190	09.11/ST	★★★★★		● Closed	● ●	105
Sennheiser PXC 310	200	02.11/GT	★★★★★		● Closed	●	115

HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		In-ear On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling Wireless	Weight (g)
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 Momentum On-ears	170	10.13/GT	★★★★★	A comfortable pair of cans, just lacking a little presence in the mid-range	●	Closed		160
Sennheiser Urbanite	150	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Stylish but not quite as expressive when it comes to sound	●	Open		260
Sennheiser X 320	70	10.12/ST	★★★★★	The best Xbox gaming headphones we've heard so far	●	Closed		280
Shure SE215	100	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Affordably opulent buds	●	Closed		30
Shure SE310	120	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Detail and clarity is first class	●	Closed		7
Shure SE425	200	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £150-£300, Awards 2014	●	Closed		32
Shure SE535	450	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Still good but no longer the best	●	Closed		272
Shure SE846	950	06.14/FT	★★★★★	The most capable in-ears we've heard	●	Closed		36
Shure 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-Z1000P5	385	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Impressive sounding cans - with good flexibility	●	Closed		270
Sony XBA-2iP	130	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £120-£200, Awards 2012	●	Closed		6
Sony XBA-3iP	225	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £200+, Awards 2012	●	Closed		7
Sony XBA-4iP	275	10.12/ST	★★★★★	The best Sony headphones we've heard in years	●	Closed		8
SoundMagic HP100	150	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Sparkling detail, spacious character	●	Closed		228
TDK ST700	150	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Tonally balanced and solidly musical	●	Closed		205
thinksound ts02+mic	90	02.13/FT	★★★★★	Eco-friendly buds provide a clear sound and a clearer conscience	●	Closed		10
Ultrasonne HFI-580	125	11.10/GT	★★★★★	Not class-leading, but still worthy of consideration	●	Closed		285
Ultrasonne 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

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Stereo systems

This category includes a wide range of products including all-in-one packages where the speakers are part of the system, through to micro systems where the electronics are housed separately from the speakers. A streaming option is available on many newer systems.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	CD	Streaming	Internet Radio	DAB	FM	Analogue inputs	Digital inputs	Headphone out
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	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Pioneer X-SMC5-K	300	02.12/FT	★★★★★	An excellent jack of all trades	●	●			●	●	●
Yamaha MCR-232	300	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Harsh treble docks it a star but it's an impressively compact micro system	●		●	●	●	●	●
Yamaha MCR-555	380	10.11/GT	★★★★★	Vastly improved over the original	●		●	●	●	●	●
£500 and above											
Aura Note Premier	1500	05.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine sounding all in one system	●	●			●	●	●
Cabasse Stream3	850	07.13/FT	★★★★★	Hardware is great but the app needs developing	●	●	●		●	●	●
Cambridge Audio Minx Xi	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					●		
Lyngdorf Digital 2.2 System	12350	05.10/FT	★★★★★	Not without its flaws, but a system worth a look	●	●			●	●	●
Linn Majik DSM	2965	02.13/FT	★★★★★	A thoughtfully designed system and a pleasure to use	●	●	●		●	●	●
Marantz M-CR610	435	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £400-£800, Awards 2013	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Naim Uniti	2670	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best Network Music Player £1500+, Awards 2010	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Naim UnitiQute	1600	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Systems, Awards 2010	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Pioneer P1DAB	550	07.13/FT	★★★★★	Great sound for a sensible price	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Ruark Audio R4i	599	07.11/FT	★★★★★	Best all-in-one music system, Awards 2012	●	●	●	●		●	●
Sony CMT-G2BNiP	500	04.12/FT	★★★★★	A solid performer in every respect	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
TEAC CR-H700DAB	550	10.11/GT	★★★★★	Great - but not a total all-rounder	●	●	●	●	●	●	●



Surround systems

This category includes a wide variety of systems. Most include a disc drive and now tend to feature video and music streaming capabilities. The speakers supplied tend to either be small satellite designs, or towers that usually provide greater scale and sonic authority.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Blu-ray	3D Blu-ray	DVD	Streaming	Optical in	HDMI in	Channels
Up to £500										
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

One-box speaker systems that include amplification, and are a great alternative to a full-on home cinema package if you don't have much space. Few soundbars include a Blu-ray player as standard.

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

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Discr. Smart	Ext. subwoofer	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	RCA in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £2000											
Bowers & Wilkins Panorama 2	1650	09.13/GT	★★★★★	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	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbase up to £300, Awards 2014				0	1	0	12x53x33
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	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	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
Focal Dimension	890	10.14/FT	★★★★★	A bold move that pays off handsomely. Spectacular				1	1	0	12x116x12
Harman/Kardon SB30	800	07.12/FT	★★★★★	A good alternative to a full-on home cinema system	●		0	1	1	●	10x116x8
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
Maxell MXSP-SB3000	220	02.14/ST	★★★★★	An enjoyable performer with some impressive features				3	1	1	8x94x39
Monitor Audio ASB-2	800	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbar £800+, Awards 2013	●		3	1	1	●	101x119x17
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	15x105x8
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	11x141x100
Samsung HW-H550	310	12.14/ST	★★★★★	A soundbar that combines decent design with good performance	●		1	1	0		6x94x6
Sandström S42SWLH13	150	03.14/ST	★★★★★	A great-looking soundbar with plenty of connections	●		2	1	0		11x90x5
Sonos Playbar	600	05.13/FT	★★★★★	An impressive soundbar that produces fantastic surround sound	●		0	1	0		9x90x14
Sony HT-XT1	300	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Packs a punch but rivals are more insightful				3	1	0	7x72x31
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 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	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbar £600+, Awards 2014		●	1	2	1	●	7x94x14

"If you're looking for a simple device that will massively improve the sound from your TV and give you immediate access to more music than you could ever possibly hope to listen to, only the Sonos Playbar will do"

May 2013



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	Coaxial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/kHz)	Video
Up to £3000														
Lacie Lacinema Classic HD	190	04.10/GT	★★★★★	As good as Apple TV, this needs to be auditioned	1TB	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	24/92	●
Microsoft Xbox 360 (250GB)	200	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Now an appealing media hub as well	250GB	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	16/48	●
Netgear EVA9000	190	04.10/GT	★★★★★	Needs better sound and Apple TV-like usability	500GB	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	24/92	●
Olive 4HD	2150	02.10/FT	★★★★★	This is 21st-century hi-fi at its best	2TB	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	24/192	●
Olive O3HD	900	12.10/FT	★★★★★	A great music server that's nearly excellent	500GB	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	24/192	●
Raumfeld 3Raumfeld	1680	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	A fabulous product to make Sonos sweat	160GB	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	24/96	●



Media streamers

These access the music or video files you have stored on your network. Check for file compatibility and decent control apps that improve usability.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	HDMI out	Optical out	Coaxial out	HDMI in	Optical in	Coaxial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/kHz)	Video
Up to £500													
Apple TV	100	06.12/GT	★★★★★	A limited but likeable streamer from Apple	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
Asus O!Play HD2	110	01.11/FT	★★★★★	A flexible streamer improved by a hard disk	1	1	1	0	0	0	3	20/48	●
Bluesound Node	400	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer up to £600, Awards 2014	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	24/192	●
Now TV	10	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Oodles of free and premium content makes this a great upgrade for a 'dumb' TV	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
Pure Jongo T2	130	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Cheaper than Sonos but comes with a few niggles	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
QED uPlay Stream	150	03.14/FT	★★★★★	A handy device that boasts decent sound and good features	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24/196	●
Roku 2XS	100	06.12/GT	★★★★★	A family friendly streamer	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	16/48	●
Roku Streaming Stick	50	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Performs a very specific task and does it brilliantly	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	●
Sony NSZ-GS7	180	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Good first Google TV device but needs more apps	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	24/48	●
£500-£1000													
Bluesound Powermode	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	●
Camb. Audio Stream Magic 6	700	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £600-£1000, Awards 2013	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	24/96	●
Camb. Audio Stream Magic 6V2	700	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £600-£1000, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	24/96	●
Pioneer N-50	400	05.12/ST	★★★★★	Best streamer up to £600, Awards 2013	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	24/192	●
Rotel RT-09	650	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Does a lot but not all of it to the standard we'd like	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	24/192	●

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STREAMERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		HDMI out	Optical out	Coaxial out	HDMI in	Optical in	Coaxial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/kHz)	Video
£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	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	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	
NaimUniti	2670	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best streaming system £2000+, Awards 2011	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	●	24/192	
NaimUniti 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	
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	

Soundbars v Soundbases

As TVs have become slimmer, their sound has become thinner. It's adequate, but if you want more detail, authority, scale and dynamics, then your telly won't cut it

A 5.1 surround system would do the job but they take up space, are not great for small rooms and even for large living spaces a surround system could add to the clutter.

That's where soundbars and soundbases come in. Soundbars have been a massively popular choice for beefing up that weak TV sound. That's now being challenged by the soundbase and while it performs the same function, they have attributes that make them a viable alternative.

Positioning/placement

Soundbases offer a big, solid foundation, a 'base' if you will, that's wide enough to plonk your TV on and save space (nevertheless, thin soundbars are available). They can be a neater solution, combating the soundbar's sometimes-awkward shape.

The 'bases' we've tested state they can support a TV up to 40kg, but we've not found weight to be an issue with modern TVs being relatively light. It's the size of the stand that matters so make sure the soundbase can ably support it.

And don't expect all soundbases to be similar in size. Canton's DM 75 and Sony's HT-XT1 were made for larger TVs, putting them within touching distance of a soundbar. You'll need a sizeable equipment rack to sit a soundbase on, especially when you take into account the depth of a soundbase is much more than that of a soundbar.

Soundbars offer a different proposition. Most are sleek, some are bulky (notably Focal's Dimension bar) and tend to be a metre long,

and in most cases you'll need a rack that's wide enough to support it. If not, then there's the option of wall-mounting it.

A soundbar that's too tall may block the IR blaster on your TV. One that's too small and we wouldn't be surprised if it sounded a little on the reedy side. Philips's Award-winning HTL5140 has speakers you can detach if space is a problem.

Some soundbars have a built in bass unit (making for a chunkier unit), while others have the option of an external woofer that's either wired or wireless. Where the subwoofer will go is dependent on space, but we'd place it as close as possible to the bar for the best integration.

Inputs and outputs

Many of the soundbars and soundbases we've tested haven't been stacked with inputs or outputs. Around the budget and mid-range area, you can find a soundbar with at least one HDMI input and digital coaxial or optical audio connection.

Streaming of the Bluetooth variety (or any wireless connectivity) shouldn't be taken for granted, but these options have been creeping in to a number of lower-priced efforts (along with NFC pairing).

Expect the same options from a soundbase, with HDMI inputs at a premium, as they are with soundbars. Considering a HDMI port offers the best sound from high-res Blu-rays, the lack of one may be a sticking point.



The HTL5140 is a rare soundbar, it comes with two detachable metal-mesh ends

The Canton DM 75 is twenty cms wider than the DM 50, so you're gonna need a bigger rack

Sound

Both options offer excellent sound.

A soundbase may be more attractive, as its size and shape can hold bigger drive units, and from some of the higher-rated 'bases' we've tested, performance is spacious and punchy.

Soundbases can incorporate mid-range speakers and woofers to improve the tonal range and provide that 'oomph' for low frequencies and a soundbase with side speakers could, in theory, generate a wide soundfield but that's not always the case.

Would that make them a better option than a soundbar? Not necessarily as a soundbar has its virtues, too. Yamaha's YSP-1400 can create a soundfield that's very close to aping a 5.1 surround set-up, placing sound effects around the room, while a dedicated woofer unit has a heft to it that an integrated one may not possess.

In reality there's little to choose between the two. They're different approaches to achieving the same goal. It'll be down to what's more convenient for your home set-up. We'd expect a £200 soundbase to have a similar level of performance to a £200 soundbar. Which one is better? Whichever fulfils your needs the best.



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												
Equinox Tizi	150	03.11/FT	★★★★★	Wi-fi Freeview for your iPad, iPhone or iPod Touch	●				1	n/a	0	
Humax DTR-T1000	230	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Best Digital HD recorder, Awards 2012				●	2	500	1	
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 Foesat HDR	300	04.10/GT	★★★★★	If you're looking to try Freesat, this is the way we'd do it	●				2	320	1	
Humax HD-FOX2	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	
Panasonic DMR-PWT500	350	01.12/FT	★★★★★	PVR box meets Blu-ray player	●				2	320	1	●
Philips DTR-5520	150	07.10/GT	★★★★★	Fine in its own right, but there's better out there	●				2	n/a	1	
Philips HDT8520	270	09.10/GT	★★★★★	Excellent Freeview HD+ box	●				2	500	1	
Sagem DTR94250S	250	04.10/GT	★★★★★	A capable if unspectacular buy		●			2	250	1	●
Samsung BD-D8500	450	05.11/FT	★★★★★	Freeview meets Blu-ray in this handily sized box	●				2	500	1	●
Samsung STB-E7500	270	09.12/FT	★★★★★	One of the best, most flexible, Freeview HD TV recorders	●				2	500	1	●
Sky+ HD 1TB	249	Aw.12/GT	★★★★★	Set-top boxes, Awards 2012			●		2	1TB	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	
TechniSat HDFS	180	04.10/FT	★★★★★	A superb solution for its price		●			1	n/a	1	
TVonics DTR-HD500	280	12.10/FT	★★★★★	A clever and well-presented PVR	●				2	500	1	
Virgin Media Samsung V+	99	07.09/FT	★★★★★	An alternative to Sky HD, but still less high-def content				●	3	320	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								
Astell & Kern AK100 MkII	700	04.14/GT	★★★★★	A few design issues mar a very talented performer	2.5	320x240	32	79x59x15
Apple iPod Nano 16GB (2012)	130	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A simple, attractive, music-playing wonder	2.5	240x240	16	77x40x5
Apple iPod Shuffle 2GB	40	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Simple and brilliantly effective	n/a	n/a	2	30x30x10
Apple iPod Touch 64GB (2012)	330	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Best iPod Touch so far, but it's fast becoming niche	4	1136x640	64	123x59x6
Cowon X7	200	02.11/FT	★★★★★	A genuine rival to the monopoly of Apple	4.3	480x272	120	127x79x15
Cowon Z2	200	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	A great music player with good sound and flexible storage	3.7	800x480	16	116x63x12
FiiO X5	290	08.14/GT	★★★★★	A bulky design gives way to a strong, if not outstanding music player	2.4	400x360	n/a	114x68x16
iBasso DX50	200	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Enjoyable and affordable. However it's not the last word in sound quality	1	96x96	8	60x40x20
SanDisk Sansa Clip+ 8GB	40	12.11/GT	★★★★★	A worthy Apple alternative	2.4	320x240	8	106x41x7
Sony NWZ-A15	170	12.14/FT	★★★★★	A good place to start if you're looking to get into hi-res	2.2	320x240	16	109x44x9
Sony NWZ-F805 16GB	200	01.13/FT	★★★★★	This multimedia Walkman is a fine choice	3.5	800x400	16	115x57x9
Sony NWZ-F886	200	08.14/GT	★★★★★	An intuitive interface, good sound and battery make for a well-realised music player	4	854x480	32	116x59x8
Sony NWZ-ZX1	550	04.14/GT	★★★★★	A seriously impressive first attempt at a premium high-res audio player	4	854x480	128	123x61x16

"Treat iBasso's DX50 to the sort of full-fat file sizes it deserves and it's an engagingly perky player"

August 2014

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Price £6.00 per metre

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
March 2014



Van Den Hul The Clearwater
Price £9.00 per metre

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
March 2014



Wireworld Luna 7
Price £6.50 per metre

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
April 2007



Chord Reference Signature
Price £200.00 per metre

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2012
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
CABLES & ACCESSORIES
AUDIOQUEST FLX-SLiP 1414



AudioQuest FLX-SLiP Cable
Price £5.80 per metre

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
July 2008



Atlas Hyper 2.0
Price £20.00 per metre

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
Jan 2008



Ecosse MS2.4
Price £58.50 per metre

TOP SELLING SPEAKER CABLES

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
July 2008



QED Silver Anniversary XT
Price £6.95 per metre



Tellurium Q Black
Price £49.99 per metre



Van Den Hul CS-122
Price £19.99 per metre



QED Genesis Silver Spiral
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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

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	★★★★★	Android	●	7	1280x800	16/32	193x137x10	
Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 7	200	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	7	1920x1200	16/32/64	186x128x9	
Asus VivoTab ME400	400	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Windows 8	●	10.1	1366x768	32/64	263x171x10	
Apple iPad Mini 64GB Wi-Fi	430	04.13/GT	★★★★★	iOS	●	7.9	1024x768	16/32/64	200x135x7	
Apple iPad Mini/Retina display	320	01.14/ST	★★★★★	iOS	●	7.9	2048x1536	16/32/64	200x135x7	
Apple iPad 4 16GB Wi-Fi	400	04.13/GT	★★★★★	iOS	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x190x9	
Apple iPad Air	400	01.14/FT	★★★★★	iOS	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x170x8	
Apple iPad Air 2	400	12.14/FT	★★★★★	iOS	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/64/128	240x170x6	
Asus Eee Pad Transformer	380	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	10.1	1280x800	16/32	271x177x13	
Asus Eee Pad Transformer Prime	500	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	10.1	1280x800	16/32	181x263x8	
Asus Transformer Pad Infinity	600	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	10.1	1900x1200	32/64	263x181x9	
BlackBerry PlayBook 16GB	400	09.11/GT	★★★★★	QNX	●	7	1024x600	16/32/64	130x194x10	
Dell XPS 10 32GB	340	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Windows RT	●	10.1	1366x768	32/64	270x180x10	
Google Nexus 7	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	7	1280x800	16/32	199x120x11	
Google Nexus 7 (2013)	200	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	7	1920x1200	16/32	200x114x9	
Google Nexus 10	319	01.13/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	10	2560x1060	16/32	264x178x9	
LG G Pad	260	01.14/ST	★★★★★	Android	●	8.3	1920x1200	16	216x127x8	
Kobo Arc 16GB	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	7	1280x800	16/32	190x120x10	
Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1	450	02.14/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	10.1	2500x1600	16/32/64	171x243x8	
Samsung Galaxy Tab 2 7.0	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	7	1024x600	8/16	190x120x10	
Samsung Galaxy Tab S	320	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	8.4	2560x1600	16/32	213x126x7	
Sony Xperia Tablet S	330	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	9.4	1280x800	16/32	240x170x10	
Sony Xperia Tablet Z	399	06.13/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	10.1	1920x1200	16/32	172x266x69	
Sony Xperia Tablet Z2	400	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	10.1	1920x1200	16/32	172x266x64	
Tesco Hudl	120	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	7	1440x900	16	192x129x10	

"Tesco has been very clever [with the Hudl]... producing a tablet that's thoroughly enjoyable to use, at an accessible price"

January 2014

How to get the best from music via your laptop



Using a laptop as a source

USB DACs with headphone outputs are becoming increasingly popular, and are the simplest way to boost the sound quality of your digital tunes. We love the HRT microStreamer and Audioquest Dragonfly v1.2 for their portable design and convenience. Simply plug them into your laptop's USB port, add headphones, and enjoy the results.

Analogue connection

You can also take an analogue connection from a laptop's headphone port to a stereo amplifier. You'll need an analogue interconnect with 3.5mm headphone jack on one end (a good one, mind, such as Chord's Crimson Plus), and a pair of RCA phono connectors at the other to connect to the amplifier's analogue inputs.

Wireless connection

Most laptops now have built-in wi-fi and Bluetooth connectivity making them one of the most flexible sources to stream music to any wireless speaker. Wireless might not be as stable as a wired connection, but it's improving all the time, and Apple MacBooks have the added connectivity of AirPlay streaming.



Smartphones

Android	Offers great flexibility and innovation
Apple iOS	Fantastic ease of use; massive choice of quality apps
Windows	New kid on the block. Watch this space

The shortlist



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Apple iPhone 6

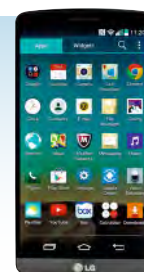
"It's fair to say we're quite taken with the iPhone 6. While it might not break any new ground when it comes to specification, its performance is one that's hard to fault."



AWARD WINNER

Sony Xperia Z3

"Sony's expertise when it comes to camera, screen, gaming and audio technology shines through to make the Xperia Z3 a true multimedia powerhouse."



LG G3

"There's no denying its high-res capabilities, mixed in with a stunning video performance, great design and superb user experience make the LG G3 a very tempting choice."

Also consider

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
HTC One	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Sets the bar high for smartphones in 2013	Android	●	4.7	1080x1920	32	137x68x9
HTC One (M8)	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Improves considerably on its predecessor. Does very little wrong	Android	●	5	1920x1080	32	146x71x9
HTC One Max	05.14/ST	★★★★★	A fine performer but could make better use of its bigger screen	Android	●	5.9	1920x1080	16/32	165x82x10
HTC One X+	01.13/ST	★★★★★	Well worth considering: good for music and a joy to use	Android	●	4.7	1280x720	32/64	134x70x9
HTC One XL	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Great for mobile media fans but its poor battery life just takes the edge off it	Android	●	4.7	1280x720	32	135x70x9
HTC 8S	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Capable and fun, if feature-light	Windows	●	4.7	800x480	4	121x63x10
LG Optimus 4X HD	01.13/ST	★★★★★	Not outstanding, but a worthy alternative to the best	Android	●	4.7	1280x720	16	132x68x9
LG Optimus L5 II	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Not a thrilling phone but the user experience is good	Android	●	4.0	800x433	4	118x62x9
LG G2	07.14/GT	★★★★★	A little outdated but still a worthy contender	Android	●	5.2	1920x1080	16/32	139x71x9
LG G3	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
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 Nexus	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Great in many ways but pipped by rivals for audio	Android	●	4.65	1280x720	16/32	136x68x9
Samsung Galaxy Note	07.12/ST	★★★★★	A hybrid between a smart phone and a tablet	Android	●	5.29	1280x800	16/32	147x83x10
Samsung Galaxy Note II	01.13/ST	★★★★★	Massive screen, massive battery, very tempting	Android	●	5.55	1280x720	16/32/64	151x81x9
Samsung Galaxy Note III	05.14/ST	★★★★★	The original phablet, updated and still the best	Android	●	5.7	1920x1080	32	151x80x8
Samsung Galaxy 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 II	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Still great but upped by the new kids on the block	Android	●	4.3	800x480	16/32/64	125x66x8
Samsung Galaxy S III	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Best smartphone, Awards 2012	Android	●	4.8	1280x720	16/32	137x71x9
Samsung Galaxy S4	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Better than its predecessor but not as good as its rivals	Android	●	5.0	1920x1080	16/32/64	137x70x8
Samsung Galaxy S5	07.14/GT	★★★★★	An improvement on the S4, but not radical enough	Android	●	5.1	1920x1080	16/32	142x73x8
Sony Ericsson Xperia Arc S	01.12/GT	★★★★★	An excellent addition to the market	Android	●	4.2	854x480	1	125x63x9
Sony Xperia S	07.12/ST	★★★★★	A real rival to the iPhone	Android	●	4.3	1280x720	32	128x64x11
Sony Xperia T	01.13/ST	★★★★★	A strong all-rounder for music and movie lovers	Android	●	4.55	1280x720	16	129x67x9
Sony Xperia Z	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A triumph for Sony – one capable of taking the fight to Google	Android	●	5	1920x1080	16	139x71x8
Sony Xperia Z1	03.14/FT	★★★★★	Sony fans will love it, a speedy, sleek and impressive smartphone	Android	●	5	1920x1080	16	144x74x9
Sony Xperia Z2	07.14/GT	★★★★★	The phone to beat in 2014. Outstanding	Android	●	5.2	1920x1080	16	147x73x8
Sony Xperia Z3	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Best phone 5in+, Awards 2014	Android	●	5.2	1920x1080	16	146x72x7



HDMI cables

Digital cables that carry both picture and sound. These carry control signals as well, so they can integrate the operation of components in your system.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Length as tested (m)	HDMI type
Up to £80					
Audioquest Pearl	23	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Best HDMI cable, Awards 2012	1 1.4
Cambridge Audio 500 (5m)	69	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A perfectly acceptable cable for the money	5 1.3a
Chord Company Supershield	50	10.10/GT	★★★★★	Still a class-leading cable, but now it's 1.4 too	1 1.3
Clearer Aud C-line HDMI (2m)	60	08.07/FT	★★★★★	Will improve even 1080p pictures, helping stability. Well worth the money	1 2
Kimber Kable HD-09	73	03.09/GT	★★★★★	Picture quality is up with the best and it creates a wide sound field	2 1.3
Philex Thor Flat HDMI	40	10.09/GT	★★★★★	Agutsy, well built HDMI cable.	1 1.3
Philex Thor HDMI/DVI kit	60	09.06/FT	★★★★★	A very decent cable for not much cash - you can't really go wrong	5 1.3
QED HDMI-P	50	11.08/FT	★★★★★	This award winning cable just got better	1 1.3
QED Performance HDMI	70	03.09/GT	★★★★★	Capable performer - finely balanced sound and a wonderfully rendered picture	3 1.3
QED Performance HDMI-e	35	03.11/FT	★★★★★	Perfectly good cable that just falls down in its pricing	1 1.4
QED Perf. HDMI-e S/speed	60	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Communicates a superb and natural colour balance and virtually noise-free images	2 1.4
QED Profile HDMI	25	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Now with 1.4 status, this is still a worthy cable	1 1.4
QED Qunex HDMI-P (5M)	75	09.08/GT	★★★★★	Fantastic picture quality mated with a dynamic and powerful sound	5 1.3
ThatCable HDMI	5	10.09/FT	★★★★★	Brilliant way to spend a fiver - will give rivals up to £20 something to think about	1.5 1.3
ThatCable HDMI (5m)	10	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A no-brainer for those on a tight budget	5 1.3a
Vivanco Prowire	45	10.10/GT	★★★★★	A fine cable that's worth seeking out	1.5 1.3
Vivanco Sound and Image	30	11.09/GT	★★★★★	A respectable upgrade, it provides greater fidelity in sound and vision over budget cables	2 1.3
Wireworld Chroma (Miami)	60	10.09/GT	★★★★★	Highly competent, although lacking in low-frequency heft	1 1.3
Wireworld Chroma 6	60	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Best HDMI cable £50+, Awards 2010. Great upgrade cable for higher-end systems	1 1.4
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-1	180	09.08/GT	★★★★★	This stylish cable offers a solid, cohesive image with good sound	3 1.3
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
Black Rhodium Coral HDMI	100	10.06/FT	★★★★★	Worthy of serious consideration - pictures are highly detailed, colours convincing	4 1.3
Chord Company Active	115	10.09/GT	★★★★★	Muscular-sounding and excellent in every regard	1.5 1.3
Chord Co. Active Silver + HDMI	95	01.11/FT	★★★★★	An impressive successor to the old Active cable	1 1.4
Chord Co. Supershield (5m)	90	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A punchy award winner that defies its low price tag	5 1.3a
Ecosse Picture Perfect Ultra	110	09.08/GT	★★★★★	This Ecosse gives a punchy, powerful performance with great detail levels	5 1.3
Ecosse Picture Perfect Ultra +	169	09.08/GT	★★★★★	With its punchy, powerful and composed production, this cable oozes dynamics	5 1.3
QED Qunex HDMI-P (7m)	85	07.07/GT	★★★★★	Stunning value, offering a cracking picture, and great for budget set ups	7 1.0
QED Reference	125	06.10/GT	★★★★★	An assured, but expensive, performer	5 1.3a
QED Signature HDMI	150	10.09/GT	★★★★★	It's competent and classy, and looks good too	1 1.3
Supra HF100 HDMI (8m)	112	08.06/GT	★★★★★	Not just pretty but it delivers impressive performance over eight metres	8 1.0
van den Hul Flat 180	90	10.09/GT	★★★★★	Typical van den Hul quality from a hinged cable that doesn't fall out of its socket	2 1.3b
van den Hul Flat HDMI (3m)	105	03.09/GT	★★★★★	One of the best HDMI cables we've ever heard	3 1.3
van den Hul Ultimate	300	10.08/FT	★★★★★	It's pricey, but has good performance	1 1.3
Vivanco SHQ Ultra	80	06.10/FT	★★★★★	It's an enjoyable watch, although there's some reservation	1.2 1.4
Wireworld Chroma 5 HDMI (7m)	109	07.07/GT	★★★★★	Flexible cable that delivers pictures as good as any HDMI cable at this price	7 1.0

Jargon Buster



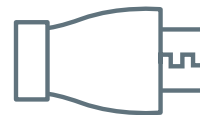
Coaxial

One of two types of digital audio connector. Offers slightly better performance than optical.



Component

Superior to scart, S-video or composite, carries video from a source to a display on three leads.



HDMI

A high-quality digital connection that carries images from DVD/Blu-ray players to displays.



AWARD WINNING Hi-Fi CABLES

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2012

CABLES & ACCESSORIES
BEST HDMI CABLE
AUDIOQUEST PEARL



3D
READY

Audioquest Pearl HDMI Cable
Prices From £22.50

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2014

Accessories
Best analogue interconnect
Atlas Element Integra



Atlas Element Audio Cable
Prices From £37.00

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2012

CABLES & ACCESSORIES
BEST OPTICAL DIGITAL CABLE
QED PERFORMANCE GRAPHITE



QED Performance Optical
Prices From £39.95

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2014

DACs
Best DAC up to £300
AudioQuest Dragonfly v1.2



AudioQuest Dragonfly V1.2
Price £129.00

WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014

Accessories
Best speaker cable
QED XT40



NEW

QED XT40
Price £10.00 per metre

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2012

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
CABLES & ACCESSORIES
AUDIOQUEST FLX-SLIP 14/4



AudioQuest FLX-SLIP Cable
Price £5.80 per metre

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2012

CABLES & ACCESSORIES
BEST USB CABLE
SUPRA USB 2.0



Supra USB 2.0 Cable
Prices From £27.00

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2010

CABLES
BEST POWER CABLE
MERLIN TARANTULA MK6



Merlin Tarantula MK6 Cable
Prices From £50.00



QED Reference Audio Cable
Prices From £41.99



QED Reference Evolution
Prices From £57.99



Atlas Mavros Optical Cable
Prices From £115.00



Wireworld Luna 7 Audio Cable
Price £34.15

Expert Advice
Phone | Email | Store

Same Day & Next Day
Delivery Available

60 Day Money
Back Guarantee

Custom-Length
Cables Available

Hi-Fi Cable & Home Cinema Cable Specialists
Bring your hi-fi to life with our high performance award winning cables
www.futureshop.co.uk - call 0208 905 1555



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
QED Performance Coaxial	30	10.08/GT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
QED Performance Graphite	40	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Optical	1
Supra USB 2.0	29	11.12/GT	★★★★★	USB	1
True Colours Industries Coral	35	06.09/GT	★★★★★	Optical	1
Wireworld Nova 6	40	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Optical	1
£50 and above					
Audioquest Cinnamon	60	11.12/FT	★★★★★	USB	1.5
Atlas Equator Optical	50	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Optical	1
Chord Company Optichord	51	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Optical	1
Chord Co. Prodac Pro Digital	70	05.11/FT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
Clearer Audio Copper-line 75	97	Aw.08/FT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
Clearer Aud. Silverline Optimus	185	09.09/GT	★★★★★	Co-axial	0.5
Ecosse The Director SE	89	09.09/GT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
Furutech Formula 2	55	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	USB	1.2
Kimber USB	52	11.12/GT	★★★★★	USB	1
QED Qunex 75 Signature	80	09.09/FT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
QED U Play (Bluetooth)	65	05.10/FT	★★★★★	Bluetooth	10
Vertere Pulse D-Fi	70	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	USB	1
Wireworld Ultraviolet 5 USB	50	08.09/FT	★★★★★	USB	2



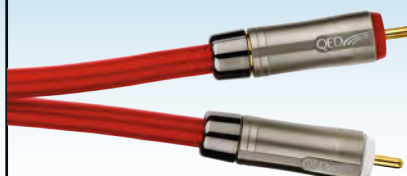
Analogue interconnects

These carry audio signal from source to amplifier, or between pre-amplifier and power amplifier. Some use a shielding construction to reduce external electrical interference.

The shortlist



Wireworld Luna 7
06.14 Group Test ★★★★★



QED Reference Audio 40
06.14 Group Test ★★★★★



AWARD WINNER
Atlas Element Integra
Awards 2014: Best Analogue Interconnect

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	RCAsphono 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

ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		RCA phono 3.5mm-to-RCA XLR (balanced) Length tested (m)
QED Performance Audio 2	40	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Agile, fun and nuanced: would do well in pretty much any system	● 1
QED Profile	18	06.11/GT	★★★★★	At the top of the first upgrade tree	● ● 1
Wireworld Luna	37	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Excellent with subtlety and dynamics: should be on any interconnect shortlist	● 1
Wireworld Luna 6	36	12.09/GT	★★★★★	Looks strange, but delivers a great refined sound	● 1
Wireworld Luna 7	40	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Delivers a confident and likable sound. A great option at this price	● 1
£50 and above					
Atlas Equator Integra	75	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A recommended second-upgrade cable	● ● 1
AudioQuest Red River	85	06.14/GT	★★★★★	What it lacks in smoothness and subtlety, it makes up for in scale and dynamics	● 1
Chord Co. Chameleon Plus	125	11.11/FT	★★★★★	New plugs make these even more essential	● 1
Chord Company Cobra VEE 3	95	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Clear and detailed, this cable brings a very driven and focused feel to music	● 1
Chord Company Indigo Plus	995	05.09/FT	★★★★★	It's genius in an interconnect - but you need the right system	● 1
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
QED Signature Audio S	190	09.09/FT	★★★★★	QED's new flagship interconnect offers great dynamics and punch	● 1
van den Hul The Bay C5	85	06.14/GT	★★★★★	For bright-sounding systems The Bay could be the antidote	● 1
van den Hul The Name	60	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Energy and fun trump ultimate precision	● 0.8
van den Hul The Wave	100	01.09/FT	★★★★★	The Wave has a formidable array of talents and is one of the best cables at this kind of money	● 1
van den Hul The Well	100	06.11/GT	★★★★★	An ideal booster for thin sounding kit	● ● 1
Wireworld Oasis 6	130	06.11/GT	★★★★★	A truly splendid cable for kit worth £800-£1000	● ● 1



Mains products

IEC _____ Usually a three-pin connector used in most hi-fi (and kettles)
 Figure of 8 _____ Small, two-pin connector. Tends to be used on lower-priced products
 Blocks and conditioners _____ Multi-plug units, some of which attempt to filter noise out of the mains

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Cable Block Conditioner Figure of 8 (2-pin) IEC (3-pin) Number of sockets
Up to £100					
Clear.Aud. C-Line Alpha One	25	11.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine first stage mains cable upgrade	● ● n/a
Clear.Aud.C-L Alpha P/HUB	90	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Makes a noticeable difference, but not the last word in cohesion	● ● ● 6
Ecosse Big Orange MK2+	60	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Provides worthwhile gains in performance – and plenty of them	● ● n/a
Lindy 6-way	40	12.08/FT	★★★★★	For just £40, this conditioner is a bona fide system booster	● ● ● 6
Merlin Tarantula Figure '8'	40	01.11/GT	★★★★★	Incredible bang for your buck from Merlin	● ● n/a
Merlin Tarantula MK6	40	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Best mains cable, Awards 2010. A good tweak for a hi-fi or AV system	● ● n/a
Russ Andrews Powerkord-8	75	01.11/GT	★★★★★	An ideal choice for a simple upgrade	● ● n/a
Tacima CS929	40	08.06/FT	★★★★★	Explicitly illustrates the gains a modest outlay can achieve	● ● ● 6
£100 and above					
Audioquest NRG 1.5	100	01.11/GT	★★★★★	A lively and precise cable that does much right	● ● n/a
Atlas Eos	147	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Well-balanced, delivering impressive depth and scale	● n/a
Clearer Audio Silver-line	150	07.06/FT	★★★★★	Capable of truly astonishing improvements	● n/a
Furutech G-320AG	165	02.11/GT	★★★★★	A 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
Wireworld Stratus 52	100	08.10/FT	★★★★★	One of the best mains cables for this money	● ● n/a

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Speaker cables

These carry the audio signal from your amplifier to your speakers. Bi-wiring uses two runs of cables per speaker and can lead to improvements in the speakers' performance.

Our recommendations

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
QED Ruby Anniversary Evolution	6	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Rich, detailed, energetic and clean. A great cable
QED Silver Anniversary XT	5	07.08/GT	★★★★★	Our budget cable Best Buy for three years on the trot
QED X-TC	4	09.10/FT	★★★★★	A great budget cable that's able to hold its own
QED XT Evolution	6	10.09/FT	★★★★★	QED is now a twin threat in the sub-£10/m speaker cable market
Talk Electronics Talk 3	4	07.11/GT	★★★★★	An essential first cable upgrade
Wireworld Luna 7	6.50	03.14/GT	★★★★★	The all-round ability of this cable means it should sit well with a wide range of systems
Wireworld The Stream 16/2	5	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Still a cracking cable, but losing out to better competition
Wireworld Stream 7	6	11.13/GT	★★★★★	If you're a fan of detail then you should definitely consider the Stream 7

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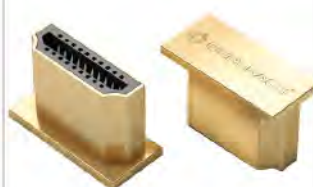
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SPEAKER CABLES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Biwire
£10/m and above				
Atlas Hyper 2.0	15	07.08/GT	★★★★★	If your system warrants this kind of cable, you won't be disappointed
Atlas Mavros (5m)	2290	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Pair with an extravagant system and get excellent performance
Chord Company Signature	125	01.07/GT	★★★★★	One of the most effective upgrades you will ever hear if you own expensive kit
Ecosse MS2.4	50	01.08/FT	★★★★★	A massively detailed cable that reveals subtleties with refinement
Kimber 4VS	12	04.10/GT	★★★★★	An accomplished performer with an expressive sound
QED XT40	10	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best speaker cable, Awards 2014, Product of the Year
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



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.

Our recommendations

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	★★★★★	Best speaker stands, Awards 2014	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 T5 IV	150	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Ideal for those with forward sounding speakers	50x24x30	2
Hi Fi Racks Podium Slimline	120	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A comfortable listening experience that's marred by some less than appealing fuzziness	60x15x21	5
Mission Stance	100	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Will do a fine job with £200-£400 speakers	58x21x28	● 3
Partington ANSA 60	150	09.11/GT	★★★★★	They remain fine stands - but no longer outstanding value	60x23x28	● 1
Part. D'nought Broadside	300	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Deliver wide ranging improvements to sound	60x23x28	1
Partington Heavi	399	03.07/FT	★★★★★	If you demand the best, buy these	60x30x21	1
Part. Super Dreadnought	180	03.07/GT	★★★★★	Best £100+ speaker stands in Awards 2007	60x16x17	● 1
Q Acoustics 20 speaker stands	200	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Clever construction and great performance makes these stands ideal support for all types of speakers	66.5x39x24	2
Soundstyle Z2	70	11.08/FT	★★★★★	Best sub-£100 speaker stand in Awards 2007	57x17x23	● 2



AV & hi-fi racks

Many racks are built to be expanded. Several manufacturers offer you a number of shelving options for ready-made products, but what if you want to get more kit in a few years? We like having the option to build upwards at a later date.

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
Alphason ST560/3	260	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A well isolated modular design that does much right	● 4 65x56x59	2
Atacama Equinox AVI	380	05.07/FT	★★★★★	Neat solution to mount a TV above AV electronics	2 110x106x60	3
Atacama Equinox	339	11.09/GT	★★★★★	Still a good rack, but newer rivals offer more	● 2-5 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 Icon Sig.	330	10.06/FT	★★★★★	A great rack for an upgrade to tame unruly systems	4 42x75x66	11
Custom Design Milan 4	470	11.09/GT	★★★★★	Small and well made, but lacks subtlety	● 4 59x57x40	5

RACKS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Modular Shelves	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Finishes
Up to £500						
Custom Design Milan LCD3	350	09.08/FT	★★★★★	● 3	42x77x40	4
Custom Design Tokyo Hi-Fi 4	430	08.11/GT	★★★★★	● 4	64x58x40	3
Hi Fi Racks Podium	460	08.11/GT	★★★★★	● 3	62x60x40	1
HiFi Racks Podium SL Ak. XL	260	09.14/GT	★★★★★	● 3	Variablex79.5x40	5
Hi Fi Racks Podium Slimline	350	03.13/FT	★★★★★	4	Variablex55x40	1
Quadraspire Q4evo	380	11.09/GT	★★★★★	4	Variablex59x39.5	8
Sonorous PL2200	280	09.08/FT	★★★★★	2	82x95x44	6
Target CL470	299	06.10/GT	★★★★★	4	82x50x55	2
Techlink Ovid	200	04.07/GT	★★★★★	3	32x95x40	4
£500-£1000						
Atacama Elite Eco 12.0	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	● 5	Variablex115x32	1
BDI Valera 9724	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	3	54x112x52	3
Hi Fi Racks Akorner XL	930	09.12/FT	★★★★★	● 3	45x110x40	6
Optimum Avion 8925	999	06.10/GT	★★★★★	3	57x127x56	3
Quadraspire Q4 Bamboo	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	● 4	Variablex59x40	1
Quadraspire QAVM (Oak)	540	04.07/GT	★★★★★	● 3	50x109x50	8
Quadraspire QAVX	560	12.07/FT	★★★★★	● 2	Variablex163x52	8
Quadraspire Sunoko Vent T	800	11.09/GT	★★★★★	● 4	Variablex59x47	6
£1000 and more						
Audiophile Base StarBase	1180	12.06/GT	★★★★★	● 3	65x59x52	3
Hi Fi Racks Podium XL	1050	06.10/GT	★★★★★	● 3	53x140x40	1
Spectral Closed CL1050	1100	07.07/FT	★★★★★	2	31x101x53	17
Spectral Closed CL1552	1800	07.07/GT	★★★★★	6	VariablexVariablex53	16

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Here's a handsome, high-quality, modular equipment rack that offers superb isolation from vibration and sonic resonance for your electronics. It's made from steel and bamboo, which simultaneously maximises its chances of doing the job properly while keeping ecological considerations to the fore.

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The key is resonance and vibration control, of course, and put simply the Atacama Eris Eco 5.0 performs better than anything else we've come across this year. Whatever the characteristics of your electronics – detail, dynamism, bass definition, whatever – it's given greater expression via the Eris Eco 5.0 than on any alternative. And the flexibility of the modular design means it can grow with your system.

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What the team say

"A good kit-rack is a must-have – and not only does the Atacama perform brilliantly, it's modular and it looks good too"



Headphone amps

The headphone outputs on most products are usually afterthoughts and have had little care taken in trying to make them sound good. A dedicated headphone amp is a must if you want the best headphone sound.

Our recommendations

Our recommendations					Line level in Outputs
Product	£	Tested	Verdict		
Up to £1500					
Beyerdynamic A1	975	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Best headphone amplifier £500+, Awards 2010. A formidable combo when partnered with T1 headphones	2 1
Chord Electronics Toucan	800	10.10/FT	★★★★★	A headphone amp with built in DAC that's worth a punt	2 2
Creek OBH-21SE	280	04.09/GT	★★★★★	Perfectly pleasant but it could do with more bite	2 2
Edwards Audio HA1	280	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Packs a punch but not that refined	2 1
FIIO E7	65	03.11/FT	★★★★★	One of the most cost-effective ways to improve headphone sound from a computer	1 2
Lehmann Black Cube Linear	750	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Deeply impressive device given the right system	1 1
Lehmann Rhineland	400	04.09/GT	★★★★★	Best headphone amplifier £300-£500, Awards 2010. Its user-friendly sound makes this a very wise buy	2 2
Meridian Prime	1200	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A top-class headphone amp and a talented preamp to boot	2 4
Musical Fidelity V-CAN II	120	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Does enough right to be worth serious consideration	1 3
Pathos Aurium	850	08.13/FT	★★★★★	This amplifier is a top class choice	4 2



Phono amps

Dedicated units tend to sound better than the circuits integrated into amplifiers. Higher priced options usually allow for electrical optimisation for your cartridge, thus producing better results.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	MM MC	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500						
Cambridge Audio 651P	120	06.13/GT	★★★★★	● ●	1	2.5x8x11
Creek Audio OBH-15	240	02.09/GT	★★★★★	● ●	1	6x10x15
Graham Slee Gr- Amp 2 Comm.	160	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●	1	7x10x25
Leema Elements	495	03.10/FT	★★★★★	● ●	2	5x11x10
Lehmann Black Cube	325	02.09/GT	★★★★★	● ●	1	5x11x11
Pro-Ject Phono Box S	120	06.13/GT	★★★★★	● ●	2	7x10x14
Musical Fidelity V-LPS II	160	06.13/GT	★★★★★	● ●	1	5x11x11
Rega Fono Mini A2D	85	03.12/FT	★★★★★	●	1	6x18x25
Rega Fono MM MK2	200	06.13/GT	★★★★★	● ●	2	7x43x33



Cartridges

Moving magnet (MM) These produce a higher output, giving your phono stage an easier time
Moving coil (MC) Can produce more detail, but is more demanding of your phono stage

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	MM/MC	Tracking weight (g)
Up to £500					
Goldring 2100	92	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.7
Goldring 2500	224	03.09/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.7
Grado Prestige Silver	115	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.5
Nagaoka MP110	89	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.8
Ortofon 2M Black	460	04.11/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.5
Ortofon 2M Bronze	275	03.09/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.5
Ortofon 2M Red	80	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.8
Rega Exact	195	03.09/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.75
Roksan Corus Silver	400	01.11/FT	★★★★★	MM	1.9



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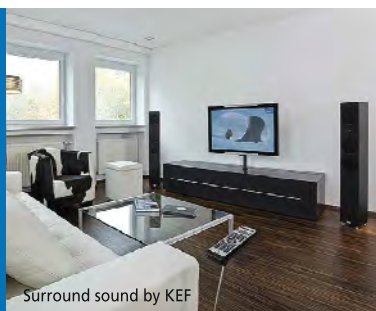
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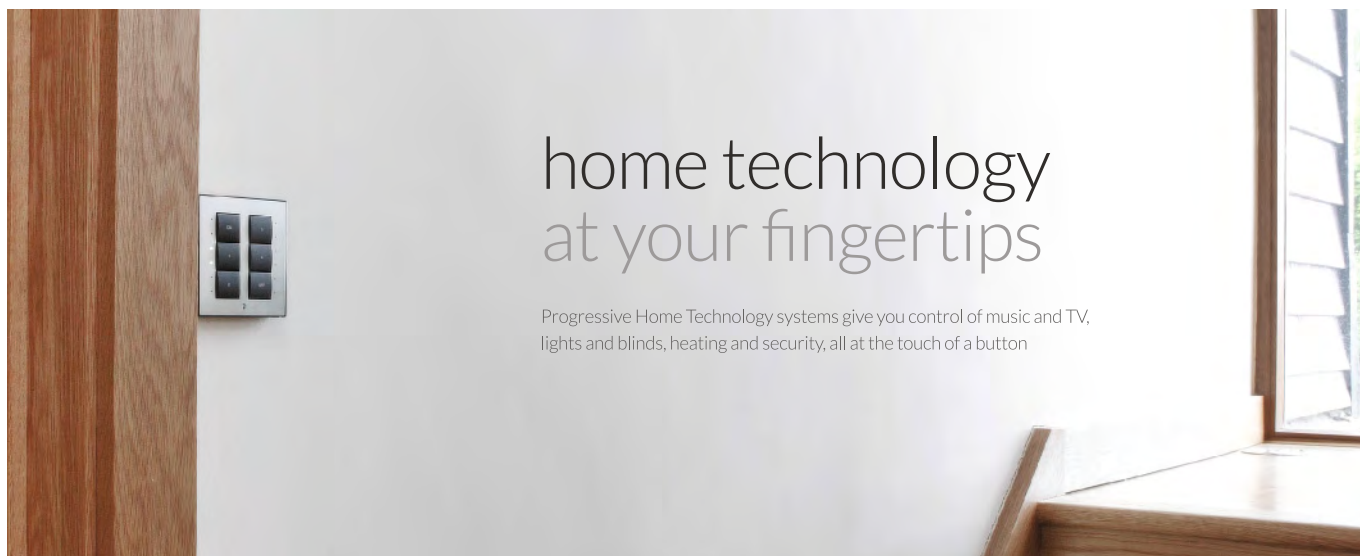
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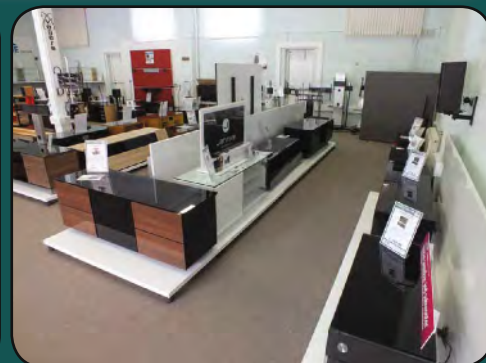
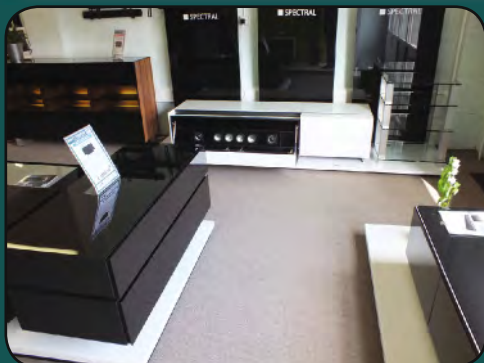
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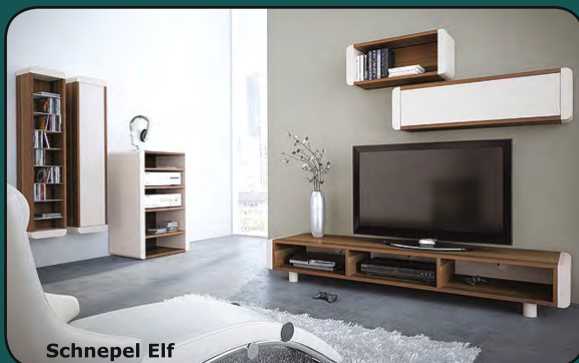
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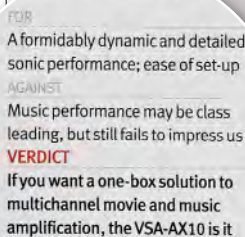


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Pioneer VSA-AX10 £2700 ★★★★★

VERDICT
If you want a one-box solution to multichannel movie and music amplification, the VSA-AX10 is it.

IT MAKES GREAT promotional copy: Pioneer works with AIR studios to create a reference-quality AV integrated amplifier. Stories such as this are usually creative marketing spin based on the thinnest thread of truth. Thankfully, not in this case, and the result is a fabulous product.

Proper set-up is vital to get the full performance out of any of these amps, so Pioneer decided to attack the problem head-on. Rather than relying on the user to go through the myriad of settings to gain optimum sound, it's come up with an automatic set-up system that takes measurements at the listening position, and makes all the adjustments. It goes far beyond just level-matching the speakers—read the panel below for more details.

In action, the AXiO is astonishing. We've never heard an integrated amp that blends dynamics, power and finesse to such dramatic effect.

Thirteen Ghosts features a twisted atmospheric soundtrack that veers from dramatic high-pitched crescendos to stunning silence in an instant. The Pioneer flows from one to the other with breathtaking agility, and rock-solid punch. There's absolutely no hint of aggression, or the subtle hardening up of sound that some amps suffer from. Also, the surround effect is mesmerising as ghost noises and other sounds pan seamlessly around the room.

the same trick in this specifically the Pioneer moves ahead when it comes to outright detail resolution, the discrimination of dynamics, particularly the low-level variety to communicate the emotion in music or the timbre of an instrument.

Turn to *The Accused* of the quiet dialogue-based scenes of Wilton and the VSA-AXto shows its subtle side. There's real finesse on offer here and surprisingly nuanced soundscapes.

Yamaha

FOR

Plenty of power

AGAINST

VERDICT
Yamaha's latest amp so nearly p
back by a lack of

THE DSP-AZ amp here by a long way. It's playing in the same league as two rivals, and the AV integrate without a big price hike. The comp

Sound quality was everything we know and love about Pioneer's

Of course, the newer amp adds modern features such as 4k compatibility and Dolby Atmos - such things didn't exist back in the older one's day - but the VSA-AX10's sonic DNA remains pretty much undiluted. The SC-LX88 is as informative and exciting as we could hope for and, like its ancestor did, sets the standards at its price.



**Like its predecessor,
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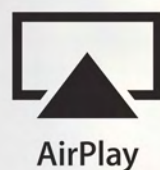


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