

WHAT HI FI?

SOUND AND VISION

JANUARY 2016 ₹100

INDIA'S No.1 HOME ENTERTAINMENT MAGAZINE

RETURN OF THE LEGEND

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803 D3 reviewed

EXCLUSIVE



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Samsung and Sony go head-to-head
with their affordable televisions



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This magazine contains 116 pages including both covers.

haymarket

Hello/01/16



We break through to the other side with a legend and that's not a bad way to start a new year is it? Bowers

& Wilkins has had a long relationship with magazine covers due to its industry-disrupting designs and the latest generation of the mighty Nautilus series isn't any different. We audition one of the first pairs to make its way to the country and come away expectedly impressed. Read all about our mesmerizing experience (p80) and start saving. Even if you don't like how it sounds, which in itself is pretty close to impossible, its timeless design and the way it pushes the boundaries of man-making-machine is bound to leave you short on words.

We haven't forgotten the everyday classics either. **Stereo amps** (p68) have been a staple and continue to be the stepping stone for every new audiophile and veterans alike. We test out three popular Brits to give you a verdict on which ones worth your rupee. Want something even smaller and simpler? Wireless speakers are rapidly coming of age and our **Group Test** (p44) reveals some new surprises that can come in handy when you're away from your floorstanders and power amps. What Hi-Fi? is on the upswing and you will see more of us in 2016, with more events, more content and even on newer platforms. Watch this space!

Nishant Padhiar, Editor



Why we're No.1!

Experience and heritage

In the AV universe our deep rooted heritage and experience helps us share a wealth of information, helping you make a sound decision

Dedicated test facilities

Our bleeding edge test facilities are stocked with the top of the line reference systems to put incoming products through their paces

We spot big trends first

Don't blame us for breaking the best stories, it is a habit that ensures you get to learn about tomorrow, today

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First test p13

"This is one way to enjoy the benefits of top-end tech without paying top-end cash"



Audio Pro Addon T3
Test p46

"The feel is more complex and natural than you may have imagined possible, and that texture remains unconfused. It is bigger and subtler than anything we've heard in this test"



HiFi Man HE400S
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"There's sense of scale, however, and a wide soundstage adds to the drama of it all."



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"These soundbars are trying to bring the cinema into your living room"



First tests
"The ND5 XS has a decent spread of analogue and digital connections too"

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Subscribe and get the latest news and the hottest reviews from the world's best home entertainment magazine

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Audeze EL-8 Titanium

The world's first headphone to support Apple's Lightning cable is here



Test Televisions

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68 Stereo amplifiers Like a plush-looking rug, a stereo amp ties a hi-fi system together - so making the right decision is essential. If you're after the best at around ₹1,50,000, this is a good place to start.

79 Off the shelf Get up close and personal with the new iPad Pro, buy a new home for the B&W 803 D3, sink into the couch with the Hi-FiMan HE400S and give the OnePlus Icons and the Soundmagic E80 a good listen.



Group test Stereo amplifiers

"It delivers a fast, agile sound that is as rhythmically surefooted as we've heard at this level"

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

The most trusted hi-fi guide!
1500 products rated p91

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



Our ratings explained

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One of the best
A serious contender
Worth a look
Disappointing
Awful



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TEST WINNER

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

Exclusive reviews of the latest kit

FIRST TESTS

**MORE
FIRST TESTS**



Chord Mojo

₹45,000 **Page 13**

Get to enjoy high-end tech without having to pay top-end cash



Naim ND5 XS

₹3,45,000 **Page 15**

A capable streamer, no matter what type of music you throw at it



Samsung

Galaxy S6 Edge+

₹53,900 **Page 16**

Samsung boosts the Edge experience with a gorgeous smartphone

EXCLUSIVE

Make way for the next Generation...

Bluesound Generation 2 | Multi-room system | ₹50,000+

When a new company bursts into a competitive marketplace and immediately produces impressive results, we have to believe those in charge when they still say "we can do better". And that's exactly what high-res multi-room brand Bluesound has done, after a hugely successful first year in which it picked up our Product of the Year Award for 2014.

Over the past year, the company listened to feedback and has decided to redesign the

changes to them. The new look for the Node 2, Powernode 2 and Vault 2 is a welcome one. While last year's look was striking, the shiny plastic finish did feel a little on the cheap side - not to mention that it was a nightmare for using with a traditional rack.

This design feels much more grown up, better thought out and, thankfully, less of a haven for fingerprints too. The rest of the changes cover functionality and usability.

Finally, there is a more powerful ARM 9 processor in all the new additions to the range, which makes the user interface even quicker and smoother to use than before. Bluesound quotes a 20 per cent rise in speed (and a 50 per cent reduction in power consumption), which you'll see through the likes of shorter indexing and load times.

Listening to feedback, Bluesound has decided to redesign the range from the ground up, offering a more streamlined look with new features and a few new additions to the range. This design feels much more grown up

range from the ground up, offering a more streamlined look with new features and a few new additions to the range to boot.

Many changes

This means Bluesound's offering now comprises the Node 2 streamer (₹50,000), the Powernode 2 streamer/amplifier (₹75,000), the Vault 2 music server and CD ripper (₹1,05,000), and the Pulse Mini (₹55,000), Pulse Flex and the original Pulse wireless speakers.

The Pulse joins the 2.1 Duo speaker package from last year as the only products to make a return this year without any

For example, there are now both optical and analogue inputs across the range for connecting digital and legacy sources for multi-room playback, a subwoofer out for adding more bass and a built-in headphone amp for private listening.

Go with the glow

Bluetooth aptX is now built in as standard (previously you had to use a dongle), the USB input is higher powered for driving any hard drive you've got, and a new wi-fi chipset ensures a faster, more stable connection to the devices you choose not to hardwire.

Set-up remains the same as last year - a web-based operation that could be a touch simpler if only it was integrated into the free iOS/Android app. Each speaker has to be set up individually on to your network rather than any instant Sonos-like pairing, but at least it's something you have to do only once.

When everything is online, the play/mute button, which sits in the middle of the top-mounted touch controls, will glow blue to show you're ready to go.

A perfect little ripper...

The Vault 2 can rip and store your CD collection without needing a computer



The Vault 2 is Bluesound's new all-in-one music streamer and CD ripper, offering a 2TB hard drive for ripping and storing your CD collection in bit-perfect lossless FLAC - no computer required.

It will combine this with any other music on your network for seamless streaming of your library via the Bluesound app, or you can hook it up to an existing system via its stereo outs. You can even download new high-res music from the HighResAudio online store direct on to the Vault's hard drive.

No flicking between screens

Each speaker on the network will show up automatically within the app, with easily labelled options for grouping them together and so on.

It will also help you to pull in music from NAS drives on the same network, and is capable of playing back files up to 24-bit/192kHz, as well as accessing some of the most popular streaming services.

FLAC files on our MusicM8 NAS are indexed quickly and accurately, and show up with associated artwork under the local sources section of the app, with streaming services showing up just underneath.

Spotify works via Spotify Connect, but

It's pricey, but if you're looking for a multi-room system that's flexible, will support a high-resolution library and sounds excellent, it's a consideration worth making

Pulse ₹65,000

Ready to go? When everything is up and running, the play button on the touch controls will glow blue

Pulse Mini ₹55,000

Power Node 2 ₹75,000

Connecting the parts is straightforward, but would be a touch simpler with an app

Node 2 ₹50,000

the rest of the apps we test show up within Bluesound's app itself, so there's no flicking backwards and forwards between screens.

The majority of the work behind Bluesound's second generation has been spent on improving things that needed it, and its sound quality certainly wasn't an area that needed addressing.

Thankfully that means it's largely been left well alone, which is no bad thing - we loved the sound of the original Bluesound and that sentiment remains with the new generation.

We set up a system comprising a Node 2, Powernode 2, Pulse and Pulse Mini and find the individual components work seamlessly together - even over an entirely wireless network. Playback is snappy and lag free, with grouped speakers playing simultaneously without any delay.

We've already given the

Node 2 a five-star review, and revisiting it for the full system review reminds us just why. It's as expressive as it is subtle, able to pick out fine detail and give real depth and insight to instruments and vocals alike.

Rough and ready

That's not to say it's a soft touch - turn up the tempo and the Node 2 is able to jump straight in with energy and enthusiasm, offering a punchy but refined performance across the board.

Ideally, we would take a touch more attack when tracks really get rough and ready, but with the level of musicality and insight on offer, it's a compromise we're willing to take.

On top of the improvements Bluesound has introduced across the range, the Powernode 2 has also seen a slight

change to its specifications, in that it now has a bigger amplifier and a larger power supply than before. This means it can now deliver 60W per channel into 8 Ohms - up a full 10W on last year's model.

It picks up where the Node 2 left off, showing a similar level of subtlety and agility, but with some added bite, which we find just slightly lacking from the streamer.

It's a balanced presentation and the clarity is second to none. Whether we're listening to Beethoven or Beyonce, the



The new 800 Series Diamond
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868 changes to be precise.

Bowers & Wilkins




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In detail...

**1**
Sub out

If you want more from the low end, both the Powernode 2 and Node 2 models offer the option of adding a subwoofer

2
USB input

You can connect a hard drive full of music to any one of your Bluesound components and access it on every Bluesound device around the home

3
Speaker terminals

The Powernode 2 is an amp and streamer in one, so you need only to hook it up to a pair of speakers and you're ready to go

4
Touch controls

This year's Bluesound features touch-sensitive controls for the first time. We find them responsive enough to replace physical controls

Powernode 2 can cater its character to suit.

What's really nice here though, is how the Powernode 2 handles dynamics. It is capable of conveying real differences between the softer and more powerful sections of the music, moving between the two with a level of fluidity and confidence that makes it such an insightful listen.

For ₹75,000, it's one of our favourite parts of the system, delivering a spacious and exciting presentation that is eager to please.

Rich and full-bodied

Moving to the wireless speakers and a play through of *Seven Nation Army* by The White Stripes reveals the Pulse to be as rich and full bodied as we remember, offering up a detailed, powerful performance that delivers real weight to the punching bassline without ever becoming sluggish.

That said, if we had to choose between the two, we might just prefer its little brother. The new Pulse Mini might not be as capable of the same level of room-filling sound but there's a touch more refinement there, with a tonal balance that's a little more neutral.

The midrange is clear and articulate, with a treble that sings, even at volume, and though its low end is no match for the powerful Pulse, it's far from lacking, with agility and punch in spades.

Though we didn't get to test it here due to its slightly later release date, we feel it's worth mentioning the Pulse Flex - the range's smallest speaker - and its optional rechargeable battery.

Worth considering

This battery brings a real flexibility to your multi-room setup possibilities, giving you the further option to take a speaker outside into the garden, for example. Sonos should take note.

We're big fans of the new Bluesound range. It sounds as good as ever, with some well-judged improvements and great new additions that make it a stronger proposition than ever.

Price will be a consideration - it's a little more costly than much of the competition - but if you're looking for a multi-room system that's flexible, will support a high-resolution library and sounds excellent, it's a consideration worth making.

TECH SPECS

Power 60W/channel (Powernode 2) 80w (Pulse) 60W (Pulse Mini) **Formats** MP3, AAC, WMA, WMA lossless, OGG, FLAC, ALAC, WAV, AIFF **Supports** Up to 24-bit/192kHz **Inputs** 1 x USB, 1 x Toslink/3.5mm (except Pulse) 1 x optical (Pulse & Node 2 only) 1 x ethernet (Node 2 only) 1 x RCA 1 x coaxial **Output** 1 x sub out (Node 2 & Powernode 2 only), 1 x 3.5mm headphone jack (except Pulse) **Bluetooth** Yes, aptX **Supported services** Spotify, Tidal, Rdio, Qobuz, Deezer, Napster, TuneIn Radio

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Improved design and build; better features; fine detail; strong product range

AGAINST App could be a touch more intuitive to keep up with the best

VERDICT The best-sounding multi-room system just got even better

REVIEWER'S NOTES... GETTING TO KNOW THE BLUESOUND GENERATION 2

1 These look different from last year's models - but we like it. The Node 2 and Powernode 2 fit on our rack much easier

2 Getting the system onto our wi-fi network is straightforward, but building the process into the app would be a nice touch

3 We're happy to see Bluetooth is built in this year, and aptX too. It gives the system greater flexibility when you need it

4 There's a headphone jack and dedicated headphone amp too, giving you the option for personal listening sessions

5 Wow! This is a great sounding system, with high-res support too. The Powernode 2 is a highlight - for ₹75,000 it's superb



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Dali Zensor 1 AX | Stereo speakers | ₹60,900

All powered up for the modern age

A decade ago, there would have been little use for the Dali Zensor 1 AX powered stereo speakers. They would have found a niche, perhaps, but it would have been tiny. Now, however, it seems the time of the powered speaker may be here. That, at least, is what the Danish speaker manufacturer is hoping. And it might just be on to something - because the Zensor 1 AX is a good plan, well executed.

Straight from the source

Now that smart devices are everywhere and vast tracts of the world's population are used to carrying their music with them wherever they go, having a simple way of playing those tracks to a decent standard and without fuss makes more and more sense.

Now, a student leaving home for the first time can pack a relatively small box, stick their smartphone in their pocket and have all they require for their musical entertainment. Someone who wants to be able to listen to a decent stereo system from the same speakers that will offer almost immeasurably better sound for their TV than the flatscreen can provide has a solution. And those people who stream one of the many streaming services or whatever to their PC can have a pair of speakers that will provide sound to do justice to the detailed pictures they get.

Features and accessories

The Zensor 1 AXs, then, are a pair of Zensor 1 speakers that will stand alone as a system, with just a source for company. Inside the left-channel speaker lies an amplifier that supplies the 2 x 50W power to run both speakers. If you want to hard-wire a source, there is a 3.5mm auxiliary input and an optical digital socket. For the streamers there is Bluetooth, including the best-option aptX codec for those sources that can take advantage of it. The speakers come with a power-cord and speaker cable to connect to the right-hand speaker. And there's a remote control to cover the major functions.

The light on the front of the left-hand speaker shows which input is being used: green for analogue, orange for digital, blue (naturally) for Bluetooth.

And that should be sufficient for most requirements - a traditional-looking pair of speakers with a modern purpose. As traditional speakers, though, they should be placed on solid stands for best results.



Though traditional in appearance, the Dalis are fully modern in their application

As the AXs are Zensor 1s with amplification added, it should come as little surprise the sound is familiar Dali. Which means what you get is a fast, tight musicality that will get your toes tapping. We listen first via the 3.5mm input, and the sound is detailed and balanced, the soundstage impressively open.

Treble and midrange are nicely articulated, with each instrument easily distinguishable, and vocals clear. Nothing stands out in the mix - just as it should be.

Bass in proportion

These are pretty diminutive boxes, so you shouldn't be expecting anything huge in the way of bass reproduction, but what you get is tight and accurate, and in keeping with the fun, sprightly nature of the sound.

Should you feel the need for more bass kick, however, there is a sub-out socket to connect to the subwoofer of your choice. Something to consider, perhaps, if you're connecting your TV to the Zensor 1 AXs and want some extra movie welly.

A switch to streaming via Bluetooth brings a noticeable reduction in sound quality, with music seeming thinner. That, though, is a shortcoming in the streaming technology, not anything to do with the Dalis. We are caught out for a while when trying to change Bluetooth source, as we can't connect the new smartphone, but the manual soon puts us straight. After that, connection is as simple as it had been first time out.

Connectivity is good, and includes the aptX Bluetooth codec for streaming purposes



These speakers are quite happy being placed close to a rear wall - indeed, the bass can benefit from such positioning if you're careful. That also means that the Zensor 1 AXs can serve very well as PC speakers - although they are fairly substantial for such a purpose. They may be small hi-fi speakers but hi-fi speakers they certainly are, so make sure you've got the desk space to accommodate them.

Do the AXs give a better sound than the basic Zensor 1s connected to a standalone amplifier? No - a Marantz PM6005 for ₹44,900 will undoubtedly do a better job than the amplification housed in the AXs. But this little pair of powered speakers is certainly more convenient, and the sound they provide is more than enjoyable enough for us to recommend them without hesitation. If their convenience suits your needs, you won't go far wrong with the

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Convenience; fast, articulate, enjoyable sound; decent connectivity

AGAINST Small cabinets mean bass isn't huge

VERDICT Dali has hit on a very neat and flexible solution to what is an increasing need. It's good idea, well executed

Also consider

KEF Egg
₹39,000 ★★★★★

These fun-looking desktops sound beautifully balanced - enough to win an Award



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Chord Mojo | DAC | ₹45,000

Minor Chord creates harmony

Does anyone need a DAC with an upper sampling-rate limit of 768kHz? We seriously doubt it. But get past that headline-grabbing spec and it's obvious that the Mojo could be the perfect solution for those who crave Chord's ₹1.60 lac Hugo but have stuttered at the hefty price. The name is short for 'Mobile Joy'. Quite.

Shape-shifter

We're not so positive when we first take it out of the box. It feels oddly shaped and we miss Chord's traditional extravagant detailing. Such things have been discarded to meet the entry-level (by the company's usual standards) price point.

It takes us a while to get used to the minimal control layout. Three ball-like buttons take care of power and volume. There's no display as such, but the power button lights up in different colours depending on the sampling rate of the input signal (red for 44.1kHz, green for 96kHz, pink for DSD). Similarly, the volume buttons change colour according to gain level.

Small, but well connected

The Mojo is a small unit, with a footprint barely larger than a credit card, yet Chord has found space for a good range of connections. There's (micro) USB, optical and coax, though the latter takes the form of a 3.5mm jack rather than the usual RCA or BNC, and a second USB connection for charging only. The inputs are auto-sensing, with USB taking priority followed by coax. Outputs are limited to a pair of 3.5mm jacks.

Build quality is terrific. Despite the minimal detailing, the Mojo feels like a solid chunk of metal. Its aircraft-grade aluminium casing is beautifully machined and finished to an extremely high standard.

At the moment only black is available, but we wouldn't be surprised if a silver option appeared at some point.

Fresh out of the box, the Mojo needs a minimum of 10 hours of charging, and gets hot doing so. Once fully charged it should run for around eight hours, depending on the headphones and volume levels used.

And this a fabulous performer. We listen to Stevie Wonder's *Innervisions* on DSD and are gripped from the unmistakable opening bars of *Too High* right through to the end of the album. There's plenty of detail here, and the kind of insight into the recording that nothing we've heard beneath the Hugo can better.



USE IT WITH

Grado 325e

Like the Chord, these agile, musical on-ears take their music seriously - seriously enough to be Award winners

This is one way to enjoy the benefits of top-end tech without paying top-end cash



But it's not the excellent resolution that impresses us most. It's the Mojo's ability to organise all that information into a cohesive and musical whole that makes it stand out from the competition. It delivers the hard-charging rhythm of *Higher Ground* brilliantly, communicating the song's unstoppable momentum with warmth, solidity and real enthusiasm.

Power and subtlety

Mozart's *Piano Concerto No.12* (24-bit/192kHz) confirms the Mojo's convincing tonal balance and reveals a surefooted handling of dynamics. It can convey power and scale but has the finesse to honour the subtler passages too. Poor recordings (and sources) will be easy to spot, but this DAC won't go out of its way to be nasty.

We think Chord has produced yet another winner here. The Mojo offers a large slice of the Hugo's performance for a fraction of the cost. Even at ₹45k, we have to conclude that it's a bargain.

In detail



The connections on the side include two micro-USB ports - one for playback (on the left), the other purely for charging



The volume controls change colour depending on the volume level, as does the power button to indicate the input signal's sampling rate

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Informative, subtle and dynamic sound; rhythmic drive; good build and finish; portable

AGAINST Runs warm and gets hot when charging the battery

VERDICT The Mojo delivers much of the sound of the ₹1.60 lac Hugo at a fraction of the price

Needs to beat

Audiolab M-DAC
₹69,000 ★★★★★

The M-DAC is a larger desktop alternative with a great display. It can't match the Mojo for sound quality though





Introducing The Absolute Authority :
Jeff Rowland Model 925 Mono Power Amplifier



The Naim's minimalist design and crystal clear display give it a premium quality feel



Naim ND5 XS | Streamer | ₹3,45,000

A brilliant streamer by any other Naim

Streamers may be the new kit in town, but Naim has an advantage after getting into the game early. If you want true high-fidelity music from a multi-talented streamer, it remains one of the best in the business, as the ND5 XS proves.

Startling precision

With native Tidal support now added to its long list of features, the ND5 XS is a capable streamer no matter what kind of music you throw at it. Feed it well-recorded, high-resolution files, however, and it shines.

Kate Bush's *50 Words For Snow* (in 24-bit/96kHz) bursts through with confidence and authority like no other. Each lilt and inflection of her vocals is enunciated with startling precision. It's a stunningly balanced and dynamic presentation, with seemingly no limit to the highs and lows it can reach.

The treble is rounded off a little at the very top to combat any undue brightness. However, it's not at the cost of any excitement or detail; Nina Simone is still able to belt her vocals out and Tom Waits' rasp is intact. The bass performance is taut and textured – satisfyingly deep, while retaining an energetic and nimble character.

While the Naim is revealing enough to show up a poor-quality recording, its smooth touch will soften the blow.

Carefully-controlled soundstage

The ND5 XS delivers delicacy and muscle when needed. Timing is precise, with every instrument working cohesively in a carefully-controlled soundstage. The Naim takes Radiohead's challenging arrangement of *15 Step* in its stride. Snappy and tightly



woven, it's a toe-tapping performance. The ND5 XS has an effortless quality to it and, given the appropriate partnering equipment, it flourishes.

Naim's sturdy black chassis, minimalist design and crystal clear display have an elegant, premium-quality feel to them. The supplied remote control looks smart and feels natural to use, with buttons laid out logically and the menu responding instantly. Track information is sharp and easy to read on the Naim's punchy display.

But for the complete experience, we'd recommend Naim's slick iOS/Android app. It's perfect for scrolling through vast libraries of music stored across multiple sources. Switching between sources, queueing playlists and choosing radio stations becomes utterly intuitive when using a tablet's large and speedy interface.

Decent spread of connections

As for specification, this Naim is kitted out with just about every streaming feature worth having. The Tidal update joins Spotify Connect and vTuner internet radio, opening up a world of music and radio stations for your enjoyment.

The ND5 XS is a fully UPnP player, meaning it will play just about anything. Simply connect the ND5 XS to your home network (it's stable across wi-fi and wired),

and you'll be able to stream all popular file formats up to 24-bit/192kHz high-res, including DSD64 tracks.

It also has aptX Bluetooth on board for streaming directly from a smartphone or tablet. You'll find a decent

spread of analogue and digital connections, too: optical and two coaxial inputs (one with BNC plug), a pair of RCA analogue outputs, DIN connector and BNC digital output on the back panel. The USB port will charge your phone and play stored songs from an Apple device or a memory stick.

The ND5 XS has a decent spread of analogue and digital connections too

Forward-thinking approach

Everything about Naim's streamer has been planned to be seamless, a forward-thinking experience. Coupled with its brilliant sonic performance, this ND5 XS is a must-have if you're after a truly high-end streamer that can do it all.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Stunningly clear and precise sound quality; sturdy build and design; excellent spec

AGAINST Power supply upgrades aren't cheap

VERDICT A fully featured, insightful and captivating streamer that does it all – one of the best high-end streamers we've ever tested

Needs to beat

Cyrus Stream XP2-Qx
₹2,69,000 ★★★★★

Old-fashioned looking and not quite as slick as the Naim, but this Award-winning Cyrus delivers an incredibly capable performance



System builder total build ₹9,83,900

Stereo amplifier

Naim Supernait 2
₹3,75,000 ★★★★★

You'll want a partnering Naim amplifier to match the streamer's tonal balance, and this powerful Supernait 2 does the job perfectly



Stereo speakers

ATC SCM19 ₹2,28,000 ★★★★★

These big ATC speakers are firm favourites in our testing rooms for their stunning transparency and insight. They will pair up beautifully with the Naim separates



Tablet

Apple iPad Air 2 ₹35,900 ★★★★★

Using the slick new Naim app is the best way to navigate around your vast music library, and it's even better on a tablet with a large and speedy interface, such as Apple's elegant Air 2



Samsung Galaxy S6 Edge+ | Smartphone | ₹53,900

Plus-sized Samsung has the Edge

It's been a good year for Samsung Mobile. After falling short of the competition a little, everything seems to have come together with the Galaxy S6. The plastic and faux leather has been replaced by metal and glass, and it is backed up by a performance that can't be argued with.

The S6 put Samsung back on the map, but its curvier sibling, the S6 Edge, has been the surprise hit of 2015. It delivers excellent performance alongside dashing good looks, and won the full five stars in the process. It showed people were prepared to pay a premium for a good-looking phone, and Samsung couldn't make them quick enough.

Samsung has delivered the Edge experience to those wanting a larger display - the result is the Galaxy S6 Edge+. Great news for big-screen fans - it is every bit as good as its smaller sibling

Samsung has decided the S6 Edge is worthy of a screen boost, delivering the Edge experience to those wanting a larger display. The result is the Galaxy S6 Edge+, and the great news for big-screen fans is it's every bit as good as its smaller sibling.

Gorgeously sharp

The screen is one of the biggest changes in the S6 Edge+, with a jump in size from 5.1in to a Galaxy Note-matching 5.7in. The bright Quad HD Super AMOLED display remains, with a screen resolution of 2560 x 1440 with 518ppi (pixels per inch). This is a slight drop from the regular Edge at 577ppi, but still higher than the iPhone 6 Plus (401ppi).

There's a small loss of subtlety in images compared with the regular Edge, but it's still a gorgeously sharp and precise picture. Colours are rich, while blacks go deeper than you'll find on the likes of the iPhone 6 Plus or even last year's Note 4.

Skin-tones look natural, textures are portrayed with depth and contrast is strong, with whites doing well to really pierce through dark scenes. They have a slight blue tinge to them off-axis, but it doesn't take away from the overall experience. Whether you're streaming video or watching downloaded movies, the picture on the S6 Edge+ certainly won't disappoint.

Two-handed approach

Elsewhere, this is just a supersized version of the Edge. Of course you're going to need slightly bigger pockets to accommodate the extra size (154 x 76 x 7mm), plus it's around 20g heavier, but Samsung has nailed the screen-to-bezel ratio so it doesn't feel big in your hand. Despite having a larger screen, it's smaller than the iPhone 6 Plus.

This size does mean some tasks are two-handed - even large hands will struggle to stretch the thumb to the very top of the screen from the bottom.

The premium glass and metal finish remains, with a choice of black or gold at launch. The glass is as much of a fingerprint magnet as it was on its smaller sibling, but we'll take that over a plastic finish any day.

The unique curved-edge design is obviously a big feature here, but this time it's a little more useful. As well as the People Edge UI, which displays favourite contacts down your 'active' edge, there is also the Apps Edge. This brings up a

selection of five customisable app shortcuts, which save time over going to the homescreen and clicking a shortcut.

It's no slouch

The handset's unibody design means there's no microSD card slot, with onboard storage options available only in 32GB. That's plenty for most, but power users will mourn the loss of the 64GB version that the original Edge offered.

The S6 Edge+ is no slouch. It keeps the same 64-bit octa-core Exynos 7420 chipset found in the S6 and S6 Edge, but RAM has been upped to 4GB from 3GB to keep things running smoothly. Swiping through menus, launching apps and playing graphic-heavy games are no problem. There's no waiting as you switch between windows, and webpages load without a stutter.

The S6 Edge+ has received a suitable battery boost to help cope with that bigger screen, boasting a 3400mAh battery compared with 3000mAh on the Edge. We get through a working day without needing to charge the phone, and expect around 10 hours with a reasonable usage.

As with the rest of the S6 family, the Edge+ benefits from Samsung's fast-charging system. We went from empty to 19 per cent in 10 minutes, and a full charge took just under the claimed 90 minutes.

You'll need bigger pockets - and bigger hands. The size of the S6 Edge+ makes some tasks a two-handed affair



USE IT WITH AKG Y50

These award-winning folding portable headphones are fantastic sounding

Wireless charging is also on board (though you'll have to buy the charger separately) and is reportedly 33 per cent faster than with the S6. A full charge will take 120 minutes, but it's still no slouch.

The Galaxy S6 Edge+ offers high-resolution music playback up to 24-bit/192kHz, and unsurprisingly, sounds very much like its smaller sibling. Play anything with a bit of get up and go, and there's plenty of punch and attack to deliver an up-front and exciting performance.

Firing shot after shot

There's no shortage of detail, with insight to subtler tracks and the dynamic knowhow to uncover the differences between the soft and loud parts of tracks, not to mention the connection between them. It's a refined sound, and tonally balanced.

A new feature in the S6 Edge+ is the UHQ Upscaler, which Samsung promises is able to upscale MP3s to the quality of high-res audio. It adds a touch more clarity, boosts volume and gives the treble slightly more bite, but at the expense of a little subtlety. It's worth playing around, but we'd leave the processing modes well alone.

The camera on the S6 Edge+ remains the same as that on the S6 and S6 Edge. It's 16MP, with optical image stabilisation on the main camera and a 5MP wide-angle lens on the front-facing one. Both lenses offer f/1.9 aperture for good low-light shots and 4K video capture returns too, at 30fps.

It's really quick to launch from a double tap on the home button (0.7 seconds, if you're interested) and that speed stays with the camera throughout.

Autofocus is snappy, as is processing, meaning you can easily fire shot after shot without delay. Results are great too - we keep it on auto mode and find it to be fine for most shots, automatically switching to HDR mode when needed and delivering good results in varying situations.

Colours are true to life and there's plenty of detail to images, even on zoomed-in shots. Bright sunlight can occasionally overexpose lighter details, but it's largely reliable. Even low-light snaps fare well, delivering clear images with minimal noise.

Those wanting more control of their snaps can opt for the Pro manual mode, for tweaking things such as ISO, white balance





Despite a slight drop in pixel density, the Edge+ retains the gorgeous picture of the S6 Edge

and shutter speed. Other options include Selective Focus for giving a DSLR-like depth of field to your shots, and a Panorama option for wide landscape images.

The S6 Edge+ also brings with it a few extra options, such as the Collage Video feature, which pieces together four six-second clips into one collage, and a Live Video streaming feature, which allows you to broadcast live to selected contacts via a YouTube link.

We find this works well, with optical image stabilisation helping keep video smooth and steady. The video link has just a slight delay and, depending on how many contacts you want to include, sending out the invitations can take a minute or so.

You can see any 'likes' you receive in real time, but unlike Twitter's Periscope app you won't see how many viewers you've got or any comments you receive until after.

Staying with video, it's only Full HD footage that benefits from optical image stabilisation - meaning 4K video goes without - while the slow-motion and fast-motion options will record only in a maximum of 720p.

Desirable looks

The overall premise of the Samsung Galaxy S6 Edge+ is simple - to bring a bigger screen to the Edge experience. It's still as desirable in both looks and performance, with a few additions that make sure the big screen offering is as good as the smaller one.

It's undeniably expensive, but if you have the budget to stretch to it or can find a decent deal on, there's no doubt that this is the big screen phone to opt for right now.

In detail



Fingerprint scanner Samsung's improved scanner is at play on the Edge+, making it quicker and easier to use than ever



Camera The 16MP snapper is a great performer and works particularly well in low light, thanks to its f/1.9 aperture



Charging The S6 Edge+ features Samsung's fast-charging system, meaning the phone goes from empty to full in 90 minutes

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Gorgeous screen; premium build; great video performance; punchy, exciting audio with high-res support; strong camera

AGAINST Expensive; no expandable storage

VERDICT A superb performer, and the big-screen phone to opt for right now

Also consider

Samsung Galaxy S6 Edge ★★★★★

If you prefer a smaller screen, the S6 Edge might be more your thing



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Audiolab 8300A | Stereo amplifier | ₹1,25,000

Bring out the old – and ring in the new

The **Audiolab brand** was established on the extraordinary success of its first product, the 8000A integrated amplifier. Back in the early 1980s, this slim unit struck just the right chord with hi-fi buyers – its combination of quality build, sensible features and highly neutral sound proved a massive success.

The DNA of that original design has been retained through the company's subsequent designs, including the 8300A on test here. However, this isn't just some mild evolution. The 8300A is a completely new design that stays true to the original's engineering principles and aesthetics, but takes in the advantages of current thinking in electronic design and technology.

The core of the 8300A's new electrical design is its 75W-per-channel dual-mono power amplifier section. It is designed to be a highly linear, low-distortion performer into a wide range of speaker loads. The numbers seem to confirm this, as output rises to a claimed 115W into 4 ohms and maximum current delivery is a notable 15A.

Characteristically solid

Build quality is as good as we've come to expect from Audiolab. The casework feels solid and is beautifully finished, in either the black of our review sample or silver. We particularly like the precise feel of the rotary controls and the remote – it's a classy system controller that feels good to use.

Around the back you'll find line-level inputs, including a balanced XLR option. There's also an adjustable moving magnet/moving coil phono stage for those who use a turntable. There are also two sets of speaker outputs to make biwiring possible.

This is the first time one of the brand's amplifiers has featured a display, which is useful for setting up the amp and making adjustments such as phono-stage gain or the length of standby mode. It's large and easy to read, even from a distance.

Preparing to do Battle

We give the Audiolab a few days of running before we start to listen seriously. When we do, we pick a piece of music with wide dynamic extremes, Hans Zimmer's *The Battle* from the *Gladiator* OST, and this amp takes it all in its stride. There's plenty of

This isn't just some mild evolution. The 8300A is a completely new design based on current thinking

punch and the kind of heft at low frequencies most rivals don't get close to. The presentation is big-boned too, with a wide stereo sound stage populated with nicely layered, crisply focused instruments.

We're also impressed by the 8300A's tonal balance. It's as even as they come, refusing to add unnatural colour or drama to the sound. We listen to smaller scale recordings, from the likes of Eric Bibb and Satie, and are impressed with the way this amp renders tonal textures. Its presentation is very clean too, as if distortion levels are way lower than the norm.

Despite all this obvious talent we're not totally bowled over with the overall performance. Compared with alternatives

from the likes of Rega and Naim, the Audiolab is a little short in its sense of rhythmic drive. The 8300A doesn't communicate the changing momentum of a piece of music as well as we'd like. That means the initial build-up of tension in The Dead Weather's *60 Feet Tall* isn't particularly obvious. Similarly, the sheer energy and drive in OutKast's *Hey Ya!* is diluted, meaning a slice of the song's sense of fun is lost.

It doesn't help that the amplifier isn't flawless when dealing with low-level dynamic shifts either. Nina Simone's vocals on the haunting *Strange Fruit* come through with less passion than we're used to.

Phono call

The story is much the same through the phono stage. It's a decent effort, with low levels of noise and a good amount of insight, but also loses out on some of the solidity and authority of the line stages.

Make no mistake, the 8300A is an amplifier that can impress easily. Build is excellent and its large-scale sound gives it an edge over many rivals. It just doesn't have enough all-round sonic talent to gain an unreserved recommendation.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Big-boned presentation; plenty of muscle; clean and crisp sound; fine build and finish; sensible range of features

AGAINST The overall sound isn't the most engaging around

VERDICT The 8300A is a hugely capable and serious product but sacrifices a little too much fun for our tastes

Also consider

Rega Elex-R
₹1,12,500 ★★★★★

Rega's Elex-R is a wonderfully musical performer that gets all the essentials right. This is our favourite amplifier at this price



USE IT WITH
Audiolab 8300CD

The obvious partner. This Audiolab CD player is hugely talented and equally well built. It has digital inputs too

Round the back, two sets of speaker outputs make it easy to biwire the speakers



The remote is classy and the main unit's fascia has a display – an Audiolab amp first

Experience geniune performance and awesome sound!

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Monitor Audio Bronze B5 AV | 5.1 surround speaker package | ₹2,42,500

Bronze sets the new standard

Hand-me-downs have rarely been so appealing. When Monitor Audio upgraded its Award-winning Bronze home speaker package, it made sense to use technology from the company's pricier ranges. The B5 AV system comprises the new Bronze Centre, two Bronze FX surround speakers and Bronze W10 subwoofer (as do all Bronze packages) and a pair of Bronze 5 floorstanding speakers for front channels.

Terrifically rhythmic

The technology upgrade centres on new C-CAM drivers (made of Ceramic-Coated Aluminium/Magnesium, a material originally developed for jet engine components). For the midrange and bass drivers, the stiffness and damping quality of that dished cone aids control and reduction in break-up. The drivers are also an inch smaller in diameter than previous models, helping reduce the speaker's overall footprint. The tweeter's C-CAM dome is gold-anodised for stiffness and also dampening, meaning the sound shouldn't harden at its highest frequencies.

We play *Taxi Driver* on Blu-ray and are immediately struck by the film's jazz accompaniment. Instruments are brilliantly organised and offered a generous amount of space in which to breathe, but most of all they are expressive and terrifically rhythmic. When Bernard Herrmann's score is realised like this, it highlights Robert de Niro's own

The Bronze B5 AV feels comfortably in control without being restrained, delivering perilous thrill and slapstick humour with consummate ease

improvisational delivery, giving purpose to the false starts and broken sentences.

The sound dates the film as much as the flared trousers, but the package doesn't hide behind that. Voices are warm and expressive, there is depth to sounds such as the fizz of Travis's Alka-Seltzer and attack to the gunshots. This is a reasonably priced speaker package, but that doesn't stop it exploring the nuances of a dejected, lonely film.

Perilous thrill and slapstick humour

Changing tack with *ParaNorman*, the Bronze B5 AV is equally comfortable with the modern-day family-focused animation. The same characteristics of rhythm, detail and organisation are present as the zombies chase Norman and co through the woods, only now with a healthy injection of power.

The surround sound field is cohesive, and there's great tonal matching between the channels. They feel comfortably in control, without being restrained, delivering perilous thrill and slapstick humour with consummate ease.



With technology derived from the higher range, the Bronzes have raised the bar at this price

The results are much the same in stereo. We play LCD Soundsystem's *Sound Of Silver* album and, though still using an AV receiver, we remain impressed by the balance, dynamics and expressiveness that keep us hooked. If you're using these speakers for music as much as cinema, this may be where the depth and organisation of the Bronze 5 speakers trumps the Bronze 2-based alternative package most considerably.



The Bronze B5 AV system package includes the W10 subwoofer for an injection of power

You don't have to be Miss Marple to read the clues - we like this speaker package a lot. Monitor Audio's decision to hand down driver technology to its Bronze range has raised the standard. This package delivers a sound that is bold and capable of great subtlety and dynamics. Spend a couple of hours with the Bronze B5 AV and this may be the easiest ₹2,42,500 you'll ever spend.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Great dynamics and musicality; enough punch for adventurous soundtracks

AGAINST Nothing of note

VERDICT By handing down technology from its more expensive ranges, Monitor Audio has raised the bar for its competitors

Needs to beat

Dali Zensor 1 5.1 ₹1,12,200 ★★★★★

Dali offers another speaker package of all-round brilliance for those whose budgets won't stretch to more than 1.50 lacs



B&W Zeppelin Wireless | Wireless speaker | ₹58,000 (Approx.)

New Zeppelin is off to a flyer

B&W has cemented its commitment to the wireless speaker market in the last few years with the five-star A5 and A7 AirPlay models and the portable T7 speaker. However, the brand's Zeppelin line is perhaps its biggest success story.

It all started eight years ago, when the original Zeppelin marked the brand's first foray into the powered one-box speaker market. That model then spawned the equally impressive Zeppelin Mini in 2009 and the Zeppelin Air in 2011. Just when we thought the beloved range had succumbed to the brand's more conventional-looking entries, the Zeppelin Wireless arrives to make its mark - and with an almighty bang.

B&W couldn't very well tamper with the airship-shape and keep the legendary moniker going, so the iconic design returns. The new Wireless has simply gained a couple of centimetres here and there, but with a trend among some speakers to resemble beach balls, eggs and all sorts of other objects it doesn't seem quite so offbeat anymore. Instead its elegant, stylish look proves timeless.

Fibreglass ribs

While it would be easy to underestimate the work that's gone into the Wireless based on its appearance, it would be a great injustice too. Beyond the chassis, almost everything else has been entirely reworked.

Behind the elliptical front panel are five new drivers: two 25mm metal dome tweeters, as found in the company's CM Series speakers, and a pair of midrange drivers which, featuring FST technology borrowed from the flagship Diamond 800 Series, use a foam surround instead of a conventional one to improve damping. They also feature anti-resonance dust caps for a cleaner, smoother response.

Taking centre stage on the baffle (now double the thickness to reduce vibrations and strengthened with fibreglass ribs) is a single 15cm woofer - the same size as that found on the flagship A7.

Save for a few upgraded components the power amplification stage is largely the same, each driver powered by a Class-D amplifier. B&W claims that the digital signal processing is now twice as powerful for more accuracy too.

A more modest offering

That's pretty tech-heavy stuff for a ₹58,000 wireless speaker, but if an established company like B&W wants to repackage some of its flagship technology and most impressive engineering into a smaller, more modest offering, who are we to argue?

Sensing the end of an era, the Zeppelin Wireless ditches the front-facing Apple

In keeping with its legendary moniker, the Zeppelin Wireless keeps the product range's famous iconic airship design

dock, so Apple users don't need to hand over their iPhone or iPod anymore. A direct connection to a smartphone or tablet can still be made via its 3.5mm input, but the Zeppelin's focus is very much on wireless connectivity - through AirPlay, aptX Bluetooth or Spotify Connect.

Design-wise, it's the most seamless-looking of the Zeppelins, and not just because it doesn't have a dock sticking out of it. A small brand badge, which protrudes from the shapely chassis, doubles as a neatly discreet control touch panel. Touch the right hand side of it for two seconds to initiate Bluetooth pairing, tap the other side to switch to the 3.5mm input. It's wonderfully simple.

Set-up is facilitated by the updated Bowers & Wilkins control app, which works a treat and gets you up and running in no time. You can download it on a Mac, PC or iOS device, but there's no Android version.

The only other things to get acquainted with are three buttons on the top for volume and play/pause; Ethernet, power and auxiliary sockets around the rear; a service-only type-B USB slot.

Expansive spread of sound

The Zeppelin plays and upsamples to 24bit/192kHz, so a 96kHz file of Muse's *Supremacy* over Bluetooth seems like a good place to start.

The B&W's girth helps to create an expansive, sweeping spread of sound that doesn't struggle to fill our largest test room

In detail



Its simple, clean control layout makes the Zeppelin Wireless a pleasure to use



The Zeppelin Wireless isn't actually entirely wireless - there are LAN and 3.5mm connections too



The badge doubles as a discreet touch panel. Press the right side for Bluetooth pairing and left for 3.5mm input

End of an era

The Zeppelin Wireless ditches the front-facing Apple dock featured on previous models. A direct connection to a smartphone or tablet can still be made via its 3.5mm input, but the Zeppelin's focus is very much wireless

The Zeppelin Wireless keeps the range's legacy alive, combining an accomplished sound with greater functionality and an even more seamless design

nor overpower our smallest one - close your eyes and it's easy to imagine that the song's epic orchestration is blaring from two widely spaced conventional speakers.

It doesn't just throw out a big soundstage but also a precise and well-imaged one that stays composed no matter how hard you push the volume.

The Zeppelin Air impressed most with how tight and defined it was in the bass, and that proves one of the Wireless's biggest charms too. The Muse track's big walloping drums are freighted with punch and power, and the rolling drumbeat slaps with a vengeance underneath the vocals.

As the onslaught of distorted guitars comes in, there's heft behind each precise string strum and enough insight to hear every vibrato in its diction. The Zeppelin isn't all about the big picture though - it can put its finger on the finer details too. The dramatic stabs of violin pull through with clarity and texture.

Convincingly organised and with a precise ear for rhythms, the B&W stays coherent and coordinated even in the dense

orchestral climax. Take the intensity down a notch or two with a simple vocal and guitar accompaniment - this time Eva Cassidy's *Fields of Gold* - and you can really start to appreciate the transparency of the midrange.

Her soaring vocals are given free rein in the soundstage, with all the subtle outbursts and trail-offs accounted for. There's also a strong sense of tactility to the acoustic strings.

Move onto Eminem's rap vocal in *Bad Guy* and it almost sounds like an assault, the venom in his delivery and the dynamic of his quirky structure laid bare.

Such timelessness

There's a slight dip in sound quality playing songs over AirPlay, most notably in clarity and subtlety. Compared to Bluetooth and Spotify Connect, it makes music feel a little closed in too.

Even then, a low-res stream of Pink Floyd's *Another Brick in the Wall Pt 1* sounds surprisingly informative - start your Zeppelin journey here and you'll be

USE IT WITH

Apple iPad mini 4
₹35,900

With its tweaks, upgrades and plenty of attention to detail, the fourth generation iPad mini is better than ever

surprised to discover that what you're hearing is at 160kbps compression.

The bass guitarist's agile finger-plucking brims with subtlety, while more heavy-handed electronics tear through the piece while remaining solid and textured. The echo around vocals is plain to hear and there's a clear sense of space around them.

The Zeppelin Wireless keeps the range's legacy alive, combining an accomplished sound with greater functionality and an even more seamless design.

It's not often a product has such timelessness, let alone something as prolific and short-lived as a wireless speaker, but eight years on the B&W Zeppelin speaker is still a must-have for the audiophile who wants fine sound in a convenient package. At ₹58,000, it's going to take some beating.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Large spread of sound; precise soundstage; expressive mids; seamless control and design; good functionality

AGAINST No Android app

VERDICT Building on the range's reputation, this is arguably the best Zeppelin yet

Also consider
Geneva Aerosphere Large
₹65,000* ★★★★★

Our current Award-winner is one of the best-looking, best-sounding wireless speakers we've heard



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Sonus Faber Chameleon B | Stereo speakers | ₹1,14,990

All change for the calmer Chameleon

Ever wanted a pair of speakers that can change colour? Then you're in luck - because that's exactly what Sonus Faber has accomplished with the aptly named Chameleon Bs. It's a feat made possible by some clever engineering.

The speakers are shipped with side panels. You'll have to pay extra for a coloured set, packaged separately and available in six colours: black, white, blue, grey, orange or red. Simply push the panels into place to change the look.

No tendency for aggression

Aside from the ability to change colour there's much to admire here. We like the classy leather finish used on the rest of the cabinet, and the smart metal trims around the drive units that give the speakers such a clean look. The cabinet's angled front baffle reminds us of some of Sonus Faber's classic products.

Typically at this price, the Chameleon B is a two-way design. It features a 29mm fabric-dome tweeter in combination with a 15cm polypropylene mid/bass unit. A downward-firing port tunes the low frequency output. There's a small plinth on the base to ensure enough clearance for the port to work properly.

This configuration helps to make these speakers easy to position. They work well out into the room and lose very little of that balance close to a wall. There's a bit more prominence to the lows, but they're still kept under strict control. Give these standmounters a day or two to run and they turn in a likeable performance. They aren't the most insightful or analytical speakers we've heard at this price, but they're appealing all the same.

We like their smooth, slightly rich balance. It makes them very easy to listen to over long sessions, as well as allowing less-than-perfect recordings such as Bruce Springsteen's *Radio Nowhere* to shine. There are no hard edges and little tendency towards aggression, even when provoked. All that smoothness is nicely judged, and



The Chameleons have a unique design, but the sonic performance lacks a little excitement

enough of the song's drive remains intact to keep the listener interested. There's good bite to the guitars and drums, and a pleasingly sure-footed sense of rhythm.

Refusing to crumble

We try a range of music, from Nick Cave's *Push The Sky Away* and Kate Bush's *Aerial* all the way to Biffy Clyro's *Infinity Land*, and the Bs take it all in their stride. The integration between the drivers is seamless, allowing the speakers to do a fine job with vocals. There's also a decent sense of organisation and pleasing composure when the music becomes complicated.

At 32cm tall, the Chameleons are fairly compact, so really deep bass shouldn't be expected. What they do produce is solid and tuneful, though a little on the full side. Play Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* and they display good stereo imaging with decent precision to the placement of instruments. These speakers also communicate

larger-scale dynamic shifts with confidence, refusing to crumble during crescendos.

These Sonus Fabers aren't the most insightful performers we've heard at this price, and don't match the sonic muscularity of class leaders such as B&W's 685 S2s, but there's still much to like here. If you're after some well-built, flexible speakers that just sound nice, almost regardless of what you play, give these a go.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Likeable character; excellent integration between drivers; composure; clever design

AGAINST Not the last word in excitement

VERDICT Ideal for those who need flexibility in finish and positioning without sacrificing much performance

Also consider

B&W 685 S2
₹65,000

★★★★★

Sets the sonic standard, even if appearance doesn't match the Sonus Faber



Underneath, there is a small plinth which gives clearance for a downwards-firing port

System builder total build ₹5,35,290

Stereo amplifier

Roksan K3 ₹1,56,300

★★★★★

A powerful integrated amplifier which is capable of plenty of insight



CD player

Roksan K3 CD Di ₹1,69,400 ★★★★★

Mirrors the partnering amplifier in sonic character and has digital inputs to improve the sound from external sources



Stereo speakers

Clearaudio Concept ₹94,600

★★★★★

Smart, well engineered and easy to use - this turntable is our choice at this price



Devialet Silver Phantom | **Wireless speaker** | ₹2,55,000

High-end speaker with silver service

Paon. That's French for peacock. We aren't certain they use the term peacocking in France, but, if they do, it could definitely be applied to Devialet.

But when the insides of the Parisian company's products are so radical, you expect the exterior to be its match. That has certainly been the case with the innovative hybrid amplifiers we've seen - the D-Premier and 110, both awarded five stars - and remains so with their first wireless speakers, the Phantom and Silver Phantom.

Severed droid head

The Silver Phantom is identifiable by the silver domes of the side-firing bass drivers. It's ₹40k dearer than its partner, but with a whopping internal power of 3000W and capable of outputting sound levels of 105dB (compared to a not inconsiderable 750W and 99dB for the standard version) - that's louder than your average motorbike.

Aesthetically, quality of design may be largely subjective but any product that arouses discussion over what it looks like - vacuum cleaner? Severed droid head? Plus-sized computer mouse? - has a place in our hearts, if not necessarily our homes.

The genius of the Silver Phantom is in its innovative circuitry, the same wedding of a Class A and Class D amplifier working in tandem as pioneered by the D-Premier. While the former delivers high-quality sound at low power, the latter provides the muscle. In theory at least, it is the ideal partnership. Moreover, Devialet's engineers have managed to shrink it enough to fit inside the Phantom's 12-litre chassis.

The body itself is grander than a simple plastic moulding, too: the external surface is made of ABS (Acrylonitrile Butadiene Styrene), the internal skin uses fibreglass-filled polycarbonate and has an aluminium central core to aid the unit's rigidity.

At a hefty 11kg, the Phantom is a heavyweight in every respect. But having lugged it onto a speaker stand, being careful to avoid hitting the fragile side-firing bass drivers or front-facing co-axial unit, you'll be pleased to know that is the hardest part of the set-up. (Devialet's own stand, the Branch, will soon be available, along with a carry case, the Cocoon).

Ambient electronic noises

For the rest, unless you want only to connect directly from your phone through Bluetooth, you are guided through by Devialet's Spark application and a series of ambient electronic noises emitted by the Phantom. The speaker itself has only one button, for power, so unless you opt for the remote, everything is done within the app. If you want to connect two or more

speakers (the limit is 24) you'll need a Dialog, available for ₹33,000, which also gives you access to streaming services and Internet radio.

Achingly cool polyrhythm

Though impressed by the technology, and by the sound emitted by its familial amplifiers, that doesn't necessarily mean Devialet can succeed with a high-end wireless speaker. But we are impressed when we play Darkside's *Psychic* album. Though we can't play in stereo, having only one Phantom, the space and depth of *Golden Arrow's* atmospheric opening is immediately apparent thanks to some intelligent organisation.

And soon, with the track's low-end pulse the Phantom demonstrates the depths to which it can reach with those sizeable bass drivers. Yet still there is breathing space left. Bowed strings are decipherable and believable, closer to the acoustic performance you'd expect from a wireless speaker.

We aren't playing at anywhere near the Phantom's capabilities in terms of volume, but our large listening room is still easily filled. The drum beat thumps you in the chest, but in a way so restrained it at once respects the nuances of the track and tells you it can go a lot harder if it wants.

With *Paper Trails*, that rhythmic expression is showcased further. The guitars and percussion lay down the most achingly cool polyrhythm, only superseded by the baritone vocal doubled by its bass counterpart - each remaining coherent despite an overloaded low end.

To see how the Phantom reacts to heavier tracks at louder volumes, we release the breaks with Deftones' *My Own*

USE IT WITH

Devialet Dialog
₹33,000

The Dialog lets you use the Phantom as a streamer and link multiple speakers for stereo, multi-room or cinema

Summer (Shove It). That inimitable guitar riff is kicked through by the drum kit like a hoof and doesn't become muddled by the weight of the bass guitar. All very impressive, but it's the handling of those screams and breakouts we like.

Playing in your living room

It feels like it could blow the doors from our listening room, but with a sense of organisation that separates powerful from just loud. No hi-fi can recreate the power of live performance, but with the Devialet you could happily fool your neighbours into thinking you had the band playing in your living-room.

We tone it down with Owl John's *Songs About Roses*. Without touching the volume, the Phantom lets Scott Hutchinson's delicate guitar playing and vocals sing. The speaker is assured as the kick and bass guitar drive the song later on, not needing to flex its muscles or prove its worth. It is enthusiastic with the music, but isn't overzealous and doesn't force the issue.

High-end product

We'd just like a little more subtlety and expression - each note is clear, but how it is being played isn't always explicit. It is that layer of musicality at which traditional hi-fi, even at lesser cost, excels in ways the Phantom can't. Generally we'd say the two shouldn't be compared but, at this money, that level of subtlety matters.

Nonetheless, the speaker is talented and you're clearly buying into Devialet and not just the Phantom. That means free firmware updates and a chat function on the company website. You're paying a high-end price for a high-end product, but also getting the service to match.

So why isn't this a five-star product? It is the best sound we've heard from a wireless speaker - bolder, bigger and louder than its size would suggest - but compared to the Award-winning Naim Mu-so we want more for that extra cash.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Huge sound for its size; rhythmically good fun; innovative technology; striking design

AGAINST Lacks some subtlety

VERDICT We can't fault the Phantom on anything other than expressiveness and subtlety when considering the price tag

Also consider

Naim Mu-so ₹1,39,875

★★★★★

An Award-winner for two years in a row, the Naim Mu-so delivers an impressive sound



Weighing in at 11kg, the Phantom is a heavyweight speaker, but take great care when moving it, the side-firing bass drivers are fragile

Is it a vacuum cleaner? Severed droid head? Plus-sized computer mouse? The Silver Phantom's design will get you talking



No hi-fi can recreate the power of live performance, but with the Devialet you could happily fool your neighbours into thinking you had the band playing in your living room

The Phantom is a high-end speaker with service to match, including free firmware upgrades and a company website chat function





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with the V-Surround-II
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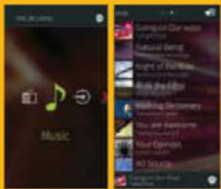
Phase Technology is coming to the Indian market via Onkyo and it promises the good stuff

Audiophiles from the 90's would have fond memories of Phase Technology when the brand was in its prime. After a few years of hibernation and a custom-theatre line of speakers in the form of dARTS, Phase Tech has decided to enter the Indian market through the capable



distribution of Onkyo Sight & Sound India Pvt. Ltd. While the line-up is extensive and has something for everyone, currently the popular Phase Velocity range is making its way to our shores. The Enclosures on Phase Velocity Speakers with their sleek curves not only look good, but they serve to enhance the sound of the speakers. The curved sides actually reduce cabinet resonances much more than a conventional design. The V626 is the largest model in the range and features twin 6.5in Vapour Deposited Titanium (VDT) woofers and the patented 1in soft dome tweeter, and the patented 3-way Absolute Phase crossover. Most audiophiles might be unaware that Phase Technology's original founder Bill Hecht actually invented the soft-dome tweeter as we know today, used in the majority of the world's loudspeakers! "Absolute phase crossovers" achieve two key goals in speaker system design. The first is to ensure that the drivers are

acoustically and electronically in-phase. The second benefit is to maintain vertical axis dispersion. This improves timbre matching from speaker to speaker and also maintains a consistent soundstage, relatively impervious to height changes in the seating position. This means you can place any Phase Velocity speaker vertically or horizontally, even mix models with uncompromised sound throughout your seating area. The prices for the Phase Velocity models start from ₹1,80,000 for the 5.1-channel package that includes the HV121 (12in, 100watt) subwoofer and the V5520 speakers. The range tops out at ₹2,31,000 for the V626-based 5.1-channel package with the FL-12 (12in, 250watt) subwoofer. All Phase Velocity speaker packages can be upgraded to full Dolby Atmos 7.1.2 configuration should your budget and living space allow it, making it a practical choice for beginners as well as advanced users.



*Pioneer ARC App

The Advance Remote Control app syncs with compatible in-car entertainment systems for seamless control. Compatible head units start at ₹5990.

Interview

SONOS: The start of a new era?

The new Play:5 and Trueplay could usher in a fantastic period for music, and for the Santa Barbara company

This feels like the start of a new era for Sonos. After a year of heavy software focus, and two since any new hardware, it has recently announced its new Play:5 speaker and the Trueplay speaker-calibration technology.

We visited Sonos in Santa Barbara to meet the senior team at the world's biggest multi-room brand and find out if we can expect a wider range of products, or more replacements like the Play:5.

"We have this mission to fill your home with music," says Sonos co-founder Tom Cullen. "I look around and think 'do we have this covered?' We haven't truly filled the home yet, so you can expect more from us.

"Ultimately our goal is to make the smallest number of speakers that do the widest range of things, but I think the answer is a bigger number than now."

Going portable

"We know a lot of people use their Sonos players outside using an extension cable, but we need to be sure we make it feel like a natural experience," says chief product officer Mark Whitten. "Our focus is in

the home, but we'll keep looking at all the options."

New products might be some way off, but Sonos has built two microphones into the Play: 5 in order to futureproof the design for Trueplay. Michael Papish, director of platform strategy, says this isn't new.

"We always think long and hard about how to futureproof our hardware for later updates. The Play:3 had dual wi-fi that was in there for years before it was any use. The mics in the Play:5 will be the same.

"If this speaker lasts for 10 years, we have to think about what home listening could look like in that time. We have some ideas about how microphones might be used, but they're not crystal clear just yet."

The result of 18 months of development, Trueplay feels as much of a big deal for the team as the launch of the Play:5. "This is just the first phase," says Papish. "With Trueplay we're talking a plan of 10, 15 years. We won't see its real potential for two or three years yet. We're building smart speakers that will be aware of the people in the room, the content they're listening to. Software will make the speaker responsive."

The new Play:5 is the first Sonos product in two years - will it signify the start of a new era too?



High-res music on Sonos

For years Sonos has had the run of the multi-room market, but now rivals are muscling in. One of the questions is whether we might see high-res music on a Sonos system. The answer is - don't hold your breath. "We've looked really hard at deeper bit depth," says Tom Cullen. "But the math just isn't there." "We need to improve the overall quality of listening full stop," says Giles Martin, Sonos's sound experience leader. "Once we get to the stage where there is a huge demand for high-res, we should accept it. For now, there aren't enough tracks, nor enough value for the majority of consumers for us to chase it."

Downsampling

What about downsampling, which Sonos currently doesn't offer, meaning your high-res music is unplayable unless you downsample it yourself?

"We want to play everything, so we should do," says senior product manager Jon Reilly. "It's something we're considering."

Apple Music

"We're working with Apple on the development of Apple Music and I'd expect it to go into beta in the not-too-distant future - I'd anticipate before the end of the year. We've been pleasantly surprised at how open they've been to working with us."

So it seems that a period of learning and evolution lies ahead for Sonos, with no doubt much in the pipeline that we don't even know about yet.

"It's a fantastic time for music," says John MacFarlane, Sonos co-founder and chief executive. "After a dark period, it's only going to get brighter and brighter - a fantastic once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. And I think we have a wonderful role to play in that."

"We're building smart speakers that will be aware of the people in the room, the content they're listening to. Software will make the speaker responsive."





*Brainwavz Delta

Housing a multi-function three-button microphone and remote, the ₹1599 Delta carry a two year warranty and are smartphone compatible.

*Panasonic SC-HT40GW-K

Launched along with the SC-HT20GW-K, the multi-channel 4.1 and 2.1 speaker set-ups are now available with prices starting from ₹5990.



MyMe to launch new line of headphones

Popular multimedia accessories brand MyMe is all set to expand its portfolio with the launch of its new range of headphones. The new range will feature two on-ears, the MyMe Flex and M7 and one in-ear named Myme She. Aimed at the budget headphone segment, the M7 (pictured above) retails at a ₹3299 and will soon be followed by the Flex and She. All headphones will be soon available through major online retailers.



LeTV's 'Super' TV has a Snapdragon 810

You'd expect to find Qualcomm's Snapdragon 810 in a smartphone, but LeTV has also put one inside its new 65in TV – the Super 4 Max65 Curved. Using a Samsung 4K panel, the Max65 Curved features 60 frame H.265 4K hardware acceleration and a Harman Kardon audio system with a wireless subwoofer. Stay tuned for news regarding its debut.



The LG XBoom Cube is ready to party

A compact party boombox, the ₹17,990 XBoom Cube packs in features like Auto-DJ, voice cancellation and key change for karaoke, LG Bass Blast for a deeper low end, multiple inputs and Bluetooth streaming. The XBoom Cube also supports the MusicFlow smartphone app and can also be connected to your DTH set-top box. Head over to lg.com/in and download the Music Flow Bluetooth app for an enhanced Bluetooth experience with the XBoom.



Automation brand RTI brings in-wall goodies

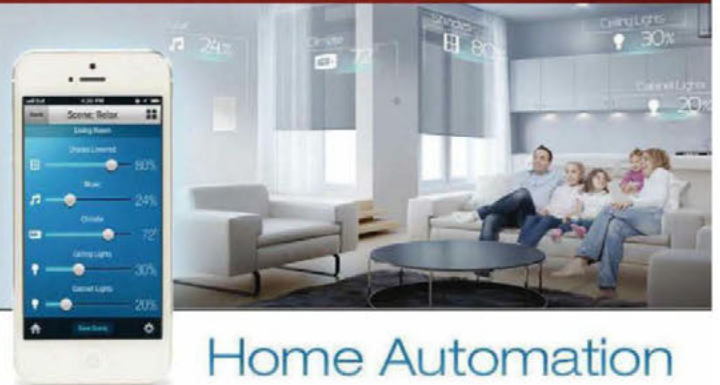
Remote Technologies Incorporated (RTI) announced the launch of its in-wall touchpanel controller, the KX3 along with a water-resistant WK2 in-wall keypad through its local distributor Mojoworx (mojoindia.in). The KX3, ideal for installation in domestic and light commercial establishments like schools and conference rooms, is a controller that offers integrators flexibility through an intuitive interface via its 3.5in touch screen, including monitoring of a camera security network via 10/100 Base-T Ethernet and wireless Ethernet capabilities. The all-glass exterior-sporting, water resistant RTI WK2 can be employed in the same areas as the KX3 and is aimed at allowing control at places with high moisture content like kitchens, where splashes of water and liquids are a common occurrence.



Yamaha readies new MusicCast range!

Yamaha has expanded its MusicCast wireless streaming range, which includes a wide variety of soundbars, speakers and AV receivers centred around the MusicCast streaming and controller app. Designed for multi-room audio, the MusicCast system uses the app to stream audio from any connected source over Bluetooth, WiFi, or AirPlay and includes in-built support for streaming services. Interestingly, the app also supports audio streaming to other-brand Bluetooth speakers. New additions to the MusicCast range include the WX-030 desktop wireless speaker, the R-N602 network Hi-Fi receiver and the YSP-5600 Digital Sound Projector.

The WX-030 features Bluetooth and WiFi streaming while the R-N602 receiver pairs support for Apple Lossless, FLAC, and USB with an output of 80Wx2 RMS. Also new is the YSP-5600, a 7.1.2 Digital Sound Projector, which offers 3D sound reproduction from a 46-speaker configuration, with support for Dolby Atmos, Yamaha Cinema DSP 3D and DTS-HD. Other features include IntelliBeam sound optimisation, HDMI input with 4K and 3D passthrough, and a 128W power rating. For more information on the Yamaha MusicCast range and app, head over to in.yamaha.com.



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*Intex 12001

This stereo speaker pair from Intex sports a USB port, SD card slot, Bluetooth connectivity and built in FM tuner along with an AUX audio input, all for ₹9200.

*Creative Woof 3

This WiFi- and Bluetooth-compatible wireless speaker has a unique trick up its sleeve. It plays MP3, WMA, WAV, FLAC and APE formats and also supports MicroSD and AUX input.



LET YOUR MOVIES AND MUSIC TAKE OFF

Aero Cables is set to introduce its full line of home AV cables in India

No matter what sort of AV system you have, cables are an element you simply can't ignore and while finding cables isn't a tough task, finding the right cable isn't always easy. Aero Cables, which has been selling in limited markets until recently now, is ready to go full bore throughout the Indian sub-continent and its line-up of high-quality cables includes HDMI 2.0 Certified (4K and 3D compliant), USB-A to Micro USB, 3.5mm auxiliary, speaker cables in different gauges and gold-plated banana plugs. Aero Cables, which is a product from Sight & Sound will benefit from the establishment's stronghold in distribution and marketing. They have already conducted tests on long runs for their HDMI cables and have passed even the more stringent standards set by ISF and HDMI for transmission of 4K data without dropouts.

Aero Cables also gives the customer a choice in the quality level depending on budget and will have options from entry to mid-level. Price competitiveness is a key differentiator between Aero Cables and

The AEHD HDMI 5M (below) and the AEAU 11 (right) are a few of the varieties of Aero Cables that will enhance your set-up



its closest competitors in the market. We hope to bring you a review soon but if you're in need of a cable quickly, log on to major online retailers to find a selection of Aero Cables already on sale.

Italian loudspeaker brand Chario enters India

Veteran audiophile brand Chario was founded in Italy in 1975 and is known for its innovativeness. Case in point, Chario builds its own drive-units whereas most loudspeaker brands have drive-units built according to their specifications from external sources. Exported to over 30 countries worldwide, Chario loudspeakers are now available in India through its distributor, Delhi-based Seak Corp. Its range of loudspeakers, including the Reflex, Constellation, Academy and subwoofer series will now be locally available. Watch this space for upcoming reviews on Chario loudspeakers soon.



Audio-Technica brings new bass-heavy series

Headphone specialist Audio-Technica's Solid Bass range is now available in India and is targeted at those who prefer heavy bass output. Despite the clear emphasis on a deep low end, Audio-Technica says listeners will be rewarded with accurate mids and highs. The new range includes three over-ear headsets with in-line mics and controls, and utilises 53mm Deep Motion Drivers, central and side vents with rigid anti-vibration housings. The three new models named ATH-WS550iS, the ATH-WS770iS, and the top-of-the-line ATH-WS1100iS are available at prices ranging from ₹6999 to ₹18,999 with a year's warranty as standard.

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www.simplysofas.in | 

*Zebronics Tyson

Using something Zebronics calls as 'ZEB- Spatial disperser technology', the ₹4500 Tyson claims to achieve a full 360 degree audio dispersion. It has a built-in FM radio, USB and SD/MMC card slot and an AUX input.



1 Jaybird X2 ₹15,999 The latest in-ears from Jaybird have a claimed play time of up to eight hours. Aimed at the fitness-savvy audiophile, the X2 house an ingeniously developed codec for decoding audio with an enhanced bit rate for optimum audio output. The X2 come with a lifetime warranty against sweat and use exclusively designed Comply ear tips for maximum comfort and noise cancellation.



2 Audeze EL-8 Titanium ₹59,990 Iconic industrial design by BMW DesignWorks USA, an Apple MFi certification, built-in high-quality DSP and DAC that supports 24-bit digital audio, the EL-8 Titanium is definitely on top of Apple users' 'must-have' list. Claimed to be the world's first headphone with fully integrated Apple lightning cable, one can even tend to calls and communicate with Siri once connected. For more details, head to p114.



TOP 5 New launches

3

3 Apple iPad Pro from ₹67,400

With a massive 12.9in Retina display, the Apple iPad Pro claims to have the highest resolution across all iOS products. It houses a A9X chip, with third-generation 64-bit architecture. Drawing and sketching should be a breeze with a special stylus, the Apple Pencil, which offers greater control and intuitive touch, thanks to its high responsiveness and virtual zero lag along with pressure-sensitive features. Head to p82 where we dig deeper.



4

4 Pro-Ject RPM 10 Carbon ₹4,02,000

Pro-Ject has announced the RPM 10 Carbon as a successor to the RPM 10.1 Evolution. It's the same teardrop chassis, but has a new plinth with resin-coated steel pellets and covered in carbon fibre to reduce unwanted resonances. It comes fitted with a 10CC Evolution tonearm - an Ortofon Cadenza Black cartridge can be fitted for a little extra.



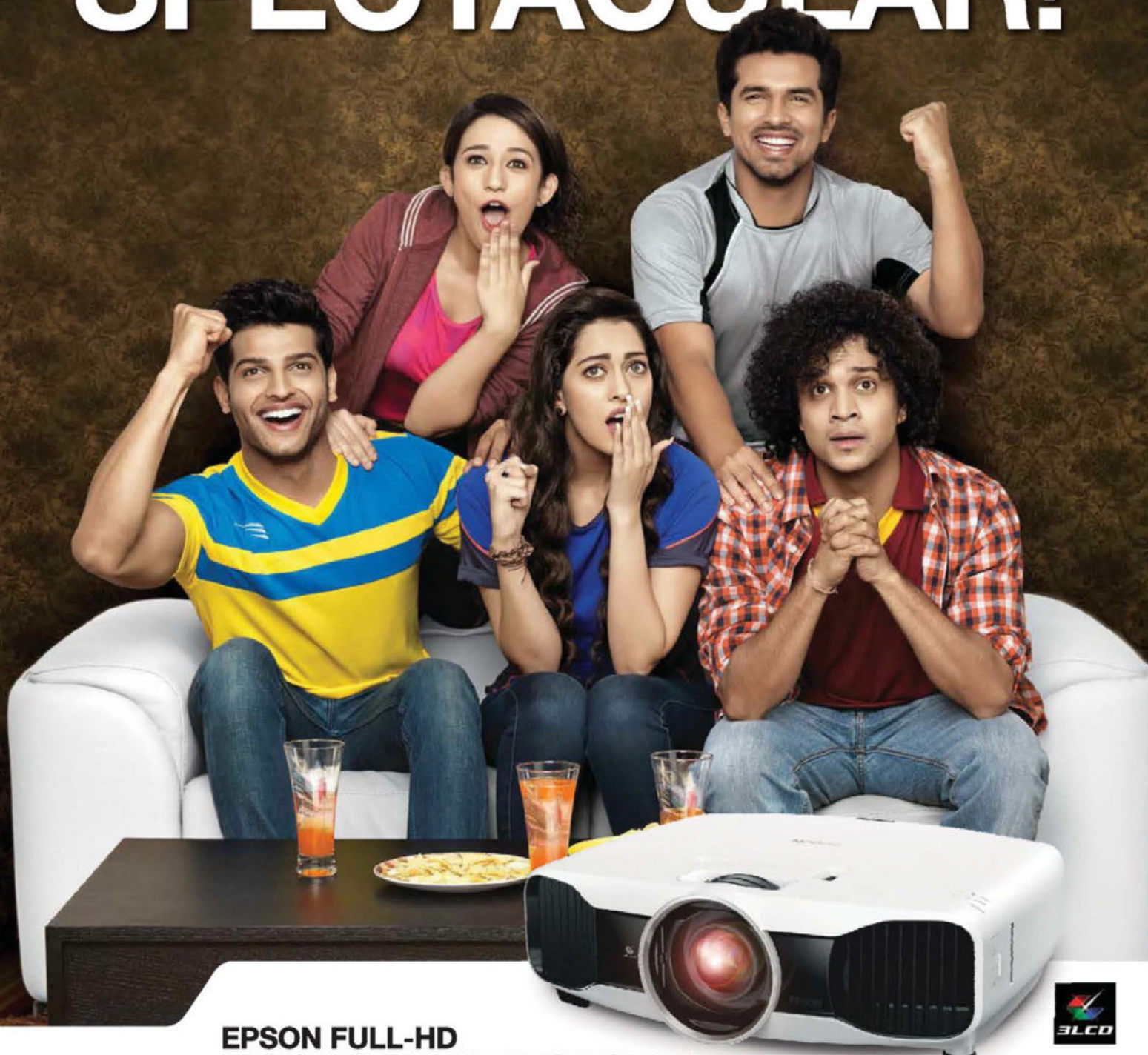
5 Zu Audio Definition Mk.IV ₹14,90,000

Sporting Zu Audio's latest nanotech drivers and Radian 850 based tweeter assembly, the Definition Mk.IV is a formidable performer, to say the least. With the rear-firing subwoofers in the earlier model replaced with a single massively motored 12in subwoofer driver and a machined aluminum plinth, the Mk.IV has its own signature look. Bass 'N' Treble are the local distributors of Zu Audio. Look out for a review soon.

5



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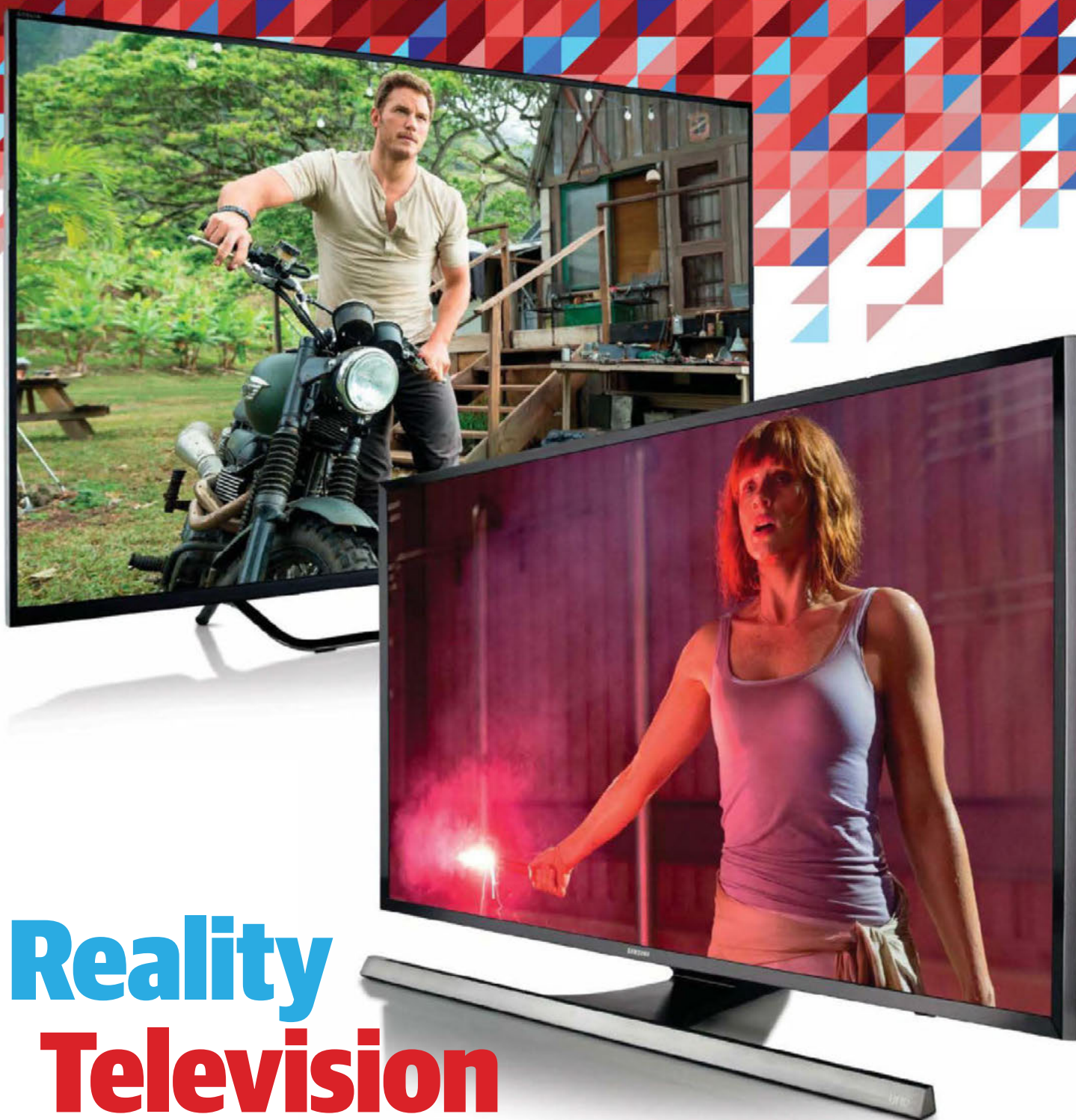
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Reality Television

An influx of smaller screens at affordable prices means your 4K TV need not cost the earth

This time last year, if you were thinking of spending less than ₹1,00,000 on a 4K TV, we'd have told you to invest in a decent Full HD set instead. Not only was content thin on the ground, but upscaling was poor, leaving even Blu-ray content looking distinctly average. 2015 has seen standards rise, however, along with an influx of affordable 4K sets with smaller screens. Here we pit Samsung's UE40JU7000 against Sony's KD-43X8305C to see which smaller 4K

What's on test?

Samsung UE40JU7000

Sony KD-43X8305C

SAMSUNG

UE40JU7000*

₹83,900 ★★★★★

Samsung has had a great run in the star ratings with its JU7000 series televisions. So far, we've seen 65in and 48in versions of this upper mid-range 4K set, and now we have the baby of the group, 40in - the smallest size screen Samsung has to offer in UHD. All have five stars.

Well-judged palette

These more compact dimensions open up 4K as an option for those with less room space to play with - and, with a price tag of less than ₹90,000, the technology is now more accessible than ever.

Even better, this set follows in the footsteps of its JU7000 family in being an excellent-value TV that delivers across the board, combining features, functionality and performance to make it a very compelling proposition indeed.

To get started, we reach for our trusty THX disc to calibrate the picture, and afterwards delve into the advanced menus to make sure any additional processing is turned off. This allows us to judge the picture in its raw form and add in only the processing we feel is required.

First up, we load some 4K content, *Wet Hot American Summer: First Day at Camp*. The bright 80s clothing and outdoorsy setting give the Samsung the perfect opportunity to show off its well-judged colour palette, which manages to nail both the subtle tonality in landscapes and skin-tones as well as deliver on punch and vibrancy when needed.

Detailed and subtle

Reds, blues and yellows are bold and vivid but never overdone, while the greens in grass and trees are portrayed with a realistic hue - something lesser TVs can trip up on.

For some context, we opt for the Standard picture mode here (and throughout), which we feel offers a good balance between the cooler and warmer colour palettes also on offer.

Detail and subtlety are two more strong points. Pictures are as sharp and clean as you'd expect in 4K, but it's the finer detail and insight on offer that really makes this picture shine. From strands of hair to the mottling of bricks, textures are realised with precision and never over-etched, while landscapes deliver a believable sense of depth that gives every scene improved perspective. Motion proves to be well handled too,

with smooth pans and judder-free outlines to fast moving objects - we found switching the motion-processing to Standard gives the best results here.

Contrast is superbly judged, and a switch up to the darker scenes in *House of Cards* only shows off just how well this Samsung can see off the competition. Blacks go impressively deep while retaining their detail, and whites have the ability to push through a scene with brightness and clarity without disturbing the darker areas around them.

Strong upscaling

Take a step down to a Full HD Blu-ray and the story is much the same. Upscaling is strong, so detail levels don't take too much of a hit, while contrast and colour balance are as good as ever.

For those interested in 3D, this set includes the active variety, though you'll need to fork out for your own glasses. A 3D Blu-ray of *Hugo* produces a picture as crisp and detailed as we've noted elsewhere, with colours well balanced and textures expertly handled.

The active 3D is comfortable to watch and gives a lovely sense of depth to scenes, precisely layering the objects to good effect. We do pick up some instability in fast-moving images, though, particularly ones coming towards you (rather than sideways), and there's a touch of ghosting on some objects too.

None of the motion-processing modes are able to get rid of this completely. It's about finding a balance and taking the rest on the chin as a tradeoff for the 3D. In terms of a full movie, it's only a mild inconvenience in a handful of scenes.

Engaging sound

We take another step down now into broadcast TV, and the HD channels fare pretty well. The picture remains solid and detailed, with clean and relatively noise-free edges.

The colour palette feels a little cooler here than on Blu-ray and 4K, but it's still a good balance that handles colours with believability and subtlety. Due to the massive amount of scaling required, standard def pictures do suffer a little by comparison, but it's a valiant effort that provides a perfectly watchable result. There is more noise here, for sure, and outlines are noticeably softer and less defined, but the level of detail this set is able to retain is admirable. Audio



performance doesn't let the side down either, and provides a perfectly usable sound for those who don't want to immediately make the upgrade to a soundbar or surround-sound system.

Sound is weightier than you might expect, and richer too, with a good spread that works for both small-scale TV broadcasts and action movies. Voices are expressive but don't feel detached from the soundtrack, delivering an engaging and well-balanced performance.

As we've seen in other Samsung sets, inputs are largely handled by the company's easily updateable One Connect box, which plugs into a proprietary input on the back panel. While it's handy for updates, it could make wall-mounting more demanding.

The box offers four HDMI ins (one of which is MHL compatible), two USBs (2.0) and an optical input, plus you'll find a single 3.0 USB input, component

CONTENT CONTROL

Whether it's an app, specific input or live TV, content is lined up for you to access as if you were just flicking through channels. Of course, you can also expand this into all available apps, which appears on a full screen, sorted by genre.



Nice design with slanted, brushed metal-effect bezel, but the showy stand takes up a lot of space

The colour palette feels a little cooler on broadcast TV but it's still a good balance that handles colours with believability and subtlety. Sound is weightier than you might expect, delivering an engaging performance

and composite video ins and a headphone output on the back of the TV. There's also ethernet for those who want to hardwire their TV, but the onboard wi-fi proves to be very reliable, easily locking onto our connection.

Once you're logged on, you can access all of Samsung's new Tizen operating system, which replaces last year's full homescreens with a streamlined pop-up bar populated by colourful content tiles.

Content management is slick, with a section where you can store favourites.

While it's a little better specified than Android TV, the firmware on our review set still doesn't have some of the regular streaming apps (though we're assured they're coming soon), meaning you'll have to make do with on-demand content from other sources such as YouTube and the like.

With the UE40JU7000, Samsung adds

another screen size to its excellent JU7000 range, which is very much looking like a go-to series for 4K that won't leave your bank account wincing.

Balancing great performance with a strong roster of features and easy usability, this is an excellent set with an attractive price to boot.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Sharp, detailed picture; superb contrast; great colour balance; well specified

AGAINST Still lacking a few on-demand services; could be tricky to wall-mount

VERDICT A superb all-rounder disproving the notion that you can't get good 4K at 40in

SONY

KD-43X8305C*

₹92,900 ★★★★★

If Goldilocks were to pick a TV size, 43in might just be it. It's not a size we see too often in our testing rooms, but it sits quite comfortably between 40in and 46in, and could prove to be just right for someone torn between the two.

At 43in (it's also available at an equally unusual 49in), this X8305C is Sony's smallest and cheapest 4K set of 2015, dropping 3D capabilities in order to keep the price down - a tradeoff many will be happy to make.

Minimalist looks

Design-wise, it's unlikely to floor you with its beauty, but at this price we don't expect anything too flashy.

Instead, it keeps things simple with a super-slim black bezel and minimalist central stand that is suitably sturdy. The only noticeable flourish to proceedings is a shining bar of light underneath the Sony logo, which you can turn brighter or off as you desire.

At 19mm thick, it's a candidate for wall-mounting if required, and has handily placed side-mounted HDMI ports for that very purpose.

Speaking of which, connectivity should be fine for most setups, and includes four HDMI inputs (all HDCP 2.2 compliant, with one that is MHL compatible), three USBs, two each of analogue and composite video ins, one component video, an optical input and a Scart for legacy kit.

The Sony also has an audio out/headphone jack and subwoofer out, plus an ethernet port for hardwiring the TV to your router.

Simple but slow OS

Wi-fi is on board though, and it finds our network easily, giving access to Sony's Smart TV services which this year are served by Android TV.

Although we're still not completely sold on the operating system, it does have promise. It's clean and simple enough to use, but it can be a little slow to get in and out of apps. Other offerings from the likes of LG and Samsung are much more slick and intuitive.

There's also the issue of content. As things stand, the only app available from the India's catch-up services is YouTube, although a number of lesser-known options are available too, which should get you through. Just because an app is available on the Google Play Store, that doesn't mean it'll be available on

Android TV - though there are promises that more will be coming along soon.

Of course, what is readily available is a full selection of Google services, including movie and music downloads, games and a fresh choice of YouTube content every time you open up the Home menu.

Highlights are picked out for you, but you can browse in more detail further down the home screen, as well as access any content stored locally on USB or NAS drives.

Contrast lacking

To test the X8305C's performance we jump straight into an episode of *House of Cards*. We find a sharp picture that offers smooth motion for all but the fastest moving objects (we opt for the Standard MotionFlow processing) and crisp, clean edges.

However, while detail levels are good and give good insight, they can't quite match the level of subtlety found on the Samsung UE40JU7000. Objects and landscapes don't offer as much depth and colours aren't rendered with quite the subtlety of the Samsung. They are largely handled well though, with relatively natural looking skin tones and a bold but convincing colour palette.

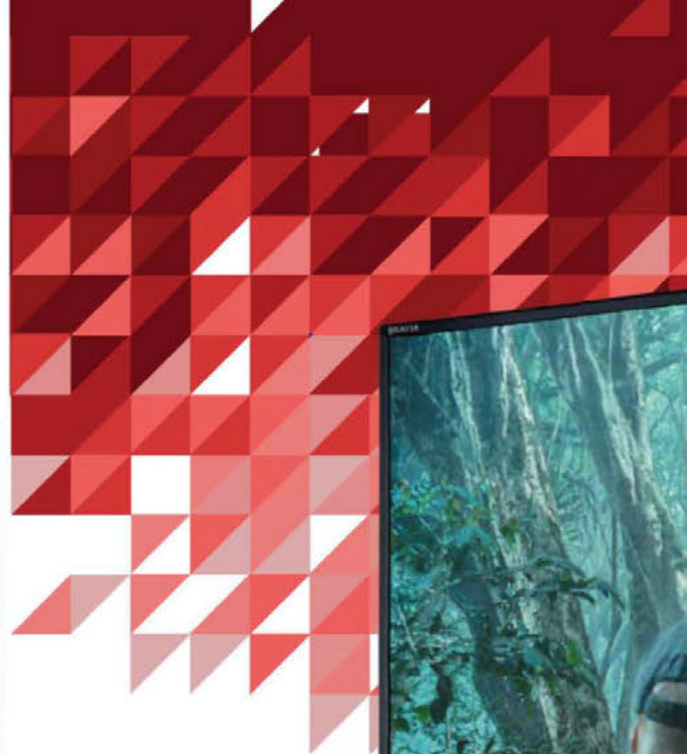
We do notice a slightly green hue, which is particularly noticeable in darker scenes. We try to tweak the set's colour levels to get rid of it but find it is more detrimental to the overall colour balance and return to the default.

Contrast is one of the areas in which the Sony falls down the most, as dark scenes really struggle with detail levels and any differentiation between light and dark areas. Blacks will go deep, but they'll lose a lot of the detail within them, whereas whites aren't able to punch through with the same purity that you'll see on the Samsung.

Warm on broadcast

Step down to Blu-ray and a playthrough of *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* and the performance is similar.

There's still no argument when it comes to crispness and clarity in brighter scenes, but we would like more fine detail and better contrast levels to really help make the picture stand out, particularly for daylight viewing. Move to broadcast viewing (there's only Standard HD on offer) and the colour palette of the X8305C takes a big turn for



A touchpad remote is available but the standard full-size item is easy to use

the warmer. This can work in its favour with some TV broadcasts, injecting an eye-catching vibrancy to a scene, but bright colours (particularly reds and greens) can look a little overblown and skin-tones a touch blushed.

Sharp HD on 4K

The Sony's upscaling performance is good, though, and it does a good job of keeping Full HD looking sharp on a 4K panel (though there is the expected drop in overall detail levels).

Standard-def is perhaps a little overdone in this respect, with detail smoothed over in an attempt to prevent too much noise breaking through.

It's understandable why Sony has taken this approach, but compare it with the Samsung UE40JU7000 and we'd take the extra detail on offer there even if it means a touch more noise thrown in as part of the process.

UPSCALE HEIGHTS

With little 4K content available, a test of a 4K TV is in its upscaling performance. The Sony does a good job of keeping Full HD looking sharp, but its standard-def is a little overdone. We prefer the extra detail on the Samsung, even if there is a touch more noise.



A great-value TV offering a lot for the money, but its main strengths lie with 4K and Blu-ray material. Upscaling performance is good though, and it does a good job of keeping Full HD sharp on a 4K panel

Thin sound

Sound performance is handled by two drivers, powered by a total output of 20W. You won't immediately find yourself reaching for a soundbar, but audio is a little thin and enclosed. Voices are clear but soundtracks aren't as expressive or engaging as we'd like, and overall it lacks body and subtlety.

There is only one, standard-sized, remote control in the box. A touchpad

remote is available separately. Not that we think you'll need it. The included remote is well laid out, with a shortcut for Netflix and a sizeable D-pad for navigation, with most of the controls you'll need laid out around it.

In the 43X8305C, Sony has produced a great-value TV that offers a lot for your money. Its strengths certainly lie with 4K and Blu-ray material though, with broadcast pictures on the warm side.

We want more from the contrast across the board too, and while detail levels are good there are competitors out there offering more.

For these reasons, we have to dock this Sony a star. For entry-level 4K at this price it's worth a look, but there are other sets around its price level that show what it takes to get the full five.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Clean, sharp picture across all sources; strong upscaling; detail levels good; well priced

AGAINST Android TV lacks apps; broadcast colour palette too warm; lacks contrast

VERDICT A worthwhile consideration for entry-level 4K, but the competition outpaces it



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TEST VERDICT**THE WINNER****Samsung UE40JU7000*** ₹83,900 ★★★★★

For picture quality alone, the five-star **Samsung UE40JU7000** is worth shelling out a little more for

It certainly seems that 2015 is the year 4K becomes a convincing option for most budgets and screen sizes, and at the bottom end of both sit these two sets from Samsung and Sony.

Although the Sony has a few extra inches on the Samsung, it actually has dropped 3D for this set. It's a tactic to consider when looking for the right TV in your budget - you may be able to get more for your money in other areas if you're willing to let 3D go.

However, even at its price the Sony could still do with some work on its performance in order to really prove its worth. 4K and Blu-ray performance is largely good, with a sharp, detailed picture, but the contrast needs improvement. Broadcast TV pictures can be overly warm too, with colours overdone and skin-tones verging on the unnatural. We dock it a star for these issues. By contrast (no pun intended), the Samsung throws up few

niggles at this price. Not only does it have all the bells and whistles, including Standard HD tuners and 3D, it also delivers where it really matters - in picture quality. Colours are superbly balanced, contrast-handling is top notch and there's a real depth and subtlety to images, which are pin-sharp and full of detail.

Both Smart TV systems are still works in progress, but Samsung's Tizen just about beats the Sony's Android TV here for content, plus it has the upper hand in the sound stakes too.

Overall, we'd say that it's worth spending the ₹83,900 for the Samsung. For that reason alone it would manage five stars, but it also continues the trend of what we've seen from other screen sizes within this range - a superb balance of features and performance that offers 4K television at a great price.

SYSTEM BUILDER

Now you have 4K TV at a reasonable price, you should partner your Samsung with these...

**Blu-ray player****Sony BDP-S4500** ₹13,990 ★★★★★

A tidy little box that impresses us with its speedy load times, unfussy controls and a wonderfully crisp and detailed picture

**Soundbar****QAcoustics Media 4** ₹45,000 ★★★★★

This Award-winning soundbar adds some much-needed weight, clarity and subtle detail to any flatscreen TV's sound

**Streaming service****Hotstar** from ₹free ★★★★★

With new shows and a vast catalogue of old favourites, Hotstar is now almost mandatory.

Total build from ₹NA**Facts & figures****Samsung UE40JU7000***

₹83,900 ★★★★★

- Type LED • Size 40in
- Resolution 4K (3840x2160)
- Smart Samsung Tizen • 3D yes, active • Wi-fi? Yes • Standard HD Yes • HDMI 4 • USB 3
- Dimensions (hwd) 59 x 92 x 27cm • Weight 10kg

WHAT HI-FI?
TEST WINNER**Sony KD-43X8305C***

₹92,900 ★★★★★

- Type LED • Size 43in
- Resolution 4K (3840x2160)
- Smart Android TV • 3D no
- Wi-fi? Yes • Standard HD Yes • HDMI 4 • USB 3 • Dimensions (hwd) 60 x 96 x 19cm
- Weight 12kg

BIGGER ON THE INSIDE THAN THE OUTSIDE

For music on the move, a battery-powered wireless speaker could be just the thing. Don't be fooled by their size, these little beauties pack a powerful punch

Here we are, at the sweet spot for wireless speakers. Chances are, if you want something between entry level and stay-at-home midrange, your budget is here - between ₹14,000 and ₹35,000. And, if you've begun your search already, you'll not have failed to notice you're probably the best catered-for section of the market. But with so many manufacturers promising the earth and failing to deliver, that isn't always the greatest position in which to be.

Here, we test eight new speakers to find the words portable and wireless, when applied to speakers at least, needn't always be synonymous with inferior and small.

What's on test?
Audio Pro Addon T3
BenQ treVolo
Fugoo Tough
Onkyo X6
Bose Soundlink Mini II
JBL Xtreme
Ministry of Sound Audio M
Cambridge G5





Audio Pro Addon T3

₹29,999 ★★★★★



Koala. That's what we see here. Round eyes, big black nose; a koala.

What we feel is a product with build quality belying its price tag. The Addon T3 isn't handbag-friendly, but that helps it feel like a more serious piece of kit.

It's still portable, though. It's robust, not heavy, the handle is a canny touch, and battery life is up to 30 hours at half volume or 12 playing at full blast. Does the sound justify the extra bulk though?

Balance and heft

Everything about this speaker so far suggests we'll be impressed, yet we've heard too many wireless speakers in this price bracket to request the Earth. So when we hear Bauhaus's *Bela Lugosi's Dead* we are pleasantly surprised.

In the drum kit - the unmistakable kick, hi-hat and snare-rim rhythm with which the piece starts - you hear the size of the room immediately, giving it a more complex and natural feel than you may have imagined possible in this

field, and that texture remains unconfused as it is treated with delay. It is at once bigger and subtler than anything else we've heard in this test.

As the song grows, first with bass and then with guitar, you notice not only the depth of the frequency range but its agility and respect for its surroundings. The low end made feasible by that larger chassis doesn't commandeer the balance. It does just what it should, offering stability when the vocal begins.

And that is where the upgrade on something such as the Ultimate Ears Roll - a humdinger at ₹9926 - is justified. Sure, the Addon T3 is equally ideal for the garden or poolside, but you'll be sufficiently engaged by its level of expression to listen for longer periods.

Fun, fun, and more fun

This isn't going to replace your hi-fi system but it is comfortable, and more communicative and absorbing, being more than merely a vessel for

Koala or panda?
Either way, the
T3 bears closer
examination

background music at a teddy-bear's picnic. Rachmaninov's *Concerto No2 in C Minor* is going to lack its usual gravitas on any sub-₹30,000 wireless speaker, but the T3 stays within its comfort zone. It focuses on making instruments sound as wholesome as possible without sacrificing organisation or range. We get through all three movements - longer than half an hour - without fidgeting.

From Beastie Boys' *Intergalactic* to Prince Fatty and Horseman's *Insane In The Brain*, that level of expression makes fun, well, fun. It's bouncy, full of attack and not slowed by the extra bass weight. There's an auxiliary input for your telly/iPod/whatever, and a USB port to charge your phone.

We're really unable to fault Audio Pro on this one. We're pretty sure you'll make a point of taking the T3 with you when you hear what ₹29,999 can buy.

The feel is more complex and natural than you may have imagined possible, and that texture remains unconfused. It is bigger and subtler than anything we've heard in this test

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Full sound; good balance; expressive and dynamic; faultless build

AGAINST Size won't suit everyone

VERDICT Audio Pro's wireless speaker ignores the gimmicks and focuses on delivering the best sound possible for the money



BenQ treVolo

₹33,490 ★★★★★

You have to admire BenQ's confidence. If, says their website, the treVolo isn't the best Bluetooth speaker you've ever heard, you can send it back for a refund.

Champion of contrast

Now that seems a bit like putting your house on India to win the FIFA World Cup. That's because what they have here is a portable electrostatic speaker. The benefits of electrostatics are lower levels of harmonic distortion and lots of detail, but to work convincingly they have to be about the size of a human adult. The treVolo's electrostatic drivers are smaller than our hands.

Still, the treVolo is a striking design. Its wings and perforated fascia put us in mind of an intergalactic cheese grater. On the lower back panel there's a charge point (battery life is up to 12 hours), auxiliary input and output, and a USB port. There are the usual buttons for power, Bluetooth pairing, play/pause and volume, as well as one for changing

the sound mode. A green light signifies 'pure' ("minimal equalisation"), red for 'warm' ("richer sound with more bass") and blue is 'vivid' ("emphasis on lead vocals and instruments").

With the sound set to 'pure', we play Lau's *Hibna*. There's decent body to Kris Drever's acoustic guitar as it strolls through the intro, and it is expressive enough to set the pace for the rest of the piece. Aidan O'Rourke's melody is buoyant enough on the fiddle, kept moving by the guitar and Martin Green on the accordion.

There isn't a huge amount of space in here, even with such a small-scale arrangement, and it doesn't feel overly enthusiastic, but we're not in yet in the realms of being uninterested.

Champion of contrast

Switching modes to 'vivid' engenders a little liveliness, and helps separate the instruments somewhat by bringing out more of the fiddle, but it isn't on the

You wouldn't
mistake the treVolo
for anything else in
an identity parade

level of other speakers in the test. On busier textures and vocals, as in Morrissey's *Kiss Me A Lot*, dynamics, expression and space are all lacking. What should be an arms-open-wide flourish feels claustrophobic and limp. Moz's voice lacks focus even in 'vivid' mode. It needs more space, more attack.

We were always sceptical about the idea of a portable electrostatic speaker, without willing it to fail. For BenQ to have pulled it off would have been quite astounding. Sadly, we're left wishing they had just focused on making great sound rather than groundbreaking technological advances. The sound is okay, but we've heard much better than this in only an eight-strong test.

Unless you've already fallen head-over-heels for its quite original design, we would suggest placing your money elsewhere until you can find space in your house for the real thing.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Decent amount of detail with modest arrangements; striking aesthetics

AGAINST Lacks significant expression; can sound smaller than expected

VERDICT BenQ is trying to push boundaries, but the treVolo is no more than okay-sounding

The treVolo's wings and perforated fascia put us in mind of an intergalactic cheese grater. Sadly, we're left wishing they had focused on great sound rather than great tech advances

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Optoma



Fugoo Tough

₹18,890 ★★★★★

“Three, two, one, ACTIVATE!”

If you understand that reference, well done, you watched *Robot Wars*. For those who didn't get it, this was a TV programme in which the Fugoo Tough could easily have been a contestant.

Though missing wheels and a circular saw, the Tough might have done well against Sir Killalot. It's mudproof (yes, that is a thing), shockproof, waterproof and claims to go for 40 hours. “Barriers are meant to be broken, your Bluetooth speaker isn't,” says Fugoo.

Energetic and coherent

There are six drivers: a tweeter and bass/mid-range driver on front and back, and a passive bass radiator at each end. The intended result is 360-degree sound – pretty important if it's going to be heaved around – with a frequency range belying its diminutive stature.

Aptly, perhaps, we kick off with the colossal psychedelia of Tame Impala's *Elephant*. Given its ultra-active target

market, we probably shouldn't be surprised by the liveliness of the sound. The Tough positively struts through the offbeat rhythm changes, affording plenty of energy while not losing sight of that laid-back Australian cool. You can hear those bass radiators working on the chugging guitars, and the sound remains very coherent as we throw the speaker around.

There is an issue: treble. At the start it sticks out as a bit harsh, but as it goes on our ears begin to ring. Higher up the frequency range, percussion sounds lightweight, detaching it from kick drums and toms (which have a decent amount of weight) to send the whole rhythm section a little off kilter.

Coarse treble

There's a similar lack of solidity to vocals that, in a range of voices from Leonard Cohen on *In My Secret Life* to Karen O in Yeah Yeah Yeahs' *Gold Lion*, reduces believability. Even if the treble

The Fugoo looks like it would cope with a building site as well as a festival venue

weren't so coarse, that would definitely remove an element of satisfaction from listening to the Tough.

Of course, the thinner the original recording, or the less composed it is in the treble, the more difficult it becomes to listen to a speaker over-cooking the top end. Unfortunately, it undoes much of what's good about the speaker.

There's a lot that Fugoo has got right here. In terms of robustness, there really isn't anything else on the market at this price that can compete.

The sound isn't entirely offputting either. It's rhythmic, there's a decent amount of bass weight and a reasonable amount of detail.

We just think you'd be better off buying something which won't tire you out when listening to it for long periods, and giving it more care than you would need to give to the Tough. After all, sound is surely what matters in the end.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Lively sound; good amount of bass weight; as tough as the name suggests

AGAINST Harsh treble; lack of body

VERDICT Treble aside, the overall sound is fairly decent – but it feels as if Fugoo has spent too much time making the Tough tough

The Tough positively struts through the offbeat rhythm changes, affording plenty of energy while not losing sight of that laid-back Australian cool, but there is an issue: treble



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Light source unit - 5 years or 10,000 hours, whichever comes first from the date of purchase.

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Onkyo X6

₹NA ★★★★★



Not long ago people were carrying around mobile phones larger than the Onkyo X6. There is something to be said for the obscure in wireless speaker design - the market is filling so fast, of course you need to stand out - but, if you can make a bar like this sound good and be affordable, you can dispense with science-fiction movie props.

Slick curvature

That isn't to say the X6 is unbecoming. We like its slick curvature and contrast of black on silver. It's not the smallest, or lightest, speaker on the market but it appears to have the trade off between portability and bulk just about right.

Scout over the body, which encases two full-range drivers and two side-firing passive radiators, and you'll find the usual: auxiliary input and USB port for charging your phone round the back, and buttons across the top for power, Bluetooth pairing, answering calls and adjusting volume. But we think the

button on the far right is rather canny. Including MULTIPAIR, allowing you to swap instantly between yours and your friends' mobile devices, deserves a pat on the back.

Attacking percussion

The JBL Xtreme looks as if it could have given birth to the X6. That doesn't mean something of this size can't be better overall, but you shouldn't expect the same scale of sound.

Nonetheless, it doesn't feel squashed in when we play City And Colour's *What Makes A Man?* The vocal and acoustic guitar are soaked in natural reverb, but helped by decent organisation there's enough space to make sense of the soundstage. Although the banjo, which plinks its way in later on, occupies a similar frequency range to the guitar, it feels far from claustrophobic as their picking patterns interlock.

Balance is important for a speaker of this size. While this arrangement isn't

Design is more baguette than Bauhaus, but the bulk is reassuring

overly adventurous in terms of range, there is a nice amount of body to the vocal without muddying the low end of the guitar with too much bass, and the treble is fairly sweet. Dynamics aren't overly expressive, but it's a decent enough performance anyway.

Our satisfaction doesn't change with our playlist, either. Even tracks such as Gallows' *Rolling With The Punches*, while remaining a scathing attack on the senses, are not a harsh or difficult listen. The MULTIPAIR function accepts there'll be a range of music played on the X6, and Onkyo has created a speaker that deals with each of them equally.

If you're wondering why you'd pick the X6 over a speaker such as the Addon T3, which is certainly a sonic upgrade, then it isn't for you. The X6 is for those looking for something versatile that can also slip into your rucksack without sacrificing half your picnic.

There is a nice amount of body to the vocal without muddying the low end of the guitar with too much bass, and the treble is fairly sweet. Dynamics are decent enough too

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Decent detail, dynamics and organisation; well built and easily portable

AGAINST Doesn't have the scale or subtlety of larger speakers

VERDICT Overall, a decent sound. For its size, you'll struggle to find better at the price

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Bose Soundlink Mini II

₹18,000 ★★★★★



And so we come to the baby of the group. Standing only 5.1cm tall, the Bose SoundLink Mini II truly is palm-sized.

Depth on acoustics

It is a fairly weighty baby, however. There is no flimsiness or fragility, and the design is clean. Our review product is a smart two-tone grey, though we think the black alternative is equally slick, and covers are available if you want something a little more jazzy.

External features are kept to a minimum. There are the usual buttons for power, pairing (linking and switching between two devices) and volume, and an incognito pair of jacks on the side for USB charging (ten hours claimed maximum life) and auxiliary input.

Beneath the shell, providing much of that bulk, is what Bose describes as "an innovative driver configuration", designed to give you a fuller, more bass-heavy sound than you might expect from a speaker this size. The key,

as ever, is getting that low end balanced and taut. That is what we are yet to hear, especially at this price.

That extra depth is immediately clear as we play José González's *Heartbeats*. Both nylon-string acoustic guitar and vocal are exceedingly rich, offering the warmth of a winter's night by an open fire. There's an impressive amount of space too, letting each part breathe and offering extra dimension to the doubled vocal. The dynamics are subtle but pleasantly expressive.

Bass-heavy balance

Testing the agility of that bass with more weighty tracks such as Future Islands' *A Dream of You and Me*, we're left in two minds. There's a bass-heavy balance that removes the element of space and a great amount of the detail in sparse tracks. But it isn't altogether boomy or distorted - it does as good a job as anything we've heard at this price and of this stature. Of course it struggles

The Bose's clean design and weighty presence deliver a feeling of quality

a little more with songs that are busier or more coarse in the low end but, even when we play Queens of the Stone Age's *A Song For The Dead*, it doesn't ever become a difficult listen.

What the SoundLink Mini II does well - adding great stability and richness to the mid and treble frequencies in acoustic tracks - is undermined by the fact that it loses all that as soon as you add a bass guitar or similar. We'd rather sacrifice some of that warmth and bass weight for better detail and expression.

Still, if we agree that there is a market for tiny speakers with more than their fair share of low end, Bose has made one that stands up to its rivals, many of whom lose all sense of composure with some of our test tracks. If you're in that camp, you'll probably be taking a Mini II home. If not, we'd suggest you compromise on price, size or frequency range, but not overall sonic capability.

Bose has made a tiny speaker with more than its fair share of low end, and one that stands up to its rivals, many of whom lose all sense of composure with some of our test tracks

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Full bodied; impressive bass weight; very easily portable

AGAINST Lacks a bit of tautness and agility in the low end

VERDICT Good if you like plenty of bass weight, but don't want to sacrifice portability

JBL Xtreme

₹224,990 ★★★★★



When you look at the JBL Xtreme, you see a brute. Its broad shoulders and barrel chest promise power.

It feels tough, too. The passive bass radiators at either end of the drum are the only areas you'd feel tentative about poking around in. The rest you feel could be subjected to a considerable amount of torture. That heavyweight material adds a little to its weight (2.1kg), but it remains a manageable size and there's a strap in the box for easy carrying.

Rich and solid

It isn't fussed by rain, either. As usual, splashproof doesn't mean waterproof, so no submerging it in the bath, but the Xtreme is quite happy for you to give it a quick wash under a running tap. Just remember to zip its dress back up first.

There's a charge point, auxiliary input and two USB outputs for your phone to share in some of the Xtreme's claimed 15-hour battery life - but they're not waterproof, so keep them dry.

We're eager to experience the muscle, but begin with something more low key: The Tallest Man On Earth's *Love Is All*. JBL captures the lo-fi recording nicely - the guitar warbles and the room is laid bare - but there's a richness that keeps the sound from becoming clinical.

The solidity doesn't compromise dynamics here, either. The guitar strings are allowed to bounce with the rhythm of Kristian Matsson's finger-picking. His vocal is similarly expressive and keeps its charm despite a thin recording.

Bold vocal

Then the opening guitar hook of Ryan Adams's *Gimme Somethin'* *Good* slashes its way through, followed by a thumping drum kit. A good wireless speaker is indiscriminate about the music it plays best, so let's just say the Xtreme feels very comfortable.

The vocal is equally bold. The sound is undeniably big; it is the power we were expecting at first glimpse.

With broad shoulders and a barrel chest, the Xtreme is a powerful brute of a speaker

Detail shortfall

If there is a criticism, it is that the low end doesn't show the agility or lightness of feet we'd really like. The detail shown throughout the rest of the frequency range is lacking down there, and when we shift to a song in which the energy comes from a dancing bass line, such as Bedouin Soundclash's *Gyasi Went Home*, we'd like a little more grip.

To tighten things up we try a range of tables, a bookcase, speaker stands and the floor. Results vary, but we are never truly satisfied. A more practical solution, given the absence of options, is to adjust the EQ on your phone or music player.

We'd certainly recommend you take a listen. You may find the Xtreme's fortes - and it has many - justify a little work to find the right balance. If so, this is a versatile wireless speaker with which you can certainly have a lot of fun.

A good wireless speaker is indiscriminate about the sort of music it plays best, so let's just say that the Xtreme feels very comfortable. The sound is undeniably big

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Full, large-scale sound; careful with dynamics; solidly built

AGAINST Low end is a little heavy on its feet

VERDICT Bold and powerful, but capable of great subtlety, the JBL Xtreme only needs a slightly tighter bass to lead the class



Ministry of Sound Audio M

₹14,830* ★★★★★

Once upon a time, nightclubbing on a shoestring meant smuggling in a couple of tins down the front of your trousers. With the Audio M, Ministry of Sound appear to be offering an alternative.

For those who can get it, there is easy access to all eight channels of Ministry of Sound's own radio station and, on Friday and Saturday nights, you can hear what's being played in the club in real time.

Attacking percussion

The Audio M is far from flashy. We thought it somewhere between waste-paper bin, dehumidifier and R2-D2 in mourning (which suits our taste down to the ground), and it feels built to last. The front grill conceals a tweeter and mid/bass driver, vertically aligned, big enough to give your music some welly.

Through a range of strokes, taps and swipes, a disc on the speaker's crown allows you to alter volume, change track and so on. It certainly makes the kit look

smarter, but a lot of the time we find it a tad temperamental and spend more time trying to find the right volume than listening to a song.

We jump in with Fake Blood's *I Think I Like It*. The Audio M is more-than capable of delivering a track such as this with a great spirit. There's a cracking amount of attack to the percussion and a mix that brings the infectious cut-up melody to the fore. Okay, it isn't going to turn your gran's spare bedroom into a super-club - the balance is left wanting somewhat in the bass - but there's enough oomph, and it's great fun.

Delicate dynamics

It does lack a little detail when there's a lot going on. We move on to Faithless's *Not Going Home*, a similarly dance-friendly track but with more focus on vocals, and find, as usual, that's when it matters most. But it still isn't enough to ruin the party. Though you lose some clarity and the warmth that helps Maxi

The design won't suit everyone, but the Audio M is certainly built to last

Jazz's voice become more lifelike, the Audio M focuses really well on the what's important for the style of music.

That detail returns somewhat when the speaker isn't overloaded with thick textures. We play Roddy Woomble's *I Came In From The Mountain* and are equally pleased by the delicacy of the dynamics with acoustic guitar and vocal. There's a nice amount of space between instruments and harmonies too; the treble is perhaps a bit bright, but overall it's a sweet reproduction. More warmth for the vocal would help it bed in and feel more realistic, though.

Getting freebies often means what you're actually paying for isn't that good, but the Audio M is a pleasant surprise. It isn't the most sonically outstanding wireless speaker in the test, but, especially for ₹15,000, there's plenty of wallop, versatility and entertainment.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Lively enthusiasm; decent level of detail; app is packed with features

AGAINST Lacks some bass weight; can be bright at top end

VERDICT We'd prefer an all-rounder, but the dance-focused Audio M is worthy

The Audio M is far from flashy. We thought it somewhere between waste paper bin, dehumidifier and R2-D2 in mourning, which suits our taste down to the ground

Cambridge Audio G5

₹25,100 ★★★★★



Cambridge Audio knows how to build class-leading wireless speakers. The Go, best sub-₹15,000 speaker at last year's *What Hi-Fi?* Awards, is an entry-level yardstick, so we were keen to test the G5.

Laid-back style

The G5 design isn't dissimilar to the Go. It's larger, as you'd expect, but it's still a thin, laid-back oblong. On its scalp are buttons for power, volume, changing input and answering calls; on its lower back are ports for auxiliary input, USB charging (the G5 has a claimed 14-hour battery at full volume), line out and A/B switch for pairing multiple speakers to play your music simultaneously. It's the unfussy, gimmick-free class we've come to expect from Cambridge Audio.

Being in an amorous mood, we begin with Father John Misty's *I Love You, Honeybear*. The G5 takes no issue, happily expressing the whimsical sway of acoustic guitar, piano, string section and drum kit with reasonable detail.

The vocal, too, is clear despite being awash with reverb and doubled lines. That we find our way to the album's third song, *True Affection*, before changing tack shows how easy it is to listen to this speaker. The G5 gets our strong recommendation on that count.

Mid-range performer

We move on to Sigur Rós's *Sæglópur*, and again it is a clean listen. Our interest is certainly held, though we aren't altogether moved. The breadth of the soundscape is satisfactory - we certainly aren't expecting this to sound like a live performance, and it isn't exactly small-sounding - but it's also not quite as extensive as some others in this test.

The build-up, continual through the first five minutes, is expressed clearly, as is the song's slow death, but it isn't as dynamically intricate as, say, Audio Pro's Addon T3 or the JBL Xtreme. There are also a lot of strings and guitars drenched in reverb and delay here, and again the

The G5's design is classy, as we've come to expect from Cambridge Audio

G5 sits somewhere in the middle of this test in terms of their organisation.

Balanced and detailed

To test its frequency range, we try the G5 with Beck's *Go It Alone* - a song anchored by the bass guitar. Where this speaker is comfortable, it's sure-footed, but everything else it almost omits.

We've heard too many products that try to squeeze in too much low end at the expense of balance, dynamics and detail, so we're glad that Cambridge Audio has toed this side of the line. That's not to say there isn't sufficient weight in kick drums and the like. Just be aware that this isn't going to shake you off your deckchair.

We like the G5. Though perhaps not such a standout performer as the Go in its price bracket, we'd happily take one home knowing we'll get a balanced, detailed and focused sound.

The breadth of the soundscape is satisfactory - we aren't expecting this to sound like a live performance - but it isn't quite as extensive as some other wireless speakers in this test

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Balanced sound; easily listenable; sleek design and well built

AGAINST Though good at the price, dynamics and organisation are beaten by others

VERDICT In isolation we have few complaints, but it loses ground against some rivals

TEST VERDICT**THE WINNER****Audio Pro Addon T3 ₹29,999 ★★★★★**

A great-sounding wireless speaker at a reasonable price, the **Audio Pro Addon T3** is a clear winner

At only ₹29,999, the Audio Pro Addon T3 wins hands down. In fact, we think you'd have part with getting on for twice as much to beat its sound with another battery-powered wireless speaker.

We really made the T3 work for those five stars with an eclectic mix of music, and not once did it miss a step. The sound is at once large and refined; you feel the force of sweeping post-rock soundscapes as much as the delicateness of a lo-fi bedroom recording. Detail is great for this size, as is the warmth and body it gives voices.

Its level of expressiveness is quite astounding given what the product is. Voices and instruments already sound

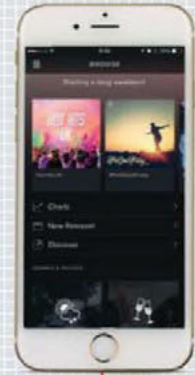
rich, but the T3's sympathetic rendering of dynamics creates a sense of losing the mindset of this being a recording. It simply keeps us engaged, allows us to enjoy ourselves and forget we're not listening to something much larger and more expensive.

Our other five-star product, the JBL Xtreme, offers a generally bigger sound, but doesn't quite have the balance, agility or dynamics of the T3. Others, such as the Onkyo X6, Bose Soundlink Mini II and, in particular, the Fugoo Tough, are more easily portable but are considerably behind on sound.

So there you have it; not only do you get a great sound wherever you want it, you've saved yourself a few bucks too.

SYSTEM BUILDER

During our tests, we made the Audio Pro Addon T3 work hard for its five stars. These two extras will show what it's capable of...

**Smartphone****Apple iPhone 6 from ₹37,900 ★★★★★**

Product of the Year winner at the 2014 What Hi-Fi? Awards, the iPhone 6 handles your music better than its smartphone rivals

**Streaming service****Apple Music ₹120 per month ★★★★★**

We're great champions of high-res music streaming services, but with a ₹27k wireless speaker, Apple Music is the obvious choice

Total build from ₹68,019**Facts & figures****Audio Pro Addon T3** **WHAT HI-FI? TEST WINNER**
₹29,999 ★★★★★

3.5mm input yes • Charging yes
• Subwoofer out no • Headphone out no
• Remote control no • Detachable speakers no • Battery yes

Fugoo Tough
₹18,890 ★★★★★

3.5mm input yes • Charging yes
• Subwoofer out no • Headphone out no
• Remote control no • Detachable speakers no • Battery yes

BenQ treVolo
₹33,490 ★★★★★

3.5mm input yes • Charging yes
• Subwoofer out no • Headphone out no
• Remote control no • Detachable speakers no • Battery yes

JBL Xtreme
₹24,990 ★★★★★

3.5mm input yes • Charging yes
• Subwoofer out no • Headphone out no
• Remote control no • Detachable speakers no • Battery yes

Bose Soundlink Mini II
₹18,000 ★★★★★

3.5mm input yes • Charging yes
• Subwoofer out no • Headphone out no
• Remote control no • Detachable speakers no • Battery yes

Ministry of Sound Audio M
₹NA ★★★★★

3.5mm input yes • Charging yes
• Subwoofer out no • Headphone out no
• Remote control no • Detachable speakers no • Battery yes

Cambridge Audio G5
₹25,100 ★★★★★

3.5mm input yes • Charging yes
• Subwoofer out no • Headphone out no
• Remote control no • Detachable speakers no • Battery yes

Onkyo X6
₹17,192* (Approx.) ★★★★★

3.5mm input yes • Charging yes
• Subwoofer out no • Headphone out no
• Remote control no • Detachable speakers no • Battery yes



Sony HT-RT5

Yamaha YSP-1600

RT

What lies beneath

Nowadays, there's far more to those slimline sound-boosters under the telly than meets the eye. We've lined up four top models to see which is best

A soundbar is fast becoming the new centrepiece of your living room. Sure, a big shiny TV screen may soak up all the attention, but it's no fun watching the latest Marvel superlick without exciting sound to back up the action on screen. Packed with features such as HDMI connectivity, Bluetooth streaming and even the promise of true surround sound, these soundbars are trying to bring the cinema into your living room. Let's have a listen...



Orbitound A-70

Philips Fidelio B5

AUX •



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Vashi, Navi Mumbai 400 703.



Orbitsound A-70 ₹50,000*(Approx.) ★★★★★

Orbitsound's flagship A70 soundbar is aiming to impress, with the ₹50k price tag pointing towards a serious approach to boosting your TV's sound. It uses Orbitsound's proprietary airSOUND technology, which aims to eliminate sweetspots by dispersing sound into a room using side-firing speakers. It also features aptX Bluetooth streaming and comes with a wireless subwoofer.

Of monsters and men

With *Jurassic World* playing on Blu-ray, you get a fairly expansive sound from the A70. It may not be big enough to fill a room, but it's a clear step up from a TV. The crisp sound is prominent, with voices placed firmly in the centre and sharply etched - in a good way. You can hear every line of dialogue clearly, even with the roaring and stomping going on.

It's a solid, meaty sound. The A70's treble does stick out a little (shattered glass has a spiky edge), and it does have the tendency to harden up when we're

watching a thin-sounding daytime telly programme. With films though, it stays just under control. The bass isn't overpowering - it just adds a great deal of punch, weight and solidity to the sound.

There's a good sense of drama, with special effects banging and crashing about merrily. The A70 doesn't have the spacious soundfield of Yamaha's YSP-1600, but its dynamics are punchier and more satisfying.

While you can play music from your smartphone using Bluetooth, we wouldn't recommend it. There's a lack of integration between the bar and the sub that gets emphasised, leaving the low end booming away inelegantly. It's a surprisingly underwhelming performance compared with how decent Blu-ray movies sound.

Discreet and good-looking

The A70 is slim and has a low profile, so it won't obstruct the screen when placed in front of your TV. It's a nicer, glossier finish than Orbitsound's older bars, but it doesn't feel quite as premium as rivals such as Yamaha's YSP-1600 or the Philips Fidelio B5. However, both 'bar and sub are sturdily built. The S3 subwoofer - which links to the bar via Bluetooth - has a matt-black finish.

There are three drive units positioned at the centre of the A70: two 5cm drivers and one 25mm tweeter. Additional side-firing units are housed at either end of the bar.

Touch-sensitive controls on the left side of the unit light up when tapped, showing controls for power, volume, inputs, Bluetooth and NFC. All these are easy to adjust using the slim remote which, happily, is more substantial than credit card-style variants.

The buttons are responsive, and you can tweak the bass and treble levels. Small dots on the 'bar show how far up or down the tonal controls go. The display also shows which input you're using.

Connectivity is straightforward, with an optical and 3.5mm analogue the only physical inputs. Unlike all the other 'bars in this test the A-70 has no HDMI inputs, but the optical connection works fine plugged straight to your TV.

The A70 is a step above Orbitsound's previous efforts. Yamaha's YSP-1600 offers bigger and better surround sound, but the A70's punchy dynamics, solid presentation and crisp way with voices is exciting. Its performance with music isn't up to the same level, but that meaty sound is worth a listen as long as you stick with films.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Crisp and clear with voices; good weight and attack; good build quality; easy to use

AGAINST Could be more refined and balanced; spiky treble; average performance with music

VERDICT Exciting to listen to with films, but not the most refined contender here

Side-firing speakers are employed to help disperse the sound evenly in the room



Philips Fidelio B5 ₹55,900 ★★★★★

The Fidelio B5 is a shape-shifter - a soundbar that, thanks to two speakers that detach from it and then link with it wirelessly, can transform itself into a surround sound package or even a Bluetooth-powered multi-room system. The B5 is clever enough to recognise when the ends detach, the 'surround on-demand' option on each flicking on to transform them into rear speakers.

Impressive in any configuration

This is no gimmick. Whether you're using it as a straightforward soundbar or as a surround system, the B5 delivers hugely entertaining and viable surround-sound performance.

The B5 breathes texture and dynamics into an episode of *Doctor Who*, with the special effects sounding much punchier than they would through a TV's speakers. Voices are clear, subtle and packed with character.

The sound is satisfyingly solid, too. There's an authoritative weight running throughout the balanced frequency range, lending solidity to the smooth top end as well as delivering a great deal of wallop and grip to the bass.

With the thunderous action of *Mad Max: Fury Road* on screen, the B5 is nuanced enough to distinguish the various textures and layers of the different engines roars. There's also an open and spacious quality to the sound unmatched by any of our other three contenders. Even *Pointless* sounds just that bit grander.

With the (battery powered and charged by the main unit) rear speakers deployed, that sense of immersion is enhanced. Unlike on the Sony HT-RT5, the rears don't attract undue attention. Instead, they subtly add atmosphere to the B5's performance, integrating seamlessly with the 'bar and subwoofer.

The B5 performs admirably with music too. Streamed over Bluetooth, Fiona Apple's *Every Single Night* is lively and detailed. Snap the rears back into place on the soundbar, and the song sounds more solid and cohesive.

The B5 looks every inch a lifestyle product, with its curved, flat design, elegant cloth finish and sleek aluminium panel. Build and finish quality is impeccable.

Under the cloth grille you find two 7.5cm drivers and two 25mm soft-dome tweeters, while each rear satellite contains one full-range driver. The downward-firing wireless subwoofer packs 90W of claimed power. It's tall but fairly slim.

Connection ports and possibilities

You get two HDMI inputs and an output with ARC (audio return channel) alongside single inputs apiece for coaxial, optical, and a pair of analogue RCAs. You can stream songs from your smart device using aptX Bluetooth too, or use NFC (near-field communication).

Both rear speakers can be switched into Bluetooth mode, and since they're completely wireless and easily portable, you can take them into different rooms. *Voilà!* - a multi-room system with no extra set-up, wires or fiddling with apps.

The Fidelio B5 is an excellent soundbar whose clever design and superior performance are sure to leave executives at Orbitsound, Sony and Yamaha looking worried.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Expansive, open sound; subtle detail and exciting dynamics; immersive surround sound; clever design; great features

AGAINST Nothing of note

VERDICT An ingenious product that delivers an immersive surround sound performance

The downward-firing subwoofer is slim, so it shouldn't take up much space





Sony HT-RT5 ₹60,000* ★★★★★

The Sony HT-RT5 is not your typical soundbar. It's a hybrid: half soundbar, half surround package.

If you want the convenience of a soundbar, but still want proper surround sound with the help of rear speakers, this 'home theatre system' is for you. All you need is space to put the kit, and a spare ₹60,000.

Sony calls the HT-RT5 a 5.1 system, consisting of three drivers (a tweeter and two woofers) housed inside the bar, two rear speakers and a sub. The main bar is long and slim, with a sloped front so it doesn't obstruct the screen. All components are built to a high standard.

But the HT-RT5 isn't as neat a solution as a straightforward soundbar. You still need to find space for the two

compact rear speakers, which connect wirelessly to the main bar and need to be plugged into the mains, unlike those of the Philips Fidelio B5. The same goes for the rather large subwoofer. Sony helpfully provides a quick, accurate auto-calibration set-up and mic with the system too.

Speed and detail

Once everything is calibrated, we play the *Mad Max: Fury Road* Blu-ray and let the HT-RT5 roar into life. The soundbar delivers detail with clarity and speed, each guttural sound effect being crisply conveyed. It's fast, attacking and refined - but that's where the good news ends.

There's little weight or punch to the Sony's performance. It's too thin, with the midrange needing more solidity to convince. With music, that disconnect between the treble and bass is more pronounced, despite the clarity and detail on offer.

More worryingly, there's little sense of any cohesion between the channels because of poor integration between the speakers. The HT-RT5 doesn't spread sound wide enough, leaving a huge gap between soundbar and rear speakers.

There's decent control over the dynamics, with quieter moments making their mark against the thunderous action, but we want more authority to underpin that insight.

Sony here offers a generous three HDMI inputs and one output, which all

support 4K pass-through, DTS-HD and Dolby TrueHD soundtracks capability. A single optical output is also available.

The HT-RT5 uses Sony's own LDAC codec for higher-quality streaming over Bluetooth (instead of the more-popular aptX), while the soundbar also features NFC, wi-fi and ethernet, Spotify Connect and support for Google Cast. It can also be part of a multi-room system, using the SongPal app.

Those extensive features don't make up for that relatively disappointing performance. The thin, hard sound just isn't exciting enough, and the rear speakers don't quite deliver on the promise of surround sound. They also make this a clunky system. You might as well buy a full 5.1 speaker package.

In good company

In their own way, each of the other three soundbars here gets the better of this Sony. The HT-RT5 has agility and clarity, but the shortfall on engagement and lack of substance means it can't justify that premium price tag.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Clear and detailed; fast, attacking sound; good build quality and features; easy set-up

AGAINST Surround experience falls short; rivals offer neater solutions and better sound

VERDICT A pricey system with plenty of features, but ultimately it doesn't satisfy



Those two rear speakers are connected to the main bar wirelessly

customised home theatre packages for the discerning listener

Genie



- Aluminum die cast satellite speakers
- Magnetically shielded micro drivers with extended LF
- 2 colours: white/ black
- Wall mount
- Matched with AVR upto 100 watt/ channel

Sonus



- Highly braced MDF cabinet
- 3 way tower speakers
- Wall mount dipole surrounds
- 2 colours: rosewood/ black
- Matched with AVR upto 125 watt/ channel

Avant



- Highly braced double MDF painted cabinet
- 3 way tower speakers
- Wall mount dipole surrounds
- 2 colours: white/ black
- Matched with AVR upto 150 watt/ channel

Custom Theatre



- Aluminum-wood hybrid cabinet
- High power active speakers
- Upto 500 watt/ channel
- Dedicated 7.2 channel processor
- On wall/ In wall versions
- Multiple colours



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Yamaha YSP-1600 ₹52,990 ★★★★★

Soundbars from Yamaha's YSP range have impressed us with their ability to deliver an enjoyable surround sound from a single source. The YSP-1600 is no different: a ₹53k soundbar that aims to deliver a 5.1 surround experience, while offering the latest streaming features.

It's an admirable feat, and one that the Yamaha gets almost perfectly right. Hidden under the front grille is the beating heart of the YSP-1600: an array of eight speakers (each 28mm) that use Yamaha's DSP (Digital Sound Projector) to deliver – or 'beam' – that spacious 5.1 surround sound. These beam speakers can be aimed in relation to you via the remote control. It makes a subtle, but crucial, difference.

This all adds up to a wide spread of sound, with the beam-array speakers working their magic as the iconic theme from *Jurassic Park* kicks in. It's an arresting listen. While effects won't

whizz right the way around you as precisely as they would with a proper 5.1 speaker package, it comes close to that effect.

Clear detail and attacking notes keep your attention, while a smooth flow through the frequencies ensures the sound doesn't harden up at high volume. Detail definition is layered and refined.

There's no external subwoofer, but there are two built-in 8.5cm subs which help to produce a satisfying amount of weight in the YSP-1600's sound. It's top-heavy, admittedly, but it avoids sounding thin thanks to an authoritative low-end.

This goes for streamed music too – though we'd stay away from the 'Music' sound mode, which makes songs sound strangely hollow and less cohesive.

All the YSP-1600 is missing is a bit of insight and expression. Dynamically, it doesn't soar or dip as effortlessly as the Philips Fidelio, nor is it as punchy as the Orbitound A70. Voices, while clear and direct, could be fleshed out more.

Well built, well presented

Build quality is robust and the unit's brushed aluminium finish looks smart yet discreet. Factor in responsive controls and ease of use, and you have a soundbar that looks and behaves in a way that's worthy of its ₹53k price tag. It's quite long though, so will look best with TV screens of 48in and bigger.

You shouldn't want for connections: there's 4K-supporting HDMI, plus

optical and 3.5mm inputs as well as a subwoofer output in case you want some extra heft.

Hooking up your TV and Blu-ray using HDMI will let you see on-screen menus such as the sound settings, channel levels and dynamic range adjustments for the beam speakers.

Living the stream

Once it's connected to your home network via the ethernet port, you can stream songs stored on your computer or NAS device. If you have other Yamaha kit in your house you can also make the YSP-1600 the main controller of your home's music thanks to the new MusicCast multi-room feature.

But you don't need MusicCast to make the YSP-1600 special. As a single soundbar, it performs admirably, and the extensive streaming features will appeal to many. Yes, it could be punchier and more insightful, but if you want a taste of the surround-sound experience without going the whole hog, this one deserves your attention.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Excellent surround sound; refined detail; decent weight and control; features and build

AGAINST Could be more expressive and fluid; rivals offer more excitement

VERDICT As an alternative to full surround sound, this feature-laden soundbar is a treat

You wouldn't think
so to look at it, but
it has eight speakers
and two subwoofers



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TEST VERDICT

THE WINNER

Philips Fidelio B5 ₹54,990 ★★★★★

WHAT HI-FI?
TEST WINNER



If you can marry innovative, effective design and great sound, your rivals are going to struggle. The excellent **Philips Fidelio B5** proves the point

There's a pretty simple argument for choosing a soundbar over a discrete speaker package: it saves space, and there are far fewer cables trailing all over your living room.

That's where the Philips Fidelio B5 comes in. An elegant soundbar that turns into a 4.1 surround system with no extra wires or fiddly set-up, it's a clever bit of kit that lets you switch between stereo and surround sound seamlessly. And it sounds fantastic too, offering excellent integration, an expansive sonic spread and richly detailed, exciting dynamics.

The Sony HT-RT5 also attempts to deliver surround sound with the help of rear speakers, but it's not as successful

as the Philips, sounding insubstantial and hard. The clunky design isn't as neat a solution as its rival soundbars either, and it's no cheaper.

The Yamaha and Orbitsound fare better. The first delivers a huge spread of sound from just a single bar. What it lacks is sufficient excitement of the kind the Orbitsound A70 gives. That soundbar is an exhilarating listen thanks to attacking highs, rumbling lows and a meaty middle range. It just can't match the Yamaha's ability to deliver an expansive spread of sound. Nor does it have HDMI connectivity.

All of which leaves the Philips head and shoulders clear; a happy marriage of clever design and sonic excellence.

SYSTEM BUILDER

These options will provide pictures worthy of the Fidelio's premium sound



Television

Samsung UA55JU7500K ₹2,41,900

★★★★★

A stunningly detailed and immersive 4K screen that, like the Philips, is a product of elegant design.



Blu-ray player

Sony BDP-S4500 ₹13,990 ★★★★★

This Award-winning disc-spinner is one of our favourite sources for its crisp, smooth and punchy pictures with Blu-rays and DVDs alike.



Set-top Box

Tata Sky + Transfer HD from ₹9300

★★★★★

This is the box of choice if you want plenty of capacity, great catch-up services and quality sound and pictures.

Total build ₹3,20,180

Facts & figures



Orbitsound A-70

₹50,000* ★★★★★

Power 300W • Rear speakers No • Wireless subwoofer Yes • Inputs Optical, 3.5mm • Outputs None • Bluetooth Yes, aptX • Remote Yes • Dimensions (hwd) main unit 7 x 75 x 6.5cm; sub 34 x 14 x 34cm



WHAT HI-FI?
TEST WINNER

Phillips Fidelio B5

₹54,990 ★★★★★

Power 90W • Rear speakers Yes • Subwoofer Yes • Inputs 2 x HDMI, optical, coaxial, RCA • Outputs HDMI • Bluetooth Yes, aptX • Remote Yes • Dimensions (hwd) main unit 7 x 104 x 16cm; subwoofer 51 x 20 x 20cm



Sony HT-RT5

₹60,000* ★★★★★

Power 550W • Rear speakers Yes • Wireless subwoofer Yes • Inputs 3 x HDMI, optical • Outputs HDMI • Bluetooth Yes • Remote Yes • Dimensions (hwd) main unit 6 x 108 x 13cm; subwoofer 38 x 19 x 39cm



Yamaha YSP-1600

₹52,990 ★★★★★

Power 80W • Rear speakers No • Wireless subwoofer No • Inputs HDMI, optical, 3.5mm • Outputs HDMI, subwoofer • Bluetooth Yes • Remote Yes • Dimensions (hwd) 6.5 x 100 x 13cm

STEREO AMPLIFIERS

NO ARTIFICIAL SWEETENERS

The best amps are like the best conductors: they don't draw attention to themselves, they just let the music shine through – with its flavour intact

An amplifier is the heart of your system. It's the hub that pulls everything together. While components such as speakers and sources may make a more obvious contribution to the overall character of your set-up, it's the amp that really makes it tick.

In this test we've lined up three top contenders, all pitched just below the ₹1,50,000 mark. Rega's Elex-R is the reigning champion, newly crowned. This unassuming black box is fresh from claiming yet another Best Buy in our recent Awards – it's a terrific performer, no question. Against it are two competitors with formidable pedigrees – both the Arcam and Audiolab brands have established their reputations as a result of the success of their first products, in both cases middle-market amplifiers. Both marques have also spent decades fine-tuning their skills in this sector, delivering fine products with regularity.

Will all this experience pay off in this group test? Let's find out as both the Arcam A29 and Audiolab's 8300A muster all their talents and try to knock the reigning champion off its perch.

WHAT'S ON TEST



Arcam A29 ₹1,29,000



Audiolab 8300A ₹1,25,000



Rega Elex-R ₹1,12,500





ARCAM FMJ A29 ₹1,29,000



The A29 sounds huge, like a unit with hundreds of watts at its disposal, with a sense of authority - not least in the lower frequencies - no rival we've heard can match





Arcam's formidable reputation has been built on the sensible. It has always made practical products coupled to solid build and fine sound. There has been some variation, of course, but on the whole that's what the brand does - the ₹90,000 Award-winning A19 amp being a perfect example of this.

Judged on appearance alone, that model would appear to be the basis for its bigger brother on test here, the A29. But that's not the case, as Arcam has gone for something far more adventurous.

The company's engineers have chosen to look towards its more upmarket amplifier designs for inspiration instead, using their clever Class G electronic circuitry as the foundation for this new amp. Class G is a circuit configuration that switches between multiple power-supply rails to deliver lots of output with low levels of distortion without a matching thirst for electricity. In theory, pretty much ideal then.

Don't be fooled by the figures

The result is a relatively compact, but hefty, integrated with a claimed power output of 80W per channel. But that power figure doesn't tell the whole story. Even though this is a paltry 5W per channel more than the Audiolab 8300A - itself a rather substantial performer - the Arcam's delivery is considerably more muscular, as a listen to Stravinsky's *The Rite Of Spring* proves.

The A29 sounds huge, like a unit with hundreds of watts at its disposal, with a sense of authority no rival we've heard can match. That authority extends to low frequencies, which are rendered with class-leading weight. There's plenty of composure here, and the ability to organise the music's myriad instrumental strands into a convincing whole. This quality never wavers, even at higher volume levels.

Old smoothie

Tonally, things are smooth and refined - there's little trace of harshness, even when the amp is being pushed hard. Instruments are painted in a full-bodied manner and precisely focused in an impressive, expansive soundstage. Compared with this, the Audiolab sounds relatively small scale and a little cluttered, even though by general standards it certainly isn't.

Switch to Mountain Sound by Of Monsters And Men and a few chinks start appearing in the Arcam's armour. Yes, it sounds unusually big and powerful but it also lacks the sheer energy

and drive of the Rega Elex-R on test here, failing to capture the rhythmic precision of that amplifier or its dynamic subtlety.

Vocals lack a bit of enthusiasm, and the song's upbeat nature is toned down to give it a more relaxed, softer-edged feel. Such an approach has a certain appeal, but it loses a degree of excitement in the process.

We run through a range of music from Bruce Springsteen and OutKast all the way to Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata, and the results are much the same. The Arcam delivers a smooth, large-scale sound with ease but loses out to both the Rega and Audiolab 8300A when it comes to agility and transparency.

A winner with vinyl

We like the A29's phono stage. It's a moving-magnet design and has a fine grasp of insight and dynamics. Noise levels are decently low too, so it's a good effort. The same can be said of the headphone output. It retains the sonic strengths of the speaker connections, and that isn't always the case. Phono and headphone circuits are usually an afterthought, so it's pleasing that Arcam has taken such care in designing both.

Build is as solid as we've come to expect from the company's FMJ products. Finish is good too, though we think the Audiolab nudges ahead in this respect thanks to crisper edges and more positive-feeling controls.

Thank you for your inputs

The A29 is easy to use. It has a good range of line-level inputs - certainly enough to cope with some pretty complex stereo systems. Even the phono stage can be converted to one through the set-up menu, handy if you need more than the six offered. There's also a preamp output if you want to upgrade to bi-amping at a later date.

This amplifier lives up to Arcam's heritage. It ticks most boxes, offering a useful range of features while serving up an easy-going yet insightful sound. It's up against some talented competition though..

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Large-scale presentation; spacious soundstage; good range of features; capable phono stage and headphone output; fine build and finish

AGAINST Lacks a bit of excitement and drive

VERDICT An appealing mix of muscle and refinement, but it lacks the insight and sheer fun of the class leaders

ROUND THE BACK

If six line-level inputs isn't enough for you (unlikely), the phono stage can be converted into a seventh



AUDIOLAB 8300A ₹1,25,000



This isn't some mild evolution. The 8300A is a completely new design that stays true to the original's principles, but takes in current thinking in electronic design and technology





The Audiolab brand was established on the extraordinary success of its first product, the 8000A integrated amplifier. Back in the early 1980s this slim unit struck just the right chord with hi-fi buyers – its combination of quality build, sensible features and highly neutral sound proved a massive success.

The DNA of that original design has been retained through the company's subsequent efforts, including the 8300A on test here. But this isn't just some mild evolution. The 8300A is a completely new design that stays true to the original's engineering principles and aesthetics, but takes in the advantages of current thinking in electronic design and technology.

Linear power delivery

The core of the 8300A is its 75 watts-per-channel dual-mono power amplifier section. It is designed to be a highly linear, low-distortion performer into a wide range of speaker loads. The numbers seem to confirm this, as output rises to a claimed 115W into 4ohms and maximum current delivery is a notable 15A.

Build quality is as good as we've come to expect from Audiolab. The casework feels solid and beautifully finished, in either the black of our review sample or silver. We particularly like the crisp edges on the aluminium panels and the precise feel of the rotary controls. We like the remote too, it's a classy system controller that feels good to use.

Around the back you'll find line-level inputs, including a balanced XLR option, along with an adjustable MM/MC phono stage for those who use a turntable. There are also two sets of speaker outputs to make biwiring a little easier.

Information on view

This is the first time one of this brand's amplifiers has featured a display, which is useful for setting up the amp and making adjustments such as phono stage gain or the length of standby mode. It's large and easy to read, even from a distance. It's also a simple matter to separate the pre and power sections – handy if you want to use a superior external preamp or add more muscle through an outboard power amp.

We give the Audiolab a few days of running before we start listening seriously. The claimed output of 75W is relatively healthy, but it gives little indication as to how muscular the 8300A actually sounds. Its heft is second only to the supremely brawny Arcam.

Listen to a piece of music with wide dynamic extremes, such as Hans Zimmer's *The Battle* from the *Gladiator* OST, and this amp takes it all in stride. There's plenty of punch and the kind of weight at low frequencies that almost matches the Arcam and certainly betters the Rega. The presentation is big-boned too, with a wide stereo soundstage populated with nicely layered, crisply focused instruments.

We're also impressed by the 8300A's tonal balance. It's as even as they come, refusing to add unnatural colour or drama to the sound. We listen to smaller-scale recordings from the likes of Eric Bibb and Satie, and are impressed with the way this amp renders tonal textures. Its presentation is very clean too, as if distortion levels are way lower than the norm.

Despite all this obvious talent we're not totally bowled over with the overall performance. Compared with the Rega, the Audiolab is a little short in its sense of rhythmic drive. Nor does it communicate the changing momentum of a piece of music as well. That means the build-up of tension in The Dead Weather's *60 Feet Tall* isn't particularly obvious. Similarly, the sheer energy and drive in OutKast's *Hey Ya!* is diluted.

Looking for passion

It doesn't help that the amplifier isn't flawless in the way it communicates low-level dynamic shifts either. Nina Simone's vocals on the haunting *Strange Fruit* come through with less passion than we're used to, while the steadily growing power in Arvo Pärt's *Tabula Rasa* has more impact on both the Rega and Arcam.

The story is much the same through the phono stage. It's a decent effort, with low levels of noise and a good amount of insight, but there's not the authority of the line stages.

Make no mistake: the 8300A is an amplifier that can impress easily. Build is excellent and, like the Arcam, its large-scale sound gives it an edge over many rivals. It just doesn't have enough all-round sonic talent to gain an unreserved recommendation.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Big-boned presentation; plenty of muscle; clean and crisp sound; fine build and finish; sensible range of features; clear display

AGAINST Sound isn't the most engaging around

VERDICT The 8300A is a hugely capable product but sacrifices a little too much fun for our tastes

ROUND THE BACK

Connectivity is good, and there are two sets of speaker outputs to make life easier for those wanting to bi-wire



REGA ELEX-R

₹1,12,500



It has us hooked from the first note right through to the end of the piece. With hi-fi this good it's easy for any listening session to extend well into the night





When you've just bagged the 2015 *What Hi-Fi* Award for Best Stereo Amplifier between ₹70,000 and ₹1,50,000, you can probably walk into a group test such as this one with a fair degree of confidence. That said, even if the Rega can see off the Audiolab 8300A it still has to make its case alongside the new Arcam.

Think of this integrated as a more muscular version of the company's Brio-R (₹69,000) and you'll be pretty close to the mark. By using the much admired Brio-R as a base and adding circuit elements from the unquestionably talented Elicit-R (₹1,90,000) into the mix Rega has created one of the most talented sub-₹1,50,000 amplifiers we've heard.

Family traits

Anyone familiar with Rega's current amplifier range will find the Elex-R's sonic character entirely familiar. It delivers a fast, agile sound that's as rhythmically surefooted as we've heard at this level. Play a piece of music such as Alt J's *Breezblocks* and the Rega is right at home. It's happy to deliver that thickly layered bassline with power, and has no trouble rendering dynamic shifts and changes of pace with enthusiasm. There's an addictive sense of liveliness and energy on show here, something most rivals tend to tone down in the search for greater refinement.

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

Lean, but not to excess

Tonally, the Rega edges towards leanness, though if partnered with care (avoiding sources and speakers that err too far towards brightness or harshness) all will be fine. We use a range of speakers from Dali's lively Zensor 3s and B&W's 685s right the way to PMC's mighty Twenty 26s and at no point does the Rega fail to shine.

Of course, a power output of 72.5W into 8ohms (Rega likes to be specific, it seems) isn't enough to make the floor shake in really large rooms, but we think this amplifier is capable of decent levels in most set-ups.

Switching to Tchaikovsky's *Marché Slave Op.31* shows this amplifier can keep track of complex instrumental arrangements and is able to deliver scale with authority when required.

It's not quite as expansive-sounding as the Arcam, but compared with most rivals it's good. We're pleased with the resolution on offer, and at no time is there a sense that the Elex-R is overlooking subtleties in the music for the benefit of the bigger picture. We notice, again, that this amplifier is terrific at communicating the drama of the music. It has us hooked from the first note right through to the end of the piece. With hi-fi this good it's easy for any listening session to extend well into the night.

Move away from sound and the Rega remains on sure ground, as long as all you want is a traditional stereo amplifier. There are no digital inputs, though we think Rega would direct you to its talented DAC (named, appropriately enough, the Rega DAC) for number-crunching duties. Instead you get a good-quality MM phono stage, one that's talented enough to make the most of ₹1,50,000 turntable packages such as Rega own RP6 (there's a surprise). It's a relatively quiet circuit one which retains all the good sonic points we noted in the line stages.

All the ins and outs

There are four line-level inputs, one tape out and a single preamp output should you need to add a bit more muscle. That's probably enough for most purist stereo set-ups, though we would have liked to see a built-in headphone output.

Build quality is as solid as we've come to expect from Rega. The casework is functional rather than luxurious but it's finished neatly enough. Importantly, everything feels like it will last for years. That's the main unit, of course - we're a little disappointed with the remote handset, which lacks the quality feel we expect at this price, though it works well enough.

The Elex-R is a fine achievement. It's the kind of product that gets straight to the heart of the music and conveys all the emotion in the recording with ease. It also has more than enough talent across the board to shine even in this formidable company.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR An agile and articulate performer that gets straight to the heart of the music; fine rhythmic ability; good phono stage; solid build and good finish

AGAINST Remote handset could be classier

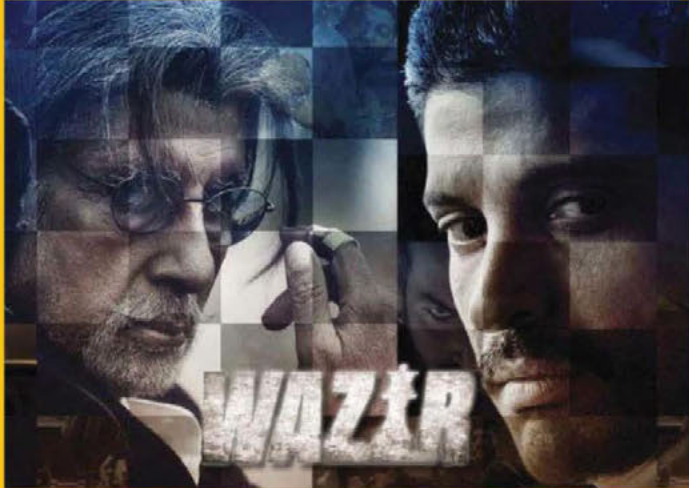
VERDICT Rega builds on the strengths of the excellent Brio-R to give us another terrifically musical amplifier

ROUND THE BACK

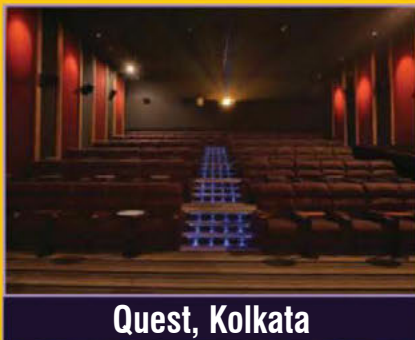
Much like the front panel, the back one is primarily functional. All the basics are present and correct



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TEST VERDICT**THE WINNER****Rega Elex-R** ₹1,12,500 ★★★★★**WHAT HI-FI?
TEST WINNER**

Don't be fooled by the **Rega Elex-R's** unassuming appearance. Its sonic prowess puts both its rivals in the shade – in this company, that's impressive

There are two good amplifiers here and one great one. The winner has to be Rega's terrific Elex-R. Get past its relatively basic appearance and you'll find an amplifier of rare quality. It's our clear favourite when it comes to sound quality – neither the Audiolab nor the Arcam can compete with it when it comes to insight, dynamic subtlety or rhythmic precision. Feed it the likes of Nirvana and it will rock with the best of them, delivering a sense of energy and drive that's truly infectious, yet ask the Elex-R to change gear with Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* and it will respond with all the finesse and subtlety anyone could wish for at this price. It truly is a complete performer and we love it.

Where does that leave the competition? They're both good, and we doubt anyone would

be disappointed with either in a well-matched system. The Audiolab may be an all-new design but its sonic signature is everything we've come to expect in the company's amplification. It sounds clean, precise and detailed – it lacks the organic feel of the Rega, but if you want a well featured, even-handed, analytical performer the 8300A is worth an audition. For us it's broadly equal in ability to the Arcam, though with a different balance of strengths.

The A29 is likeable. Neither of the others can match it in scale or sheer brute force, and they don't have its smoothness or huge soundstage either. While it falls behind the Rega in entertainment value and lacks the Audiolab's agility, there's compensation in its easy-going muscularity. And when it comes to build and features it's up with the best at the price.

SYSTEM BUILDER

All of these three have what it takes to complement the Elex-R's strengths

**Record player****Rega RP6/Exact** ₹1,35,000 ★★★★★

Rarely was a cartridge (the Exact) so well matched to a deck. The pair's detailed sound is perfect for the Rega's organic character.

**CD player****Naim CD5si** ₹1,39,875 ★★★★★

Enthusiasm and dynamic ability are the dominant traits here. They help make this Naim a great source for the Rega.

**Speakers****Neat Motive SX3** ₹1,50,000 ★★★★★

Beautifully articulate and musical speakers that integrate seamlessly across the dynamic range. They'll love working with the Rega.

Total build ₹5,37,375**Facts & figures****Arcam FMJ A29**
₹1,29,000 ★★★★★☆

Power 80W • **Inputs** 6 x line-level. 1 x MM phono, 1 x tape loop • **Outputs** 1 x preamp, 1 x speaker • **Remote control** Yes • **Finishes** Grey • **Dimensions (hwd)** 9 x 43 x 28cm

**Audiolab 8300A**
₹1,25,000 ★★★★★☆

Power 75W • **Inputs** 6 x line-level. 1 x MM phono, 1 x MC line-level • **Outputs** 1 x preamp, 1 x speaker • **Remote control** Yes • **Finishes** Black, silver • **Dimensions (hwd)** 8 x 44 x 33cm

**Rega Elex-R**
₹1,12,500 ★★★★★★

Power 73W • **Inputs** 4 x line-level. 1 x phono, 1 x tape loop • **Outputs** 1 x preamp, 1 x speaker • **Remote control** Yes • **Finishes** Black • **Dimensions (hwd)** 8 x 43 x 32cm

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OFF THE SHELF REFERENCE SYSTEM

We use only the best ingredients in the making of this magazine. This in-house system helps us to evaluate incoming products with more insight and accuracy, so you always get the best tests!



Arcam D33 DAC / UDP-411 BD/SACD Player

Capable of full high-resolution 24-bit/192kHz processing and SACD playback, this duo is state-of-art audio/video decoding



Denon AVR-X7200W

Dolby Atmos out of the box and an upgrade to Auro 3D on its way, this is the most future-proof AVR we could get our hands on, yet.



BlueSound Vault

All our CDs and music get stored and served by this elegant solution from the boys at NAD



Mark Levinson No. 585

An integrated amplifier with (almost) no equal, this 200 w/pc dual mono design is the pinnacle of cutting-edge tech along with a 32-bit DAC onboard for added ammo!



AudioQuest cables

Working truthfully between the various components, the DBS-equipped line of cables and interconnects helps us see and hear without any anomalies



PMC Twenty Series speakers

Using the Twenty.26 as mains, Twenty.C for centre, DB1 Gold and Wafer 1 for surrounds, this speaker suite is the ideal blend of neutrality and musicality



REL S5 Subwoofer

The cleanest and fastest way to add real weight and dynamics to our system was to introduce the brilliant S5 to the music and multichannel mix. A true legend



Also part of the system: Samsung 75H6400 LED TV, Apple Mac Mini, Audirvana Music Player, JBL Synthesis S800 power amp, Definitive Trinity Signature subwoofer

Bowers & Wilkins 803 D3

₹17,95,000

Few other brands have spawned as many legends as B&W, now more commonly known as Bowers & Wilkins. The 800 series has served as a reference for both wealthy enthusiasts and unforgiving recording engineers. With every iteration, the 800 series has leapfrogged the competition in terms of driver innovation and manufacturing techniques. The latest version is so brand new and exclusive that B&W can't make enough and even review samples are hard to come by. Which makes this review somewhat special and a bit of a coup. AudioVision India, the local distributors, were keen that we review the 803 D3 using the Telos ground noise isolators and so, it also became our first experience with these revolutionary devices. On first look, the 803 D3 - which is now the smallest model with the external head - doesn't look that different from last year's 802D. But on closer inspection, the greater acute angle of the turbine head and the new cone materials become obvious. In fact, B&W claims that a total of 863 changes have been made, making this practically an all-new design from the ground up. Only the revered diamond tweeter is carried over from the previous generation since the engineers couldn't find a way to make a lighter or stiffer tweeter with a break-up point as high as diamond.

The 800 demo kit reveals more intricacies about the build process. The bent wood cabinet is now even more rigid, with the bend forming the front baffle instead of the rear. The Matrix bracing inside is now made of real plywood and not MDF while a solid aluminium plate on the rear panel makes the entire external shell as inert as possible. Structural stiffness has been improved all around, in fact, even the tweeter tube is now milled from a single block of aluminium and feels like a dumbbell rather than a loudspeaker component. The turbine head for the midrange driver is now more streamlined with changes in geometry too. Then, there are the new drive units with names that wouldn't be out of place on a NASA project. Continuum midrange and Aerofoil woofer, both are a departure from previous B&W mainstays. The bright yellow Kevlar that was the identity of the brand has been replaced by this material that looks surreal, almost as if the colour has been taken out digitally from an image. Not much is being revealed by B&W until their patents are cleared but until



Listening to Tina Dico crooning. As far as love goes is a hair raising experience no less, with vocals that float in front of you and a guitar tone that is as real as can be

then, rest assured that none of your friends will have a speaker that has such cool sounding tech!

Eight years in the making, the 803 D3 comes with lofty promises and a lot of expectations. Right off the bat, the improvement in the acoustic signature is evident. Compared to the earlier 802D, this new 803 D3 feels more controlled, accurate and precise. It's borderline scary in its revelation of fine details and air around instruments, making it somewhat of a surgical tool. Listening to Tina Dico crooning *As far as love goes* is a hair raising experience no less, with vocals that float in front of you and a guitar tone that is as real as can be. It also sounds more coherent than the outgoing model with a sense of scale that far exceeds its modest dimensions, especially in the bass frequencies. Lorde's *Royals* has a bass

that drops and how. The 803 D3's twin 7in drivers managed to energize the room enough for the light fittings to rattle with enough reserve to go even louder.

Truth be told, we would've appreciated a less aggressive approach here but the speakers were barely run in and that explained the slight hint of brittleness in less than perfect recordings too. This speaker is so revealing that it might make you reconsider playing bog-standard commercial fare like Britney Spears or Justin Bieber. Hopefully, a typical customer will have a more evolved sense of music, so shouldn't be a deterrent.

The one aspect of the 803D that is the most alluring, is its absolute definition. There's no denying that this might be the most revealing midrange/tweeter combo out there in the high-end stratosphere at this price point. The point-source imaging, the huge soundstage and the depth of the sound field, all come together to create a three-dimensional space from which music emerges, not from a speaker cabinet. The lack of any sort of coloration creates a stark dynamic contrast where silences heighten the musicality and that's a feat few loudspeakers, even of this calibre can pull off so easily. Of course, it does require top-notch amplification and electronics to create that illusion and the Telos active ground filter definitely helped in making the silences as dark as possible, accentuating the dynamic range of these magnificent speakers. If there is one reservation we have, is its overzealous low-end. It needs plenty of manoeuvring around the room and break-in time to settle down and deliver the absolute coherence and integration a loudspeaker of its calibre should. It will get there without a doubt, so hang in there and prepare to be serenaded.

Rating

FOR Ultra-precise imaging and sound staging, definition of the highest order, build and design

AGAINST Bass could do with more control, more expensive than outgoing models

VERDICT An aspirational loudspeaker now gets even more tempting

TECH SPECS

Design 3-way **Drivers** 1x 1in diamond tweeter, 1 x 5in Continuum midrange, 2 x 7in Aerofoil woofers **Frequency Response** 19Hz-28kHz **Sensitivity** 90dB **Nominal impedance** 8ohms **Dimensions (WHD)** 334 x 1160 x 498mm **Weight** 65.5kgs



NEED TO KNOW

CONSIDER IF

You need monitor-level detail from your recordings and uber depth

YOU'LL NEED

Clean power and high-resolution electronics (and music files)

MAKE SURE

You give them at least 200 hours of break in time before serious listening

AVOID

Keeping them too close together. They play much better apart and into the room

HIGHLIGHT?

The holographic sound staging and realism of timbre. Sounds hyper realistic



NEED TO KNOW

CONSIDER IF

You need a notebook replacement and your work load is a light affair

YOU'LL NEED

The Smart Keyboard if you plan to do a lot of typing or use it on your desk

MAKE SURE

You load up some Full HD 1080p movies to enjoy the resolution of the screen

AVOID

Buying the Pencil unless you really are a designer by profession

HIGHLIGHT?

The incredible increase in clarity and depth it brings to the entire system

iPad Pro from ₹67,400

A lot of things that Steve Jobs had disapproved are happening now and with great success. iPhones have become bigger than ever, iPads are getting bigger than ever and now, there's even that blasphemous stylus that's making a return from the grave. But hang on, before you start rejecting the very ethos of Apple, take refuge in the fact that this has been the best year for Apple ever and with products like these, we aren't surprised why. The iPad Pro is huge and we think for the better of it. With more screen real estate than ever, it has now evolved into a bona fide creative tool, not just a consumption device. At 12.9in, it rivals a lot of ultrabooks and with its ultra svelte dimensions and weight, it trounces most of them when it comes to portability too.

The best part of every new Apple product that has a display, is indeed, its display. The iPad Pro certainly doesn't disappoint when it comes to the screen real estate. There's 78% more screen to touch, prod or draw on than on the iPad Air 2 and we felt that the iPad Air was a full-size just a couple of weeks ago! With a resolution of 2732 x 2048 pixels and an iPad Air 2-matching 264ppi, it's the highest-resolution Retina display on any portable device. Its whopping 5.6 million pixels tops even the 15in MacBook Pro and

we're already craving the full-fat version of Adobe's Creative Suite on the iPad Pro just so we stare at it more. That's also one of the very few criticisms we have for this God-like slate - there need to be more native apps for this screen size that take advantage of the resolution and processing power that's built into the iPad Pro. The app grid with acres of empty space between them seems like a waste when iOS could've

With more screen real estate than ever, it has now evolved into a bonafide creative tool, not just a consumption device

been optimised for the larger screen. The new A9X processor claims to be 1.8 times faster than its predecessor and this makes for super-smooth video playback at 1080p resolution and even lets you edit side-by-side 4K clips in iMovie. Now that's a lot on tap and while a lot of users may never use all the horsepower, it helps in new iOS features like multitasking in split-screen mode. Colours are as rich and natural as any other retina-display device but now with ever more depth. We played *Inside Out* and the colour palette was absolutely accurate with even tones and a pop to the characters that was eminently watchable. What also make you want to watch a full-length feature on the iPad Pro are its powerful

speakers which are perhaps the best we've heard on any mobile device of this girth ever. Four speakers on each corner provide plenty of loudness but it's the crispness and weight that really impressed us. For once, there's a semblance of bass through tablet speakers and Apple has also made them smarter so that while all four will produce bass frequencies, the upper two will dedicate themselves to high frequencies for a cleaner, clearer sound. They re-map themselves too, so you always get stereo sound, no matter how you hold the iPad. The larger screen makes it a brilliant remote for your iTunes library sitting elsewhere around the house too, using the Apple Remote app. If you want to get some work done while at it, the optional Pencil and Smart Keyboard complete the package for what may be the best tablet ever so far!

Rating

FOR Superb screen, great sound, power to play or create anything on the move

AGAINST Price is prohibitive, needs more native apps

VERDICT The best full-sized tablet so far and creates a niche for itself rapidly

TECH SPECS

Screen size 12.9in **Resolution** 2732 x 2048
Memory 32GB and 128GB **Connectivity** Wi-Fi, 3G cellular **Camera** 8MP rear/1.2MP front **Processor** A9X OS iOS9 **Dimensions (WHD)** 220.6 x 305.7 x 6.9mm **Weight** 721gms



both of which were brilliantly delivered by the HE400S. The guitar intro on *The Cave* has enough detail to give us an impression that we've put on something much more expensive. Sometimes we forget it's still on our heads, have we mentioned how comfortable these are? However, the HE400S can't match the bit-perfect details that the Audezes have to offer and that is, of course, due to the fact that an amp is required to drive them. The HE400S on the other hand, can be plugged into your smartphone and enjoyed without an issue except that others around you might get annoyed due to sound leaking out of the open back. Avoid Kenny G and you should be fine. But play Lorde and you might be a tad disappointed. *Royals* gives the low-end a thorough workout and that's where the HE400S, ironically, hits bottom, or at least we wished it did. The bass feels light and as a result, robs the essence of the track, immediately sending us into a scurry to find an amp or dac that could make things better. With a NAD3020 hybrid amplifier handy, we plug the HE400S into the front 3.5mm

NEED TO KNOW

CONSIDER IF

You want to indulge in the world of planar headphones on a budget

YOU'LL NEED

To invest in an amp/DAC to really get the lower frequencies going

MAKE SURE

You correctly fold the earpads flat and then on top of each other for max portability

AVOID

Placing them in a bag without adding a cover as the plastic is easy to scratch

HIGHLIGHT?

Most comfortable and budget-friendly pair of planar headphones

HiFi Man HE400S

₹20,477

Magnetic forces - the stuff that keeps the universe and planet Earth moving and revolving. Something similar happens in the HiFi Man HE400S, sans the astrological drama. Planar magnetic headphones have just started to penetrate the Indian headphone industry like a flock of Greater Flamingos over a winter shore of a beach in Gujarat.

However, fancy technology often comes with a fancy price, as we've learnt while testing the beautiful Audeze LCD-2s, but the HE400S is a different story. It costs a considerable ₹20,477 but is planar magnetic and promises to wow with its sonic capabilities.

Well, then, plonk them on and the first thing that crosses your mind or your head, is how comfortable these are. Probably the most comfortable pair of headphones we've ever put on our audiophile melon. The slightly contoured pads fit perfectly and you could forget you've had them on for hours on end, something we couldn't say that easily for the Audeze LCD-2s. The comfort is further superseded by the thoughtful but simplistic design and build quality. The earpads fold flat and over each other, making the HE400S really portable and it ends up taking lesser space than the

Bose QC25s, for instance. The casing is mostly a plastic concoction but feels sturdy nonetheless. The open grill that covers the drivers could have been made better but now we're expecting too much out of something that costs ₹20,477.

The metal headband looks and feels pure class and has a premium finish. Talking about finish, even the cables is beautifully sleeved, rugged and thick

Sometimes we forget it's still on our heads, have we mentioned how comfortable these are?

enough to be used as a whip. But that doesn't mean you should use it as one, instead plug it into a decent source and start listening to some music. Play a few tracks and you realize why the planar magnetic technology exists. The result is really different and more detailed than a regular dynamic unit. Planar headphones have a much larger radiating surface than dynamic drivers, which means it is evenly driven as opposed to the point source units that vibrate in limited magnetic gaps. This allows planar headphones a more relaxed sound that is quick in response and makes for a reliable design too.

We start with the brilliantly detailed *Sigh No More* by British rock band Mumford and Sons. The album is known for incredible guitar and dynamic percussion

connection and play *Royals* again, this time, we smile. The warm nature of the amplifier gets the lower frequencies going and things improve a notch, but not everyone would or could use it with an amp/DAC combo. So, if you're a fan of head-massaging bass, the HE400S won't fit well in place.

We play a bit of classical - Schubert's *Piano Sonata No. 20* - and it is clear how detailed and quick-footed the HE400S can get. The layers unfold beautifully and with precision. There's sense of scale, however, and an open soundstage adds to the drama of it all. Good, then, for those with fine taste. Which leads us to the end. The HiFiMan HE400S is a brilliant planar magnetic headphone that ticks a lot of boxes right. But it needs to be driven by an amp if you want "Beats-type" bass. If you can get over the lack of bottom end, the HE400S has a bosom full to offer.

Rating

FOR Unbeatable comfort, great sense of scale, wide soundstage, good detail, price

AGAINST Lack of low-end definition, plastic finish easy to scratch

VERDICT A great and comfortable pair of planar magnetic headphones at a budget

TECH SPECS

Drivers Planar magnetic **Frequency Response** 20Hz - 35kHz **Sensitivity** 98dB **Impedance** 22 Ohms **Cable Length** 1.5m **Plug** 3.5mm/6.35mm **Weight** 350g

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SoundMAGIC E80

₹4499

We can't help but be slightly eager to unbox the Soundmagic E80 in-ears. It's not the most pedestrian of brands and nor does it claim to be in a price category that'll force most *headphonoholics* to grimace. The brand has made steady inroads into the hearts of the daily user, punching where it matters and that is its price-to-performance ratio. Its affable younger (lower priced) sibling, the E10S, has been the unchallenged award winner as

the best in-ear under ₹5000 since 2011. No surprise then, that we were eager to get our hands (ears?) on the Soundmagic E80.

The E80 keep very true to the brand's build-quality guidelines with a nice, cylindrical metallic earpiece that gets a variety of customisable options for the tips, courtesy of the host of Comply earplug options that accompany it. Packaging and the durable-looking chorded wires are reminiscent of the Soundmagic E10S. This feels like familiar territory, so far, and that's a good sign.

Put them on and the E80 fit in snugly without much effort or discomfort either. With 'noise-isolation' thrown around as E80's USP, these in-ears definitely do a decent job of passively avoiding interruptions from ambient noise or sound leakage from the drivers when in play.

Everything that we love about the E10S is spot on with the E80. We start off with the mellow *Let Her Go* from Passenger and it's clear from the word go that these are one airy set of in-ears. The soundstage is big for the size with decent imaging and carries the crescendo without losing out on clarity. Up next, London Grammar's *Metal & Dust*. Hannah Reid's haunting vocals along with its delectable layers

It's clear from the word go that these are one airy set of in-ears

of samples are a treat but there is indeed a catch, the lower end lacks presence and definition. It seems polite, not wanting to knock too loud but yet, lets you know that it is there. Play *Free Tibet* by the Hilight Tribe and there's no doubt that there definitely is a lack of bass-based depth which makes the overall output sound a bit thin. Mids are strong while treble can get pitchy at places. Prince's *Kiss* sounds passionate as ever but fails to connect at a deeper level.

Still, this is definitely a good set of in-ears; perfect for daily commutes.

Rating

FOR Good fit, build quality, airy soundstage and appreciable noise isolation

AGAINST Lack of well-defined bass tends to sap depth of songs, No microphone

VERDICT Not a huge upgrade over the E10S, but a commendable one nonetheless

TECH SPECS

Impedance 64 Ohms **Frequency response** 15Hz-22kHz **Weight** 13g **Driver** 10mm

NEED TO KNOW

CONSIDER IF

You want a solid pair of in-ears that are sturdily built, commute-friendly with good passive noise cancellation

YOU'LL NEED

To try out what fits best from a variety of Comply tips for an optimum fit

MAKE SURE

To use high-resolution files to extract every bit of detail there's to offer

AVOID

Exposure to long durations of usage at high volumes

HIGHLIGHT

A sensible performer with sturdy looks and appreciable passive noise isolation for the price



OnePlus Icons

₹2999

If you thought OnePlus was only good at building flagship-killing smartphones on a budget, think again. They have now set their eyes on the lucrative headphone / in-ear market with the launch of the Icons. With an asymmetric design, inspired by the organ piano, the Icons certainly impress with its design. A unique 51° angle design ensures a perfect fit and you can choose the ear-tip that fits you from one of the three that are bundled in the package. If you thought the design was impressive, you will be

happy to know that the Icons pack a wallop of detail for the price they are offered at. They are also extremely comfortable to wear all day long. According to OnePlus, the 11mm drivers used on the inside vastly improve your listening experience. We nod in approval.

Toss a heady mix of your favourite tracks in high-res, FLAC and 320 kbps, at the very least, and you will instantly start to applaud the detail in sonic delivery and the way these pint-sized in-ears handle the overall soundstage. Chances are, you will mistake them for something far more expensive. There is proper weight to bass, evident when you spin *Army of One* from Coldplay's latest album *A Head full of Dreams*. It overpowers only very slightly at times. You can hear the instrumentation clearly and the sound is full bodied with vocals delivered with aplomb.

What is also worth mentioning is the passive noise cancellation, which helps when you are travelling in a noisy environment. Next, we settle down with Adele's *Hello* and are welcomed with focus in the delivery of mids, yet there is ample breathing space for the instruments to shine through. Spin something more upbeat like *Losers* from The Weeknd's fantastic album *Beauty Behind the Madness* and the

You can hear the instrumentation clear and the sound is full bodied with the vocals coming through with aplomb

Icons sonic delivery is eager and engaging as the instruments start kicking in. The Icons are a star when it comes to enjoying movies or any HD content too. Explosions are dealt with vigorous intensity and dialogue comes through clean. Overall, sound quality is sizzling good for the money.

You can even receive phone calls with the headset and thanks to the comfortable fit, long conversations shouldn't be an issue. OnePlus's latest in-ears truly impress with their build and sound quality, and the pricing is just the icing on the cake that we wanted.

Rating

FOR Impressive aural performance, build quality, design, clean highs and mids, in-line mic, good passive noise cancellation

AGAINST Bass could get a touch overpowering at times

VERDICT Great sonics on a budget

TECH SPECS

Impedance 32 Ohms **Frequency response** 20-20,000Hz **Weight** 15g **Driver** 11mm

NEED TO KNOW

CONSIDER IF

You want a formidable pair of in-ears that are not only fashionable but also excel in the sound department

YOU'LL NEED

To experiment with the tips for that perfect fit

MAKE SURE

You use high-res files to extract every bit of detail the Icons have to offer

AVOID

Listening at max volume

HIGHLIGHT

Fully immersive sound in a package that is solidly built and comes with looks to boot

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Sennheiser PMX 686 Sports

₹7990

The green-and-grey colours of the PMX686 Sports make it clear that this new headset is aimed at the sports and fitness junkie.

But even people who detest 'sporty' styling will find that Sennheiser's design team has gotten things right - the PMX686 comes off as fresh and doesn't at all feel over-the-top.

Put them on and the first thing you notice is that the fit's quite snug, making you feel confident that it won't

dislodge even during a strenuous workout. Sadly, the next thing you notice is that the snug fit comes at the expense of comfort. The PMX686 always feels like it's digging into your ears, to the point that it hurts and some users might even heave a sigh of relief when taking it off. Another ergonomic failing seems to be the in-line remote, which is placed too high to feel natural.

Put on some music and you'll appreciate the sound isolation and the lack of distortion even at very high volumes. The bass feels balanced and suitable for a wide range of music. Sadly, the highs devolve into harshness that's especially audible on rock and metal tracks. But it's the midrange that really disappoints, coming off as weak

You'll appreciate the good sound isolation and the lack of distortion even at very high volumes

and necessitating plenty of fiddling around with your equaliser settings. In all, it sounds 'cold' and disconnected.

One area where you won't have any worries is the headset's durability - the PMX686 is water / sweat resistant and comes with washable, anti-microbial ear piece adapters.

Overall, the comfort levels and audio quality disappoint, but we must acknowledge the PMX686 Sports for what it's supposed to be - a rugged headset you'll use only during a workout, not something you'd put on when in the mood for 'serious' listening.

Rating

FOR Waterproof, well-constructed, balanced bass, stays put during your workout

AGAINST Uncomfortable for anything more than a short spell, highs can get harsh

VERDICT For the fitness enthusiast who spends a lot of time outdoors

TECH SPECS

Impedance 30 Ohms **Frequency response** 18Hz-20kHz **Weight** 36g

NEED TO KNOW

CONSIDER IF

You need a no-fuss set of headphones for your daily workout or run

YOU'LL NEED

To tweak your equaliser settings to balance out the weak midrange and shrill highs

MAKE SURE

You buy the 'G' version if you use an Android device, or the 'I' version if you're an iOS user

AVOID

If you're looking for a comfortable headset to wear for long stretches

HIGHLIGHT

Rugged, tough and gets loud enough to be heard over your gym's music



Altec Lansing Lifejacket2

₹14,000

Altec Lansing kicks off its re-entry into the Indian market with the 'Everything Proof' range of rugged portable speakers. The Lifejacket 2 leads this charge, making outdoor survivability its USP.

Featuring IP67 protection, with Altec Lansing describing it as snow- dust- water- sand- and shock-proof, it's a heavy (weighing nearly a kilogram) speaker encased in black rubber with blue highlights. Beyond stylistic concerns over the loud looks, we can't quibble as the rubber casing is what gives the Lifejacket 2 its survivability. In

fact, we reckon this is one of the toughest portable speakers around - while we didn't test this aspect that much, a 10-foot drop didn't seem to faze it the least bit. (Though, we advise against trying this). The Lifejacket 2 also floats, letting you play music while it bobs around in the pool, next to you.

Adding to the outdoorsy credentials is an impressive battery life, with playback times of well over 14 hours. It also acts as a power bank for your phone but don't expect fast charging. Other useful features include no-fuss NFC pairing, speakerphone, caller ID and voice commands. Though, you might miss SD card support and playback controls.

Impressive, as its survivability and stamina are, the sound isn't so. First, the Lifejacket is not as loud as you'd expect.

In fact, we reckon this is one of the toughest portable speakers around

But it's the muddy sound that really disappoints. Play any music and it comes off as hollow. Vocals seem clear enough (albeit with a restrained feel) for folk and Americana, with Ryan Bingham and Susan Tedeschi coming through okay, but the poor response at both ends of the spectrum turns heavier music like rock and metal into a mushy mess.

All things said, the sound disappoints greatly, but the Lifejacket 2 excels in its quest to be an outdoor speaker that can take any abuse.

Rating

FOR Tough, also a battery bank, NFC pairing, clear vocals and speech

AGAINST Lacking in definition, no playback controls, no SD card playback

VERDICT Solely for those who need a very rugged Bluetooth speaker with good battery life. Look elsewhere if audio quality matters.

TECH SPECS

Power output 16W **Weight** 900g **Drivers** 2in with passive bass radiator

NEED TO KNOW

CONSIDER IF

You need a portable speaker that can survive pretty much anything

YOU'LL NEED

To play around with the equaliser to make the most of the Lifejacket 2's muddy sound

MAKE SURE

To keep the flap over the inputs closed before subjecting it to water

AVOID

Bass-heavy tracks as the muddy low end completely spoils the experience

HIGHLIGHT

Stand-out survivability and battery life will appeal to many

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BUYER'S GUIDE

We can help

Welcome to India's best guide to TVs, hi-fi, home cinema and MP3, with full specs and ratings for hundreds of products.

Up to date and to the point

We've put the Buyers Guide through a much needed refresher. All prices and products are now up to date and current, and there are also a few tips and tricks for getting the best out of your kit.



How to use us

- 1** Browse by section: categories are arranged logically, with products accompanied by price, date and star rating.
- 2** Entries have a star rating followed by a concise summary of the review, so you can easily find the product for you.
- 3** We offer the most comprehensive list of technical specifications for each and every product we've reviewed.



Shanth Swaroop
Editor, Buyer's Guide

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TELEVISIONS continued

Product	Price	Tested	Verdict	Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	3D	Power	Inputs	Features	Value for money
Premium												
Samsung UA46ES8000	1,55,000	05.12/GT	★★★★★	LED	46	1920x1080	•	•	•	•	•	61x104x3
Samsung UA55ES8000	2,67,000	09.12/GT	★★★★★	LED	55	1920x1080	•	•	•	•	•	78x127x38
Samsung PS64E8000	2,37,000	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Plasma	64	1920x1080	•	•	•	•	•	88x140x5
Sharp LC-60LE925E	4,09,000	04.11/ST	★★★★★	LED	60	1920x1080	•	•	•	•	•	71x144x4
Toshiba 55L2	7,00,000	09.12/GT	★★★★★	LED	55	1920x1080	•	•	•	•	•	79x127x4

1 A benchmark set for 2012

2 A towering bruiser, with an added control twist

3 This is as smart as smart TV gets

Against its rivals, this big LED loses out

Struggles at this price level. But it's the future

Blu-ray players

Smart ability

Multi-channel

Extends the stereo

AV receivers & amplifiers

Budget	Well-equipped and deliver convincing surround sound
Mid	There are gains in features, build quality and sonic performance
Premium	Real powerhouses that pack loads of features and cinema-style sound

Product	₹	Verdict	Channels /power (w)	HDMI in	HDMI out	Networking	3D passthrough	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Pioneer VSX-930	66,990	★★★★★	A well-equipped receiver that offers a good taste of Atmos's capabilities	7x150	7	2	● ●	17x44x36
Pioneer SC-LX87	1,73,990	★★★★★	Pioneer strikes gold again with this feature-laden powerhouse	9x220	9	3	● ●	19x44x44
Pioneer SC-LX58	1,10,990	★★★★★	Best home cinema amp (premium), Awards 2015	9x140	8	3	● ●	19x44x44
Pioneer SC-LX87	1,73,990	★★★★★	Pioneer strikes gold again with this feature-laden powerhouse	9x220	9	3	● ●	19x44x44
Denon AVR-X2100W	66,900	★★★★★	A strong contender but competition at this price is fierce	7x95	8	2	● ●	17x43x33
Onkyo TX-NR545	49,000	★★★★★	A good candidate if you want an Atmos amp without breaking the bank	7x120	6	1	● ●	17x44x33
Denon AVR-X2200W	60,000	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier (budget-mid), Awards 2015. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	7x95	8	2	● ●	17x43x34
Yamaha RX-V677	59,990	★★★★★	A fun receiver that's not the most balanced, but is endlessly entertaining	7x150	6	1	● ●	17x43x38
Pioneer VSX-924	55,990	★★★★★	Another good effort but rivals offer more excitement	7x150	7	2	● ●	17x44x36
Onkyo TX-NR626	63,000	Not rated	Not rated	7x175	6	2	● ●	17x44x33
Onkyo TX-NR727	72,000	Not rated	Not rated	7x185	8	2	● ●	17x44x38
Denon AVR-X4000	1,34,900	★★★★★	A decent enough AV receiver	7x125	7	3	● ●	17x43x38
Yamaha RX-V673	56,990	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier (budget-mid), Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	7x150	6	1	● ●	17x44x36
Pioneer SC-LX57	1,10,990	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier (mid), Awards 2013	9x190	9	3	● ●	19x44x44
Pioneer SC-LX87	1,73,990	★★★★★	Pioneer strikes gold again with this feature laden powerhouse	9x170	7	2	● ●	17x43x41
Onkyo TX-NR1009	1,30,000*	★★★★★	An incredibly talented amplifier	9x180	8	2	● ●	20x44x44
Yamaha RX-A3030	1,61,000	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier (premium), Awards 2013	9x150	8	1	● ●	19x44x47
Onkyo TX-NR828	95,000	Not rated	Not rated	7x215	8	2	● ●	20x44x40
Pioneer SC-LX56	NA	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier (mid-premium), Awards 2012	9x170	8	2	● ●	19x44x44
Arcam AVR750	4,50,000	★★★★★	It isn't flawless, but it is very good indeed	7x100	7	2	● ●	17x43x43
Yamaha RX-A1040	1,14,990	★★★★★	Well-featured and full of power, but lacks in the thrill department	7x110	8	2	● ●	18x44x43
Yamaha RX-A1020	89,990	★★★★★	Delivering excitement, detail and precision, this is a brilliantly capable all-rounder	7x110	8	2	● ●	18x43x43
Onkyo TX-NR1010	1,60,000	★★★★★	Power-packed heavyweight needs a touch more precision	7x200	9	2	● ●	20x44x59
Onkyo TX-NR3009	1,60,000*	★★★★★	Produces seriously rewarding surround sound	9x200	8	2	● ●	34x61x60
Onkyo TX-NR3010	1,90,000	★★★★★	A solid performance but lacks the subtlety to cut it as a complete all-rounder	9x160	9	2	● ●	20x44x60
Onkyo TX-NR5010	2,20,000	Not rated	Not rated	9x280	9	2	● ●	20x44x46
Pioneer SC-LX86	NA	★★★★★	Best Home Cinema amplifier (premium), Awards 2012	9x190	8	3	● ●	19x44x44
Yamaha RX-A3020	1,34,990	★★★★★	A shot across the bows of the class leaders	9x230	8	2	● ●	19x44x47
Yamaha RX-V377	34,990	★★★★★	Superb surround sound on a budget	5x70	4	1	● ●	15x44x32
Yamaha RX-A1030	1,04,000	★★★★★	Not without some niggles, but this receiver delivers big-time power and muscle	7x110	8	2	● ●	18x43x43
Pioneer SC-LX87	1,73,990	★★★★★	Pioneer strikes gold again with the feature-laden powehouse	9x220	9	3	● ●	19x44x44
Arcam AVR450	2,55,000	★★★★★	There's plenty to like with this receiver, but its rivals better it	7x110	7	2	● ●	17x43x42

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Surround speakers

Full size	Traditional cabinet design that are big but can deliver a great sound
Style	Compact speakers that make a lot of sense in smaller living spaces
Bipole/Dipole	Surround speaker designs that give a more cohesive soundfield

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
Q Acoustics 2000i 5.1

Awards 2013: Best Traditional Pack (Budget)



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Dali Zensor 15.1

Awards 2013: Best Style Pack (Mid)



AWARD WINNER
Cambridge Audio Aero 5.1

Awards 2013: Best Traditional Pack (Premium)

Product	₹	Verdict	Front speaker (hwd, cm)	Center speaker (hwd, cm)	Rear speaker (hwd, cm)	Subwoofer (hwd, cm)	Finishes
Boston Ac. Soundware XS SE	33,099	★★★★★	11x11x9	11x11x9	11x11x9	31x28x40	2
Canton Movie 125 MX	39,375*	★★★★★	12x9x10	9x20x10	12x9x10	43x24x42	3
Canton Movie 130	75,000	★★★★★	12x9x10	9x19x10	12x9x10	41x24x42	3
Wharfedale DX-1HCP	45,000	★★★★★	19x12x12	12x29x12	19x12x12	34x29x32	2
Cambridge Audio Minx S215	58,500	★★★★★	8x8x9	8x8x9	8x8x9	22x21x22	1
SKS HT-528	25,000	Not rated	18x10x12	10x27x11	18x10x12	43x23x41	
KEF KHT3005 HD2	1,08,000	★★★★★	25x13x15	13x25x15	25x13x15	38x37x18	1
Monitor Audio MASS	1,03,000	★★★★★	22x13x13	13x22x13	22x13x13	42x38x38	1
Monitor Audio Vector AV10	59,000	★★★★★	24x15x17	15x35x17	24x15x17	37x32x32	3
Q Acoustics 2000i 5.1	87,750	★★★★★	23x15x20	23x16x12	23x15x20	23x16x12	2
Q Acoustics Q7000	95,250	★★★★★	24x10x16	12x21x16	24x10x16	37x51x22	2
Tannoy HTS-101	60,200	★★★★★	16x11x14	11x25x17	16x11x14	42x28x37	1
B&W MT-50	1,91,250	★★★★★	25x11x16	25x11x16	25x11x16	26x26x33	2
B&W MT-60D	3,28,500	★★★★★	25x11x16	25x11x16	25x11x16	34x27x36	2
Cabasse Eole 2	88,000	★★★★★	13x13x13	13x13x13	13x13x13	33x33x36	2
DALI Zensor 1 5.1	1,12,000	★★★★★	27x16x22	16x44x29	27x16x22	31x29x31	3
DALI Zensor 5 5.1	1,55,400	★★★★★	84x16x27	16x44x28	97x16x23	34x37x38	2
Elipson Planet M 5.1	1,05,000	★★★★★	15x15x15	15x15x15	15x15x15	39x32x32	3
Jamo D500 THX Select 2	2,17,000	★★★★★	26x45x13	26x45x13	26x45x13	42x40x42	2
KEF KHT3005SE	1,08,000	★★★★★	25x12x15	13x30x18	25x12x15	39x44x19	2
KEF Q300 5.1	1,26,000	★★★★★	36x21x30	21x63x30	36x21x30	33x34x33	3
KEF T105	89,900	★★★★★	33x14x4	33x14x4	33x14x4	38x37x8	1
Monitor Audio Bronze BX2 5.1	1,60,000	★★★★★	35x19x26	17x46x17	29x28x11	33x32x33	4
Monitor Audio Bronze BX5 5.1	2,75,000	★★★★★	85x17x25	17x46x17	29x28x11	33x32x33	2
Tannoy Rev. Compact 5.1	1,40,000*	★★★★★	27x15x16	15x30x16	39x31x34	32x29x29	2
B&W CM9 Theatre	7,99,875	★★★★★	102x32x37	22x59x28	34x20x28	32x32x32	2
B&W CT800 system	2,01,65,625	★★★★★	110x33x55	33x110x55	110x33x10	48x48x48	1
DALI Ikon 5 Mk2 5.1	3,21,900	★★★★★	81x15x28	15x57x26	38x27x15	45x41x46	2
Cerwin Vega SL Series 5.1	2,36,000	Not rated	84x36x38	17x28x18	91x42x50	45x13x16	1
Cambridge Audio Aero 5.1	1,57,000	★★★★★	98x24x34	15x43x21	18x46x15	34x33x36	2
KEFR100 5.1	2,47,000	★★★★★	28x18x29	17x53x31	28x18x29	37x33x35	4
Monitor Audio Apex	1,68,100	★★★★★	25x14x14	14x61x10	25x14x14	34x34x41	2
Energy Veritas RC Micro 5.1	47,100	Not rated	12x9x9	9x9x15	12x9x9	32x31x27	1
Monitor Audio PL300 AV	14,10,000	★★★★★	111x14x47	22x58x29	37x22x28	45x48x47	2
Mon. Audio Silver RX6 AV12	2,93,400	★★★★★	85x19x25	19x50x20	30x12x25	34x34x41	6
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 5.1	2,50,800	★★★★★	95x21x32	18x46x23	95x21x30	42x31x36	3
Mordaunt-Short Mezzo 5.1	5,27,200	★★★★★	100x22x28	18x49x22	35x22x28	32x34x35	2
Mordaunt-S. Performance 5.1	13,14,000	★★★★★	121x24x37	60x21x22	121x24x37	50x50x50	2
PMC DB1i 5.1	5,00,000*	★★★★★	29x16x23	16x29x23	29x16x23	55x20x55	4
Tannoy Revolution Signature	1,64,500*	★★★★★	85x17x18	17x45x18	27x17x18	37x34x34	2

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 2013: Best CD Player (Budget)



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Naim CD5si

Awards 2013: Best CD Player (Mid)



AWARD WINNER

Roksan Caspian M2 CD

Awards 2013: Best CD Player (Premium)

Product	₹	Verdict	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)
Cambridge Audio Azur 351C	30,800	★★★★★	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	9x43x31
Cambridge Audio Azur 651C	46,600	★★★★★	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x31
Denon DCD-710AE	27,400	★★★★★	●	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x43x28
Marantz CD6004	39,900	★★★★★	●	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	11x44x34
NAD C546BEE	41,000	★★★★★	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	7x44x29
Audiolab 8200CD	80,000*	★★★★★	●	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	0	1	1	8x44x30
Cyrus CD T Transport	1,28,000	★★★★★	●	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36
Cyrus CD6 SE2	1,25,000	★★★★★	●	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	8x22x36
Naim CD5si	1,39,875	★★★★★	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	7x43x30
Roksan Kandy K2	1,29,000	★★★★★	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	10x43x38
Burmester 069	45,00,000*	★★★★★	●	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	13x48x31
Audio Research CD5	6,18,750	★★★★★	●	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	13x48x31
Cambridge Audio Azur 851C	1,23,000	★★★★★	●	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	1	1	2	12x43x34
Cyrus CD 8 SE2	1,82,000	★★★★★	●	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36
dCS Puccini	9,50,000	★★★★★	●	1	0	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	2	11x46x40
Parasound Halo CD1	3,00,000	★★★★★	●	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	11x44x34
Naim CD5 XS	2,50,000	★★★★★	●	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	7x43x30
Naim CD555	14,00,000	★★★★★	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	11x43x31
Naim CDX2	4,50,000	★★★★★	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x31
Primare CD32	1,63,000	★★★★★	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	11x43x38
Roksan Caspian M2 CD	2,26,000	★★★★★	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x43x33
Marantz CD6005	44,900	★★★★★	●	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x44x34
Esoteric K-05	8,50,000	★★★★★	●	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	13x45x36

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DACs

Digital-to-analogue converters take a digital data stream from its source (such as a computer or CD transport) and turn 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



HRT microStreamer

Has beaten our 2012 Award-winner

"Truly captivated us with a stunningly agile-paced performance that reveals layers of subtlety hitherto unheard with just a pair of headphones and a laptop."



Chord Chordette QuteHD

Awards 2012: Best DAC (Mid)

"It's simple, looks great – and above all, sounds absolutely fantastic. You'll have to spend twice as much to get something significantly better."



NAD M51

Awards 2012: Best DAC (Premium)

"The M51 sounds sensational. In fact, we'd go further than that by saying it's one of the best NAD separates we've heard in recent memory."

Product	₹	Verdict	USB in	Optical in	Co-axial in	AES EBU in	HDMI in	Wireless	Headphone out	RCA out	Balanced XLR out	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Audioengine D1	11,789	★★★★★		1	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	3x9x10
Audioquest DragonFly	13,800	★★★★★		1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1x2x6
Arcam rDAC Wireless	36,000*	★★★★★		1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	4x16x11
Arcam rPAC	19,800	★★★★★		1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	3x10x6
Camb. Audio DacMagic 100	18,800	★★★★★		1	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	5x11x13
Camb. Audio DacMagic Plus	38,500	★★★★★		1	2	2	0	0	1	1	1	5x22x19
HRT microStreamer	20,000*	★★★★★		1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1x3x6
Meridian Explorer DAC	31,000	★★★★★		1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2x3x10
Micromega MyDAC	32,000	★★★★★		1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2x3x10
Musical Fidelity M1 DAC	40,500	★★★★★		1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	10x22x30
NAD DAC 2	25,500	★★★★★		1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	4x14x7
Cambridge Audio Azur 851D	1,03,000	★★★★★		1	4	3	1	0	0	1	0	12x43x36
Chord Electronics QuteHD	1,00,000*	★★★★★		1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	7x16x4
Meridian Director	65,000	★★★★★		1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	3x14x8
Audio Research DAC8	5,30,000*	★★★★★		1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	13x48x25
Arcam FMJD33	2,34,000	★★★★★		3	2	2	1	0	0	1	2	11x43x37
Burmester 113	4,00,000*	★★★★★		1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	6x20x17
Rotel RDD-1580	80,000	★★★★★		1	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	6x43x32
NAD D1050	42,500	★★★★★		1	2	2	0	0	1	1	1	19x6x21
NAD M51	1,27,000	★★★★★		1	1	1	1	2	0	1	0	8x44x30
Naim DAC	2,50,000	★★★★★		2	3	3	0	0	0	1	0	7x43x30

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Hi-Fi speakers

Standmounters	Usually smaller speakers that need to be put on a stand, not bookshelves
Floorstanders	Larger speakers that tend to go louder and deeper than standmounters
Powered	Have built-in amplifiers and need mains power to work

The shortlist



Q Acoustics Concept 20

Awards 2013: Best Stereo Speaker (Budget)



AWARD WINNER
KEF LS50

Awards 2013: Best Standmounter (Mid)



AWARD WINNER
PMC Twenty 22

Awards 2013: Best Standmounter (Premium)

				Standmount	Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Product	₹	Verdict						
Audioengine P4	18,000	★★★★★	Small in size, huge in sound: a must-audition pair	●		3		23x14x17
PSB Alpha T1	37,000	Not Yet Rated	Not Yet Rated		●	3		91x18x31
PSB Alpha LR1	13,000	Not Yet Rated	Not Yet Rated		●	3		18x12x16
Roth Oli RA1	16,800	★★★★★	If space is at a premium and your budget is low, then these are an excellent fit	●		2		23x15x15
Q Acoustics 2010i	19,200	★★★★★	Set the standard at this price and size level	●		4		23x20x15
Q Acoustics 2020i	25,900	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers (Budget), Awards 2013	●		4		26x17x28
Tannoy Mercury V1i	20,250	★★★★★	An excellent entry-level all-rounder	●		2		30x17x26
Wharfedale Diamond 10.0	24,500	★★★★★	An ideal choice for the easily startled, but a little straitlaced for our liking	●		7		24x15x17
Audioengine A5+	27,980	★★★★★	Bigger, better and more flexible than the originals	●		3		27x18x20
Q Acoustics Q-BT3	39,990	★★★★★	There are few other products as versatile and easy to like at this price	●	●	4		31x19x24
Boston Acoustics A-26	24,600	★★★★★	A beautifully accomplished standmounter	●		2		33x21x27
B&W 685 S2	65,000	★★★★★	A superb, hugely entertaining pair of speakers. Worth the wait? Absolutely	●		2		35x19x32
B&W MM-1	40,000	★★★★★	Still good, but there's better available		●	1		17x10x10
Waterfall Hurricane Evo	31,200	Not Yet Rated	Not Yet Rated			3		11x7x3
Bose Computer MusicMonitor	28,013	★★★★★	Enjoyable sound for a speaker this small	●		2		12x7x12
DALI Lektor 2	37,500	★★★★★	Seriously entertaining speakers and simply stunning at this money	●		2		31x18x22
DALI Zensor 3	33,000	★★★★★	If it's entertainment you crave, these standmounters deliver in spades	●		3		35x21x29
DALI Zensor 1	23,700	★★★★★	These brilliant budget standmounters demand a listen	●		2		27x16x22
Epos Epic 1	32,950	★★★★★	Punchy and exciting but they can't deliver all-round ability	●		2		31x19x25
Focal Chorus 706V	49,999	★★★★★	Thoroughly enjoyable but they may not cut it with dance music	●		3		39x22x29
Focal XS Book	59,999	★★★★★	A potent-sounding speaker that brings hi-fi listening to your desktop.		●	1		28x11x20
KEF Q300	33,000	★★★★★	Product of the year - Stereo speakers, Awards 2011	●		3		36x21x30
Totem Dreamcatcher	33,250	Not Yet Rated	Not Yet Rated			4		11x5x7
Totem Mite	44,750	Not Yet Rated	Not Yet Rated			6		11x6x8
Monitor Audio Bronze BX2	32,000	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers (Budget-Mid), Awards 2012	●		4		35x19x26
Monitor Audio Silver RX1	43,900	★★★★★	Form and function in perfect harmony, these speakers will sit pretty in any home	●		6		31x19x24
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 1	18,000	★★★★★	Still great, but the rivals have caught up	●		1		28x18x27
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 2	23,000	★★★★★	Plenty of bang for your buck, and more besides	●		3		32x21x30
Mordaunt-Short Mezzo 2	37,800	★★★★★	For speakers so small, you get surprisingly full bass	●		2		35x22x28
Q Acoustics 2050i	66,400	★★★★★	Best floorstander (Mid), Awards 2012	●		4		100x32x27
Quad 11L Classic	38,000	★★★★★	Impressive standmounters but lack a touch of sparkle	●		4		31x19x24
Tannoy Mercury V4i	54,900	★★★★★	Best floorstander (Mid), Awards 2011		●	2		97x20x28
Tannoy Revolution DC4	42,700	★★★★★	They may be small of stature but these Tannoys have a huge sonic heart	●		2		27x15x16
Tannoy Revolution DC6	70,300	★★★★★	Best standmounter (Mid), Awards 2012	●		1		36.5x20x25
Triangle Color	52,000	★★★★★	Small, but perfectly formed	●		3		29x17x24
Wharfedale Diamond 10.1	24,000	★★★★★	Fresh competition now offers more for the money	●		4		30x19x28
Wharfedale Diamond 121	20,000	★★★★★	Fabulous sound. For insight and entertainment, the 121s needn't fear any rival.	●		7		32x17x23
Audio Pro LV2e	86,625	★★★★★	Wireless desktop speakers with a hi-fi flourish			3		98x14x24
Audiovector Ki1 Super	TBA	★★★★★	These pint-sized speakers lack far-reaching dynamics, but are easy to live with		●	5		98x14x24
Audiovector Ki3 Standard	TBA	★★★★★	Packed with resolution and speed		●	5		98x14x24

SPEAKERS continued

Product	₹	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander Powered Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Dynaudio DM 2/6	76,000	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers at this price. Just the right amount of sparkle at the top end	● 2 29x17x24
Dynaudio DM 2/7	86,000	★★★★★	A seriously competitive speaker at this price point	● 1 36x22x27
ATC SCM 11	1,42,000	★★★★★	Best standmounter (Mid-Premium), Awards 2011	● 1 38x21x25
B&W XT2	1,12,500	★★★★★	Classy, sophisticated but the sound lacks bite	● 2 31x15x20
DALI Ikon 6 MK2	1,26,000	★★★★★	Cleaner, clearer and more insightful than its forerunner	● 3 100x19x36
DALI Ikon 1 Mk2	60,000	★★★★★	Huge sound and good timing, these Dalis are heartily recommended	● 3 33x15x26
DALI Mentor Menuet	84,000	★★★★★	These Menuets are something of a gem	● 2 25x15x23
DALI Zensor 5	54,900	★★★★★	Compact and affordable floorstanders	● 2 84x16x27
Energy Speakers CF70	78,400	Not yet rated	Not yet rated	● 1 103x21x40
Energy Speakers CF50	67,200	Not yet rated	Not yet rated	● 1 98x18x37
PSB Image T5	67,000	Not yet rated	Not yet rated	● 2 94x21x32
PSB Imagine T	1,46,000	Not yet rated	Not yet rated	● 5 94x21x35
Elac BS142	60,000	★★★★★	An organic sounding and entertaining pair of speakers that are fun to listen to	● 1 26x16x26
Elipson Planet L	60,000	★★★★★	Charming in many ways, with good transparency	● 3 40x42x43
Epos Epic 5	66,425	★★★★★	Hugely likeable floorstanders with broad sonic appeal	● 2 92x21x32
KEF LS50	1,10,000	★★★★★	Best standmounter (Mid-Premium), Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	● 1 30x20x28
KEF R100	73,000	★★★★★	These are extremely talented stand-mounters	● 4 28x18x29
Monitor Audio Bronze BX5	55,000	★★★★★	Easiest floorstanders to live with we've heard in a good while	● 4 85x17x25
Monitor Audio Silver RX2	65,300	★★★★★	A lot of speaker and a lot of sound	● 6 37.5x23x30
Monitor Audio Silver RX6	83,250	★★★★★	A sensational product from Monitor Audio – detailed, dynamic and very attractive, too	● 6 91x28x31
Monitor Audio Silver RX8	1,09,000	★★★★★	If you're addicted to bass, these floorstanders will suit you	● 6 96x28x39
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 6	41,500	★★★★★	A fine all-rounder, with power and bass in spades, and plenty more besides	● 3 95x21x30
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 8	52,000	★★★★★	Great speakers for sure, but too controlled	● 3 95x21x32
Mordaunt-Short Mezzo 6	75,600	★★★★★	Possibly the best in their class	● 2 100x22x28
Mordaunt-Short Mezzo 8	1,09,000	★★★★★	Not the best all-rounders in the Mezzo range, but still very likeable	● 2 107x22x31
PMCD B1i	1,20,000*	★★★★★	Superbly detailed and rewarding small speakers	● 4 29x16x23
Quad 12L Classic	52,000	★★★★★	There's plenty to admire here	● 4 34x21x28
Spendor S3/SR2	84,500	★★★★★	A little less than the sum of their parts	● 4 31x17x18
Spendor SA1	1,35,800	★★★★★	Small, top-class standmounts	● 3 31x17x19
Tannoy Precision 6.1	1,06,500	★★★★★	Rhythmic, detailed speakers but a lack of solidity leaves them sounding unbalanced	● 2 33x22x26
Tannoy Precision 8D	60,000*	★★★★★	Solid active speakers that sound good	● 1 44x27x37
Tannoy Revolution DC6T	1,03,700	★★★★★	Best floorstander (Mid-Premium), Awards 2011	● 1 95x26x29
Tannoy Revolution DC6T SE	1,10,000*	★★★★★	Best floorstander (Mid-Premium), Awards 2012	● 1 100x31x28
Tannoy Rev. Sig. DC4	40,000*	★★★★★	DC4s are still appealing across the board	● 2 27x17x18
Tannoy Rev. Sig. DC6T	1,20,000*	★★★★★	Expensive but fully justify the price tag – expertly balanced performance	● 2 14x9x9
Totem Rainmaker	59,500	★★★★★	Hugely musical, and a pleasure to listen to	● 4 36x17x23
Triangle Color 123	62,000	★★★★★	A brilliant desktop speaker package	3 14x14x14
Triangle Comete Anniv.	1,24,000	★★★★★	Ideal for injecting energy into your music	● 1 42x20x34
Vienna Ac. Haydn Grand	85,920	★★★★★	Beautifully built, they pack a sweet sonic punch that's focused and purposeful	● 5 36x17x27
Wharfedale Denton	62,000	★★★★★	Relaxed yet engaging sound has a lot of appeal	● 1 32x20x31
Neat Iota	85,000	★★★★★	Attractive, but with a hefty sound too	● 5 13x20x17
Elac FS249	2,40,000	Not yet rated	Not yet rated	● 115x26x36
JBL Project Everest DD6000	16,16,999	Not yet rated	Not yet rated	● 2 44x38x18
JBL Synthesis 4700	7,04,599	Not yet rated	Not yet rated	● 1 43x20x15
Neat Motive SX1	2,20,000	★★★★★	Charming, unique speakers - they lean backwards	● 4 93x16x20
PSB Synchrony One	3,47,000	Not yet rated	Not yet rated	● 3 109x23x33
PSB Synchrony One B	1,49,000	Not yet rated	Not yet rated	● 3 99x19x28
ATC SCM 100A	10,99,000	★★★★★	Massively talented and proportioned	● 4 107x40x56

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SPEAKERS continued

Product	₹	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
ATC SCM40	2,20,000	★★★★★	Among the best at this price level, but is your system good enough?	●	1	97x23x32
Harbeth P3ES-R	1,74,027	Not yet rated	Not yet rated	●	4	30x19x20
Harbeth Compact 7ES-3	2,46,089	Not yet rated	Not yet rated	●	4	52x27x32
Harbeth Super HL5	3,00,181	Not yet rated	Not yet rated	●	4	64x32x30
B&W 800 Diamond	26,71,875	★★★★★	An exceptional performer, and a fine showcase for B&W's range of technology	●	3	118x45x65
B&W 805 Diamond	5,34,375	★★★★★	Good, but easier to admire than really love	●	3	42x24x35
B&W PM1	2,79,000	★★★★★	Best standmounter (Premium), Awards 2011	●	1	33x19x30
Burmester B10	5,60,000	★★★★★	Well built, well refined and an engaging listen. We're in love	●	3	39x22x28
Neat Motive SX2	1,75,000	★★★★★	Cohesive, authoritative and downright exciting	●	3	39x21x37
DALI Fazon F5	2,49,000	★★★★★	Stylish deliverers of audiophile sound	●	3	92x28x32
DALI Mentor 6	2,55,000	★★★★★	Dynamic floorstanders that are really fast and agile	●	1	40x8x15
Dynaudio Excite X32	1,94,000	★★★★★	These pack an eloquent, expansive sound	●	4	92x17x27
Dynaudio DM 3/7	1,90,000	★★★★★	Plenty of positives in this mid-range floorstander	●	2	96x20x27
Dynaudio Focus 160	2,26,000	★★★★★	Just do the job and don't intrude on the entertainment	●	6	35x20x29
Dynaudio Excite X12	80,000	★★★★★	They get enough right to warrant the full five stars	●	4	29x17x26
Focal Diablo Utopia	8,99,999	★★★★★	When it comes to levels of insight, little at this price even comes close	●	Any	43x26x43
Jamo R907	6,23,800	★★★★★	The innovative R907s are stunningly capable speakers	●	1	119x44x19
KEF Reference 207/2	12,50,000	★★★★★	Big, bold and stunningly built, they major on bass	●	4	123x40x69
Linn Akurate 242	6,74,860	★★★★★	Very impressive speakers, and ideal in a Linn set-up	●	2	100x21x38
Monitor Audio PL100	2,13,000	★★★★★	For those who want sonic delivery and insight	●	3	37x23x29
Mon. Audio Platinum PL300	4,78,000	★★★★★	Its been a long time coming, and it is well worth the wait	●	3	111x41x47
Mordaunt-Short Perf. 2	1,56,000	★★★★★	Not all-rounders, but exceptional in some areas	●	3	49x24x36
Mordaunt-Short Perf. 6	2,68,000	★★★★★	Among the most realistic-sounding speakers ever	●	2	121x24x37
Neat Petite SX	1,75,000	★★★★★	Small and perfectly formed standmounters	●	6	31x20x18
Neat Ultimatum XLS	6,20,000	★★★★★	An entertainer of the highest order if partnered with care	●	9	38x22x37
PMCD15-All	2,20,000*	★★★★★	They may not look it, but these PMCs sound like every penny's worth	●	1	29x16x28
PMC Fact 3	4,20,000*	★★★★★	Hugely capable but a touch overcontrolled	●	4	54x16x30
PMC Fact 8	5,00,000*	★★★★★	These PMC floorstanders are quite simply magical - even at this price	●	4	103x15x38
PMCFB1i	2,50,000*	★★★★★	Great all-rounders. They have real long-term appeal	●	4	100x20x30
PSB Imagine Mini	49,000	★★★★★	Tiny speakers with a surprising amount of heft. Good for a small room	●	5	23x14x21
PMCPB1i	6,50,000*	★★★★★	Simply excellent speakers: big, bold and accomplished	●	1	108x20x40
PMCTwenty 22	2,20,000*	★★★★★	Best standmounter (Premium), Awards 2012	●	4	41x18x37
PMCTwenty 23	3,25,000*	★★★★★	Best floorstander (Premium), Awards 2012	●	4	92x15x33
ProAc Response D18	1,49,625	★★★★★	Best floorstander (Premium), Awards 2011	●	6	93x19x27
ProAc Studio 140 Mk2	1,16,275	★★★★★	An entertaining and dynamic performer	●	4	104x19x28
Quad ESL 2805	5,40,000	★★★★★	Exceptional electrostatic speakers	●	1	104x70x39
Quad ESL 2812	on request	★★★★★	Still a terrific electrostatic speaker, in certain respects it remains unmatched	●	1	107x69x38
Spendor A6R	2,25,000	★★★★★	An outstanding pair of speakers that do very little wrong	●	5	88x19x28
Sonus F. Cremona Auditor M	4,83,750	★★★★★	One of the best standmounts money can buy	●	2	35x20x37
Spendor A5	1,63,000	★★★★★	The most accomplished speakers for this money	●	4	79x17x25
Spendor A6	2,06,000	★★★★★	Brilliant speakers for the money - a class-leading combination of insight and naturalness	●	4	88x19x28
Spendor A9	4,06,000	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers (Premium), Awards 2010. Stunningly capable	●	4	103x21x35
Spendor D7	3,18,000	★★★★★	The finest Spendors in years	●	6	95x20x32
Spendor SP100R2	6,28,500	★★★★★	Can still compete with the best at this price level	●	2	70x37x43
Spendor SP2/3R2	2,24,500	★★★★★	They're wonderfully natural with a seamless presentation	●	1	55x28x33
Tannoy Definition DC8	2,83,500	★★★★★	Capable of seriously controlled sound	●	3	47x27x26
Totem Mani-2 Signature	2,49,900	★★★★★	When it comes to outright enjoyment we can't think of any rival speakers we prefer for this money	●		44x21x31
Triangle Quartet	2,48,400	★★★★★	Hugely entertaining premium floorstanders	●	2	123x37x39
Wharfedale Jade-5	1,80,000	★★★★★	Floorstanders that pack immense power and poise	●	3	106x25x40

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Stereo amplifiers

Integrated These amplifiers combine a preamp and power section in one box
Power output A higher number usually means louder, depending on speakers
Digital inputs Some amplifiers now have a DAC built in, which could be useful

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

NAD D 3020



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Arcam FMJ A19



AWARD WINNER

Naim Nait 5i

Product	₹	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)	
Arcam FMJ A19	72,000	★★★★★	Picky about partners but wonderfully talented	50	6	1	0		1	●	2		●	●	1	9x43x28	
Cambridge Audio Azur 351A	TBA	★★★★★	Worth considering if you prefer an energetic approach	45	5	0	0	●	1		2	●	●	●	2	9x43x34	
Cambridge Audio Azur 651A	43,000	★★★★★	Meaty and powerful, but not the most refined	75	5	0	0		1	●	2	●	●	●	1	12x43x35	
Cyrus 6a	1,30,000	★★★★★	Best stereo amp (Mid), Awards 2012	40	6	0	0		0	●	2		●	●	2	7x22x36	
Denon PMA-720AE	40,900	★★★★★	Entertaining and capable, but sonically stubborn	50	4	1	0		1	●	1	●	●	●	2	12x43x31	
Marantz PM6005	44,900	★★★★★	A shot across the bow to Marantz's rivals. An excellent system	45	5	1	0		1		2	●	●	●	2	11x44x37	
Marantz PM6004	39,900	★★★★★	Product of the Year - Stereo amplifiers, Awards 2011	45	5	1	0		1		2	●	●	●	2	11x44x37	
Marantz PM8003	56,700	★★★★★	Built like a battleship and delivers most of the goods	70	5	1	0		2	●	2	●	●	●	2	12x44x36	
NAD C326BEE	38,000	★★★★★	A really musical amplifier to grace any budget system	50	7	0	0		2	●	1	●	●	●	1	10x44x29	
NAD C356BEE	57,000	★★★★★	A party animal of an amplifier	80	7	0	0		2	●	2	●	●	●	1	13x44x34	
Naim Nait 5i	1,39,875	★★★★★	The Nait 5i gets all the basics right and more	50	4	0	0		1		1				1	7x44x31	
Onkyo A-9010	27,000	★★★★★	Best Stereo Amp (Budget), Awards 2015	44	5	1	0		1		1	●	●	●	1	13x44x33	
Onkyo A-9030	25,000	★★★★★	Proof that Onkyo knows how to build good stereo gear	65	4	1	0		1		2		●	●	2	14x44x33	
Onkyo A-9050	35,000	★★★★★	Lean presentation, but there's plenty to like	75	5	1	0		1	●	1	●	●	●	2	14x44x33	
Roksan Kandy K2BT	1,48,000	★★★★★	Full of power and punch, but some heart and soul is missing	140	5	1	0		1	●	1		●	●	2	11x43x38	
Roksan Kandy K2	1,29,000	★★★★★	Best stereo amp (Budget-Mid), Awards 2011	125	5	1	0		1	●	1		●	●	3	10x43x38	
Rotel RA-04SE	45,000	★★★★★	A startling upgrade to an already strong performer	40	4	1	0		1	●	2	●	●		2	7x44x34	
Rotel RA-06SE	91,125	★★★★★	A forceful, articulate listen. Could do with more detail	70	5	1	0		1	●	2	●	●	●	1	9x44x34	
Rotel RA-10	55,125	★★★★★	Best Stereo Amp (Budget), Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	40	4	1	0		1	●	2	●	●			27x43x34	
Rotel RA-1520	1,05,750	★★★★★	It's got good looks, a good spec, and a great sound	60	5	1	0		1	●	2	●	●	●	2	9x43x269	
Cyrus 8a	1,89,000	★★★★★	Everything we've come to expect and love about Cyrus	70	5	0	0		1	●	2		●	●	2	7x22x36	
Cyrus 8 DAC	2,09,000	★★★★★	Meticulous and engaging amp and DAC combo	70	●	6	0	0	●	0		2	●	●	2	7x22x364	
Naim Nait XS	1,75,000	★★★★★	Still a top class premium amplifier	60		3	0	0		2	●	1			1	7x43x30	
Quad II Classic Integrated	3,80,000	★★★★★	A fine integrated amplifier with a hefty price tag	25		3	1	1		1		1			1	20x31x38	
Roksan Caspian M2	2,18,000	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier (Premium) Awards 2012	85		5	0	0		1	●	1		●	2	8x43x332	
Unison Research Preludio	2,40,000	★★★★★	Rubs shoulders with the very best at this price	14		4	0	0		1		1			1	20x40x38	
Unison Research S6	2,90,000	★★★★★	In the right system, the S6 is truly magical	33		5	0	0		1		1		●	2	21x35x49	
Unison Research S9	6,45,000	★★★★★	We can't help but love this quirky valve amplifier	35		4	0	0		0		1		●	1	25x41x57	
Unison Research Simply Italy	1,50,000	★★★★★	A well-engineered valve amplifier at a sensible price	12		5	0	0		1		1		●	2	26x19x35	
NAD D3020	45,00	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier (Budget) Awards 2013	30		2	0	0	●	0		1		●	●	2	19x6x22
Naim Nait 5si	1,39,875	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier (Mid) Awards 2013	60		3	0	0		1		1	●	●	●	2	74x43x31
Cyrus DACXP Signature	3,50,000	★★★★★	With the signature update, the DACXP remains a fine product	70		2	0	0	1		1	●	1	●	2	7x22x36	
Mark Levinson No585	8,28,000	Not yet rated	Powerful, immersive and highly detailed. Brilliant!	200	●	6	0	0	●	0	2	●		●	1	19x44x51	

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.

Product	₹	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)
ATC CA-2	1,43,000	★★★★★	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	●	9x44x32
Cyrus DACXP+	3,28,000*	★★★★★	2	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	●	7x22x36
Linn Akurate Kontrol	4,18,600	★★★★★	4	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	●	9x38x38
NAD C165BEE	75,000	★★★★★	4	1	1	2	●	●	●	●	●	8x44x29
Naim NAC 152 XS	1,25,000	★★★★★	5	0	0	0	●	●	●	●	●	7x43x30
Quad Elite Pre	79,000	★★★★★	6	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	●	7x32x31
Rotel RC-1580	1,59,750	★★★★★	5	1	1	2	●	●	●	●	●	10x43x34
Audio Research LS27	7,31,250*	★★★★★	6	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	●	13x48x34
Burmester 808 MK5	25,00,000*	★★★★★	Opt	Opt	Opt	Opt	●	●	●	●	●	95x48x33
Chord Electronics CPA 8000	20,50,000	★★★★★	0	0	2	●	●	●	●	●	●	31x42x36
Naim NAC252	6,50,000	★★★★★	6	0	0	0	●	●	●	●	●	9x43x31

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.

Product	₹	Verdict	Type	Power (w)	Phono in	XLR in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Weight (kg)
ATC P1	2,16,000	★★★★★	Stereo	150	1	1	14x44x35	26
Cyrus Mono X300	3,25,000	★★★★★	Stereo	235	1	1	7x22x36	73
Linn Akurate 2200	3,33,795	★★★★★	Stereo	111	1	1	9x38x38	6.5
NAD C275BEE	99,000	★★★★★	Stereo	150	1	0	13x44x35	15
Naim NAP 155 XS	1,50,000	★★★★★	Stereo	60	0	0	7x43x30	7.5
Naim NAP 250	3,75,000	★★★★★	Stereo	80	0	0	9x43x32	165
Quad QSP	95,000	★★★★★	Stereo	140	2	0	15x33x27	14
Rotel RB-1582	1,80,000	★★★★★	Stereo	200	1	0	14x43x41	33
Audio Research Reference 75	9,00,000*	★★★★★	Stereo	75	0	1	22x48x50	21
Burmester 911 Mk3	35,00,000*	★★★★★	Stereo	535	0	1	22x48x48	31
Chord SPM 14000 MkII	19,75,000	★★★★★	Mono	700	1	1	31x48x69	75

Instant expert... hi-fi separates

1. Why matching pairs are a winning combination

We advocate separates over all-in-one systems. Sound-wise, separates tend to perform better, but when buying we still suggest you demo the same maker's matching amp and CD player. The kit usually shares the same design team and will sonically complement each other: if you like the sound of the amp, you'll probably enjoy the CD player, too.

3. Position before you listen - and don't stack it, rack it

You've bought your shiny new system. But you're not going to stack your new amp, CD spinner and turntable on that rickety table, are you? And don't even think of putting the kit on the floor. To sound it's best, hi-fi kit needs a dust-free, level and secure base. Invest pounds in a dedicated rack, and the sonic (and visual) rewards justify the outlay.

2. Listen to your favourite music, not the dealer's

Hi-fi dealers should have a decent CD and vinyl collection for demo purposes, but we suggest you take your own. Take tunes you know so you can concentrate on how the kit is performing, rather than on the new music. And don't just take your 'good'-sounding CDs. If you listen to lots of compressed pop, take it and hear exactly how it sounds.

4. Give your amplifier room to breathe

Well done for buying that nice equipment rack, but before you undo all your good work, make sure you give your stereo amplifier room to breathe. These machines get hot, and the chassis vents shouldn't be covered up. The top shelf of your rack is ideal, but if you also own a top-loading CD player and/or turntable you'll need clearance for all.

5. Keep on running, keep on improving

Hi-fi units are also (sort of) like Spanish footballers. No, not constantly feigning a blown fuse, but happiest playing in the heat. New kit can take weeks to reach optimum levels. Once run-in - unless you have an environmental conscience - we suggest you leave your kit on. Otherwise, give it around half-an-hour to warm up before you hit play.

iPod docks

Docks with power These are ready-made systems for your iPod; usually include speakers

Docks without power These integrate an iPod into an existing system as a line level source

The shortlist



Bowers & Wilkins Zeppelin Air



AWARD WINNER
Epoz Aktimate Micro



JBL OnBeat Venue LT

Product	₹	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	Dock type	Aux	Power (w)	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Arcam rCube	42,300*	★★★★★			iOS	●	90	20x20x20
Bose SoundDock II	14,513	★★★★★			iOS	●	n/a	17x30x17
Epoz Aktimate Micro	27,500	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	24x15x20
Gear4 AirZone Series 1	19,900	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	n/a	18x33x19
GenevaSound Model S	24,990	★★★★★			iOS	●	30	14x24x19
JBL OnBeat Venue LT	15,990	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	30	13x42x14
Logitech S715i	9995	★★★★★			iOS	●	20	6x39x13
Logitech UE Air Speaker	TBA	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	n/a	17x53x15
Monitor Audio i-deck 100	20,000	★★★★★			iOS	●	90	25x32x21
Monitor Audio i-deck 200	TBA	★★★★★			iOS	●	140	25x55x21
Revo K2	30,000*	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	33x11x11
B&O BeoSound 8	92,000	★★★★★			iOS	●	n/a	24x66x16
Bose SoundDock 10	48,263	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	n/a	22x43x24
B&W Zeppelin Air	48,000	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	150	17x54x21
Epoz Aktimate Maxi	56,450	★★★★★			iOS	●	60	32x21x265
Geneva Lab Model L	1,10,000	★★★★★			iOS	●	100	29x45x37
Geneva Lab Model M	54,990	★★★★★			iOS	●	50	20x37x25
Geneva Lab Model XL	2,00,000	★★★★★			iOS	●	600	79x55x37
JBL OnBeat Xtreme	24,990	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	120	23x44x24
Loewe AirSpeaker	TBA	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	4x20	13x24x244
Marantz Consolette	75000*	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	150	26x54x21

Wireless speakers

Bluetooth Universal wireless system that's incorporated into most sources

AirPlay Apple's proprietary wireless system; works over your home network

Product	₹	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	Aux	Charging	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
B&O Beolit 12	66,600	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	19x23x13
B&W A5	38,000	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	18x30x20
B&W A7	62,750	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	22x36x16
Bose SoundLink Air	23,513	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	17x31x10
Bose SoundLink W'less Mobile	20,138	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	13x24x5
Cambridge Audio Minx Air 100	36,100	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	18x35x12
Cambridge Audio Minx Go	12,500	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	23x24x6
JBL Charge	9990	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	18x7x7
Bose SoundLink Mini	16,200	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	5x18x6

Headphones

Ear tips Most in-ears come with these. Experiment with sizes to get the best fit.
In-line remote Mostly for Apple devices, but Android-friendly units are growing. Handy.

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
SoundMAGIC E10



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
AKG K451



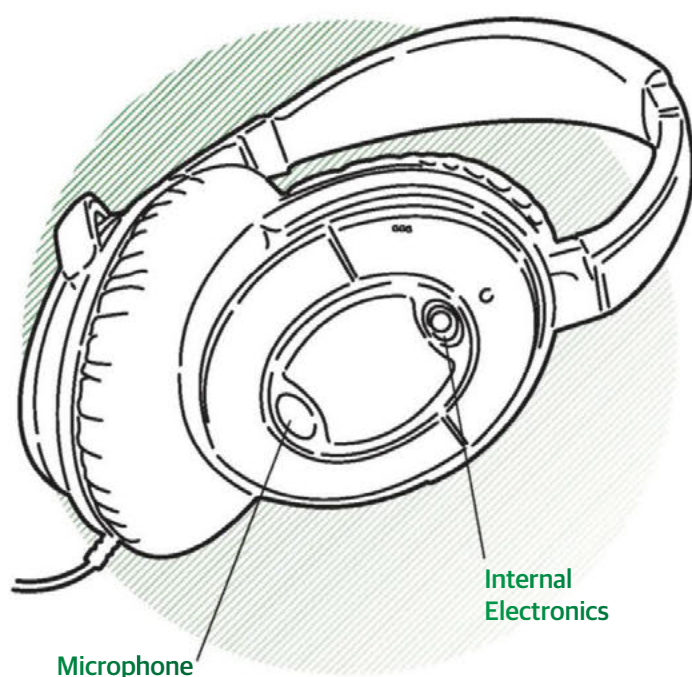
AWARD WINNER
Sennheiser Momentum

Product	₹	Verdict	In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight (g)
Audio Technica ATH-CK550	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			8
Audio Technica ATH-CKS55i	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			6
Audio Technica ATH-T400	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			260
Beyerdynamic DTX101IE	6795	★★★★★	●		Closed			11
Nokia BH-504	6500	★★★★★	●		Closed		●	108
Panasonic RP-HJE170	799	★★★★★	●		Closed			3
Panasonic RP-HTX7	3999	★★★★★	●		Closed			153
Sennheiser CX 300-II	3490	★★★★★	●		Closed			4
Sennheiser CX281	2790	★★★★★	●		Closed			16
Sennheiser HD 202	2290	★★★★★	●		Closed			130
Sennheiser MM 70i	7490	★★★★★	●		Closed		●	12
Sennheiser MM50	4990	★★★★★	●		Closed			7
Sennheiser PX100-II	3990	★★★★★	●		Open			80
Skullcandy Full Metal Jacket	3559	★★★★★	●		Closed			13
Skullcandy Icon 3	1949	★★★★★	●		Closed			45
SoundMagic E10	2500*	★★★★★	●		Closed			11
SoundMagic PL30	1486	★★★★★	●	●	Closed			10
SoundMagic PL50	2730	★★★★★	●		Closed			8
Sony MDR-570LP	2990	★★★★★	●		Closed			110
B&W P7	33,990	★★★★★	●		Closed			290
Audio Technica ATH-ANC1	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed		●	100
Audio Technica ATH-ES55	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			120
Audio Technica ATH-ES7	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			160
Audio Technica ATH-ES88	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			130
Audio Technica ATH-EW9	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			33
Audio Technica ATH-M50	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			284
Audio Technica ATH-W1000	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			350
Audio Technica ATH-W1000X	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			350
Audio Technica ATH-WS55i	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			165
AKG K3003i	1,00,000*	★★★★★	●		Closed			10
AKG K370	8000	★★★★★	●		Closed			4
AKG K451	5000	★★★★★	●		Closed			120
AKG Q701	19,990	★★★★★	●		Open			236
AKG Q460	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			120
Beyerdynamic DT880	22,399	★★★★★	●		Open		●	340
Beyerdynamic DTX80	4999	★★★★★	●		Closed			12

HEADPHONES continued

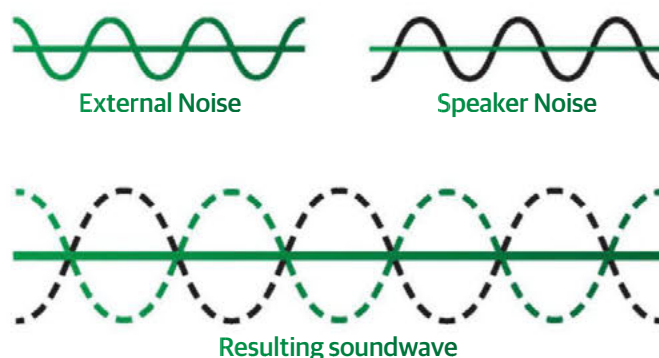
Product	₹	Verdict	In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight (g)
Beyerdynamic MMX 101iE	4750	★★★★★ Best in-ears (Mid), Awards 2012	●		Closed	●		11
Beyerdynamic T1	1,00,000*	★★★★★ Best home on-ear headphones (Premium), Awards 2010.		●	Closed			350
Beyerdynamic T50P	11,800	★★★★★ Best portable on-ears (Premium), Awards 2012	●		Closed			174
Bose Around-ear 2	8663	★★★★★ Packed with clever technology and work well		●	Closed			142
Bose MIE2i	7650	★★★★★ A perfect headphone meets microphone solution		●	Closed			19
Bose Mobile in-ear headset 2	8213	★★★★★ Unobtrusive in place, but lacking in excitement		●	Closed			18
Bose QuietComfort 15	17,550	★★★★★ Best noise-cancelling headphones, Awards 2012	●		Closed	●		227
B&W P3	16,500	★★★★★ Stylish and sonically talented on-ear headphones		●	Closed			130
B&W P5	23,500	★★★★★ Aesthetically beautiful and aurally accomplished too		●	Closed			195
Focal Spirit One	19,999	★★★★★ Refined enough, but not the most exciting		●	Closed			225
Grado SR80i	12,000*	★★★★★ Best home on-ear headphones (Budget-Mid), Awards 2012.	●		Open			200
Harman/Kardon CL	9990	★★★★★ An impressive headphone debut for Harman/Kardon		●	Closed			195
Klipsch Image One	6600	★★★★★ Perfect for those who enjoy a lot of bass		●	Closed			138
Klipsch Image X5	9750	★★★★★ Still a great buy, with a very balanced sound		●	Closed			11
Klipsch Image X10i	12,000	★★★★★ Best in-ears (Premium), Awards 2011		●	Closed			320
Klipsch S4i	4490	★★★★★ These Klipschs are great all-rounders, with an exciting edge		●	Closed			12
Logitech UE9000	31,995	★★★★★ Could be more refined, but make up for this with bundles of energy			Closed		● ●	378
Martin Logan Mikros 70	TBA	★★★★★ If you like your music to be presented with a matter-of-fact approach, these are just the job		●	Closed			13
Monster Beats by Dre iBeats	15,000	★★★★★ For smooth, bassy sounds they're ace		●	Closed			n/a
Monster Beats Pro by Dre	38,000	★★★★★ Brilliant at what they do well		●	Closed			299
Oppo PM-1	79,999	★★★★★ Oppo's first pair of headphones are a resounding success		●	Open			395
Philips Fidelio M1	16,000*	★★★★★ Best portable on-ears (Mid-Premium), Awards 2012	●		Closed	●		166
PSB M4U2	28,000	★★★★★ PSB's first headphones are truly brilliant. Hear them now!		●	Closed			362

How Does Noise Cancelling Work?



This kind of design is usually battery-powered and will reduce background noise. They contain microphones that pick up external noise, and then invert its waveform electronically before outputting it to your ears. This inverse wave works against the original, and greatly reduces the amount you hear.

It works best on continuous low-frequency sounds such as plane engines and Brian Blessed humming. It's not unusual for such designs to tweak tonal balance to improve things, although some add a degree of hiss in the process.



Try these

Bose QuietComfort 15 ★★★★★ ₹19,013

"The noise-cancelling is so effective it can feel like silence is being pushed into your head. Mid-tune, it's almost as if the outside world disappears completely."

Logitech UE9000 ★★★★★ ₹35,000

"They could do better in terms of refinement - but if it's energy and entertainment you're after (as well as Bluetooth), they're pretty much spot-on."

PSB M4U2 ★★★★★ ₹28,000

"If you want to turn your office, flight or train journey into a private listening experience of exceptional quality, these are the headphones to get."

HEADPHONES continued

Product	₹	Verdict	In-ear On-ear Type	Noise cancelling Wireless	Weight (g)
Sennheiser HD 380 Pro	9990	★★★★★	● Closed		220
Sennheiser HD25-1 II Adidas	3990	★★★★★	● Closed		140
Sennheiser HD 800	84,990	★★★★★	● Open		350
Sennheiser IE 8i	24,990	★★★★★	● Closed		18
Sennheiser IE80	27,990	★★★★★	● Closed		5
Sennheiser MM 400-X	17,990	★★★★★	● Closed	●	105
Sennheiser Momentum	24,990	★★★★★	● Closed		190
Sennheiser PXC 450	27,990	★★★★★	● Closed		240
Sennheiser RS 160	13,490	★★★★★	● Closed	●	226
Sennheiser RS 180	21,990	★★★★★	● Open	●	204
Sennheiser RS 220	29,990	★★★★★	● Open	●	329
Sennheiser X 320	7990	★★★★★	● Closed		280
Shure SE115	8200	★★★★★	● Closed	●	30
Shure SE310	21,000	★★★★★	● Closed		7
Shure SE420	29,000	★★★★★	● Closed	●	29
Shure SE535	31,000	★★★★★	● Closed	●	272
Shure SRH1840	49,778	★★★★★	● Open		268
Sony MDR-1R	TBA	★★★★★	● Closed		240
Sony MDR-Z1000P5	19,990	★★★★★	● Closed		270
Sony XBA-3iP	7990	★★★★★	● Closed	●	7
SoundMagic HP100	15,000*	★★★★★	● Closed		228

Headphones Jargon Buster

OVER-EAR



The most popular hi-fi headphone design (also called circumaural), these cup your ears completely, usually with semi-air-tight earcups. You'll notice cans of this type used as monitors in recording studios: depending on the type of design they use they can be extremely effective at cutting out the outside world.

ON-EAR



Supra-aural or on-ear designs tend to be smaller and lighter than circumaural models. They sit on your ear rather than over it, usually pressing on to it as well. Some listeners find them lighter and easier to wear for extended listening than over-ear models, but they do tend to allow in more sounds from outside.

IN-EAR



Gone are the days when everyone else needs to hear your music. In-ear buds are a great way to isolate yourself in sound. Nowadays, in-ears usually come with rubber tips, which provide a good seal and help the music travel only down your ear canals. A better fit means better sound, so experiment with tip sizes.

Try these

AKG K550 ★★★★★

"The K550s are sweetly communicative, handle tempos in a natural, unforced manner and punch into and out of low-frequency information with precision."

Philips Fidelio M1 ★★★★★

"A rounded, refined presentation. Vocals have room to breathe, while high-frequency sounds are natural and don't harden up when you crank the volume."

Sony XBA-2iP ★★★★★

"Agility and precision is up there with the very best at this price, and the spacious delivery allows for plenty of detail all the way up the frequency range."

Stereo systems

This category includes a wide range of products including all-in-one packages where the speakers are part of the system, through to micro systems where the electronics are housed separately from the speakers. A streaming option is available on many newer systems.

The shortlist



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Denon D-M39DAB

Awards 2012: Best Micro System



Ruark R4i

Awards 2012: Best All-In-One Music System



Onkyo CR-N755

Awards 2012: Best Networked Micro System

Product	₹	Verdict	CD	Streaming	Internet Radio	DAB	FM	Analogue inputs	Digital inputs	Headphone out
Denon CEOL Piccolo	39,900	★★★★★	No matter what the source, the CEOL Piccolo will play all your music in superb style	●	●			●	●	●
Denon D-M39	44,900	★★★★★	Best micro system, Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Marantz M-CR502	31,758	★★★★★	Exceptional precision and timing, and better value	●		●	●	●	●	●
Onkyo CR-N755	32,000*	★★★★★	Best networked micro system, Awards 2012	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Marantz M-CR610	54,900	★★★★★	Best music system (premium), Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Arcam Solo Mini	87,000	★★★★★	Best CD system (Mid), Awards 2010	●		●	●	●	●	●
Arcam Solo Neo	1,38,000	★★★★★	Extra functionality over the original Solo - great buy	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Denon CEOL (RCD-N7)	39,900	★★★★★	Smooth and detailed, with great features	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Linn Majik DSM	3,85,000	★★★★★	A thoughtfully designed system and a pleasure to use	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Marantz M-CR603	39,900	★★★★★	Best microsystem (Premium) Awards 2011	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Naim Uniti 2	3,25,000	★★★★★	Best Network Music Player (Premium)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Naim UnitiQute 2	1,25,000	★★★★★	Systems Product of the Year	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Ruark Audio R4i	60,000*	★★★★★	Best all-in-one music system, Awards 2012	●	●	●	●			

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.

Product	₹	Verdict	HDMI out	Optical out	Co-axial out	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/kHz)	Video
Apple TV	8900	★★★★★	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	●	16/48	●
Asus O!Play HD2	8595	★★★★★	1	1	1	0	0	0	3		20/48	●
Cambridge Audio NP30	38,400	★★★★★	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	●	24/96	
Denon DNP-720AE	29,990	★★★★★	1	0	0	0	0	1		●	24/192	
Camb. Audio Stream Magic 6	69,700	★★★★★	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	●	24/96	
Cyrus Lyric 09	4,40,000	★★★★★	0	0	0	0	2	2	3	●	24/192	
Pioneer N50	NA	★★★★★	0	1	0	0	1	0	1		24/192	
Rotel RT-09	NA	★★★★★	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	●	24/192	
Cambridge Audio Minx Xi	55,500	★★★★★	0	0	0	0	1	1	1		24/96	
Cyrus Stream X2	1,45,000	★★★★★	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192	
Cyrus Streamline2	1,75,000	★★★★★	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192	
Cyrus Stream XP2-QX	3,08,000	★★★★★	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192	
Linn Kiko	3,20,000	★★★★★	1	0	0	4	1	0	0	●	24/192	
Naim NDX	3,50,000	★★★★★	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	●	24/192	
Naim Uniti 2	3,25,000	★★★★★	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	●	24/192	
Naim UnitiLite	2,00,000	★★★★★	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	●	24/192	

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

The shortlist



Apple iPad Air



Apple iPad Mini Retina



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Google Nexus 7

Product	₹	Verdict	OS	3G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Amazon Kindle Fire HD 16GB	14,590	★★★★★	Android	●	7	1280x800	16/32	241x186x9
Apple iPad 2 16GB Wi-Fi	24,500	★★★★★	iOS	●	9.7	1024x768	16/32	241x186x9
Apple iPad Mini 64GB Wi-Fi	33,900	★★★★★	iOS	●	7.9	1024x768	16/32/64	200x135x7
Apple iPad 4 32GB Wi-Fi	37,900	★★★★★	iOS	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x190x9
Asus Eee Pad Transformer	49,999	★★★★★	Android	●	10.1	1280x800	16/32	271x177x13
Asus Eee Pad Trans Prime	42,999	★★★★★	Android	●	10.1	1280x800	16/32	181x263x8
Google Nexus 7	9999	★★★★★	Android	●	7	1280x800	16/32	99x120x11
Google Nexus 10	34,413	★★★★★	Android	●	10	2560x1060	16/32	264x178x9
Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 7	25,000*	★★★★★	Android	●	7	1920x1200	16/32/64	186x128x9
Apple iPad Mini/Retina display	28,900	★★★★★	iOS 7	●	7.9	2048x1536	16/32/64	200x135x7
Apple iPad 4 16GB Wi-Fi	31,900*	★★★★★	iOS	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x190x9
Apple iPad Air	35,900	★★★★★	iOS 7	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x170x8
Google Nexus 7 (2013)	20,999	★★★★★	Android	●	7	1920x1200	16/32	200x114x9
Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1	49,470	★★★★★	Android	●	10.1	2500x1600	16/32/64	171x243x8
Sony Xperia Tablet Z	46,990	★★★★★	Android	●	10.1	1920x1200	16/32	72x266x69

Things to consider: tablets



Camera

Most tablet cameras are decent, but they won't be able to beat a dedicated camera in terms of picture quality. Think long and hard if you're looking to capture footage as quality can be inconsistent.



Apps

iOS is the king of apps, but Android is hard on its heels and Windows is catching up. If apps are your thing then your choice may come down to which ones are available on each platform, rather than quantity.



Keypad

Want to increase productivity? On-screen keypads are a mixed bag, but some have optional (and expensive) physical keyboards. Keep that in mind if you're looking to do some work on the go.



Ecosystem

iOS, Android and Windows 8. Each one is better (or worse) than the other, in some way. Apple has the apps, while Android is customisable and Windows offers a lot in terms of functionality.

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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	Verdict	OS	4G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (hwd, mm)	
Google Nexus 5	★★★★★	A powerhouse of a smartphone in every respect	Android	●	5	1920x1080	16/32	138x69x9
Apple iPhone 5	★★★★★	Faster, lighter and better: iPhone gets its annual facelift	iOS	●	4.0	1136x640	16/32/64	124x59x8
Google Nexus 4	★★★★★	A top performer and a brilliant realisation of Android power	Android		4.7	1280x768	8/16	134x69x9
HTC One Max	★★★★★	A fine performer but could make better use of its big screen	Android	●	5.9	1920x1080	32	146x71x9
HTC One X+	★★★★★	Well worth considering: good for music and a joy to use	Android		4.7	1280x720	32/64	
LG G-Flex	★★★★★	All the pros of the G2 and more, but with a low-res screen	Android	●	6	1280x720	32	161x82x8
Nokia Lumia 920	★★★★★	A promising start for Nokia's flapship	Windows	●	4.5	1280x768	32	130x71x11
Nokia Lumia 1520	★★★★★	Apps still disappoint, but this is the best Windows Phone yet	Windows	●	6	1920x1080	32	163x85x9
Oppo N1	★★★★★	Quirky and flexible, this is a great effort from a promising brand	Android	●	5.9	1920x1080	16	171x83x9
Samsung Galaxy Note III	★★★★★	The original phablet. Updated and still among the best	Android	●	5.7	1920x1080	16/32	151x80x8
LG G2	★★★★★	Unbridled power and thoughtful design. A fantastic phone	Android		5.2	1920x1080	16/32	139x71x9
Samsung Galaxy S III	★★★★★	Best smartphone, Awards 2012	Android	●	4.8	1280x720	16/32	137x71x9
HTC One M8	★★★★★	Improves considerably on its predecessor. Does very little wrong	Android	●	5	1920x1080	32	146x71x9
Sony Xperia Z1	★★★★★	Sony fans will love it. A speedy, sleek and impressive smartphone	Android	●	5	1920x1080	16	144x74x9
HTC One	★★★★★	A true marvel in terms of smartphone tech	Android	●	4.7	1920x1080	16	
Apple iPhone 5S	★★★★★	Best smartphone, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	iOS	●	4.0	1136x640	16/32/64	124x59x8
Google Nexus 5	★★★★★	A powerhouse of a phone in every respect	Android		4.95	1920x1080	16/32	138x69x9
Nokia Lumia 925	★★★★★	The best Windows Phone yet	Windows	●	4.5	1280x768	16/32	129x71x9
Samsung Galaxy S4	★★★★★	Better than its predecessor but not as good as its rivals	Android	●	5.0	1920x1080	16/32/64	137x70x8

Consider these

Wired cans sound better, but wireless is catching up. Here are the best on offer



Logitech UE 9000

Solid build and effective noise-cancelling features make the UE 9000 a fine proposition. The wireless connection is a tad unrefined but the energy produced is excellent. Good for six hours' use.



Parrot Zik

Stylish and advanced, the Zik features the 2.1 A2DP variant of Bluetooth which doesn't quite match aptX. Still, with NFC on board and a detailed sound to boot, the Zik should be on your list.



Philips Fidelio M1BT

Our 2013 Award-winners boast aptX compatibility and easy-to-use controls. Its in the sound where they really shine, showing off an excellent turn of pace with bags of detail. Good for 10 hours' use.



Sennheiser MM 400-X

A compact, portable design and low(ish) price make these cans quite enticing. Vocals have plenty of detail and directness, and with aptX along for the ride too, these are some capable headphones.

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.

Product	₹	Verdict	Length as tested (m)	HDMI type
Audioquest Pearl	2100	★★★★★	1	1.4
Chord Company Supershield	5000	★★★★★	1	1.3
Kimber Kable HD-09	6500	★★★★★	2	1.3
Profigold SKY HDMI Ethernet	2999	Not rated	2	1.4
QED Performance HDMI-e	7410	★★★★★	7	1.4
QED Profile HDMI	2225	★★★★★	1	1.4
Wireworld Chroma 6	1589	★★★★★	1	1.4
Audioquest Cinnamon	6600	★★★★★	2	1.4
Audioquest Forest	9300	★★★★★	5	1.4
Bridge Connect BPE105	3399	Not rated	1	1.4b
Chord Co. Active Silver + HDMI	9500	★★★★★	1	1.4
Chord Co. Supershield (5m)	9000	★★★★★	5	1.3a
QED Reference	7740	★★★★★	5	1.3ab
van den Hul Flat HDMI (3m)	10700	★★★★★	3	1.3
van den Hul Ultimate	13000	★★★★★	1	1.3

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

The shortlist



QED Performance Graphite
Awards 2012: Best Optical Digital Cable

“The sound through this cable is incredibly detailed and startlingly clear. There’s a good grasp of dynamics, too.”



QED Performance
Awards 2012: Best Coaxial Digital Cable

“The QED is good at conveying subtleties. There’s a good sense of energy too, with plenty of attack.”



Supra USB 2.0
Awards 2012: Best USB Cable

“It helps deliver impeccable timing and plenty of energy, both of which translate into a tangible sense of fun.”

Product	₹	Verdict	Type	Length tested (m)
Profigold SKY Optical	2299	Not rated	Optical	2
QED Performance Digital	4135	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
QED Performance Graphite	2760	★★★★★	Optical	1
Supra AnCo (coaxial)	4700	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
Wireworld Nova 6	1059	★★★★★	Optical	1
Wireworld Ultraviolet USB	1324	★★★★★	USB	1
Chord Company Optichord	3300	★★★★★	Optical	1
Bridge Connect BEA562	2599	Not rated	Optical	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



AWARD WINNER

Atlas Element Integra

Awards 2012: Best Analogue Interconnect

"Improves on many of the things that the former champ did right. The Element Integra is highly recommended."



Furutech Alpha-Line 1

"If your current soundstage sounds a little loose and disorganised, this can help to snap everything back into place. Best for owners of midrange systems."



Chord Company Chameleon Plus

"Give your kit a serious shot in the arm – an overly dull system would certainly benefit from its ability and verve. One of our long-time favourites for high-end set-ups."

Product	₹	Verdict	RCA phono 3.5mm-to-RCA XLR (balanced)	Length tested (m)
Wireworld Luna 6	979	★★★★★	●	1
Belkin Mini-Stereo Cable	649	★★★★★		1.8
Chord Company CrimsonPlus	2800	★★★★★	●	1
Profigold PROI3301	899	★★★★★		1
QED Performance Audio 2	4770	★★★★★	●	1
QED Profile	1855	★★★★★	●	1
Wireworld Oasis 6	2914	★★★★★	●	1
QED Profile J2P	1590	★★★★★	●	1.5
QED Reference Audio J2P	3290	★★★★★	●	3
van den Hul The Name	8000	★★★★★	●	0.8
Bridge Connect BEA423	2499	Not rated	●	3
Chord Co. Chameleon Plus	8300	★★★★★	●	1
QED Signature Audio S	23,535	★★★★★	●	1
van den Hul The Wave	15,900	★★★★★	●	1

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.

Product	₹	Verdict	Biwire
Atlas Equator 2.0 OFC	750/m	★★★★★	
SCP 16/20FC-HD-WT	174/m	Not rated	
Chord Co. Carnival Silv. Screen	380/m	★★★★★	
Chord Company Leyline	160/m	★★★★★	
QED Silver Anniversary XT	668/m	★★★★★	
Wireworld The Stream 16/2	2119/2m	★★★★★	
Wireworld The Orbit	4239/2m	★★★★★	●
QED Revelation	1908/m	★★★★★	
QED Silver Anniv. XT Biwire	1336/m	★★★★★	●
van den Hul CS122	2050/m	★★★★★	●

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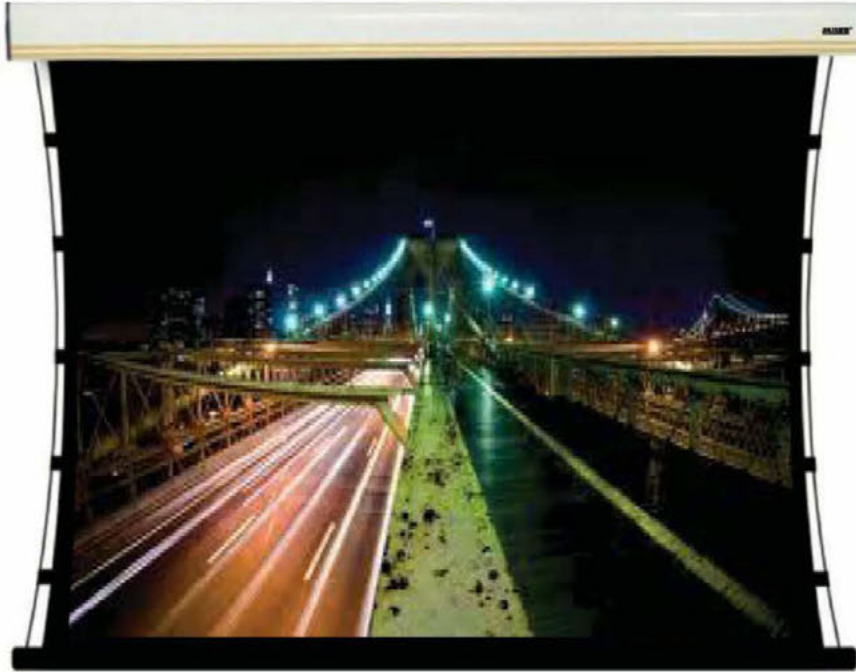


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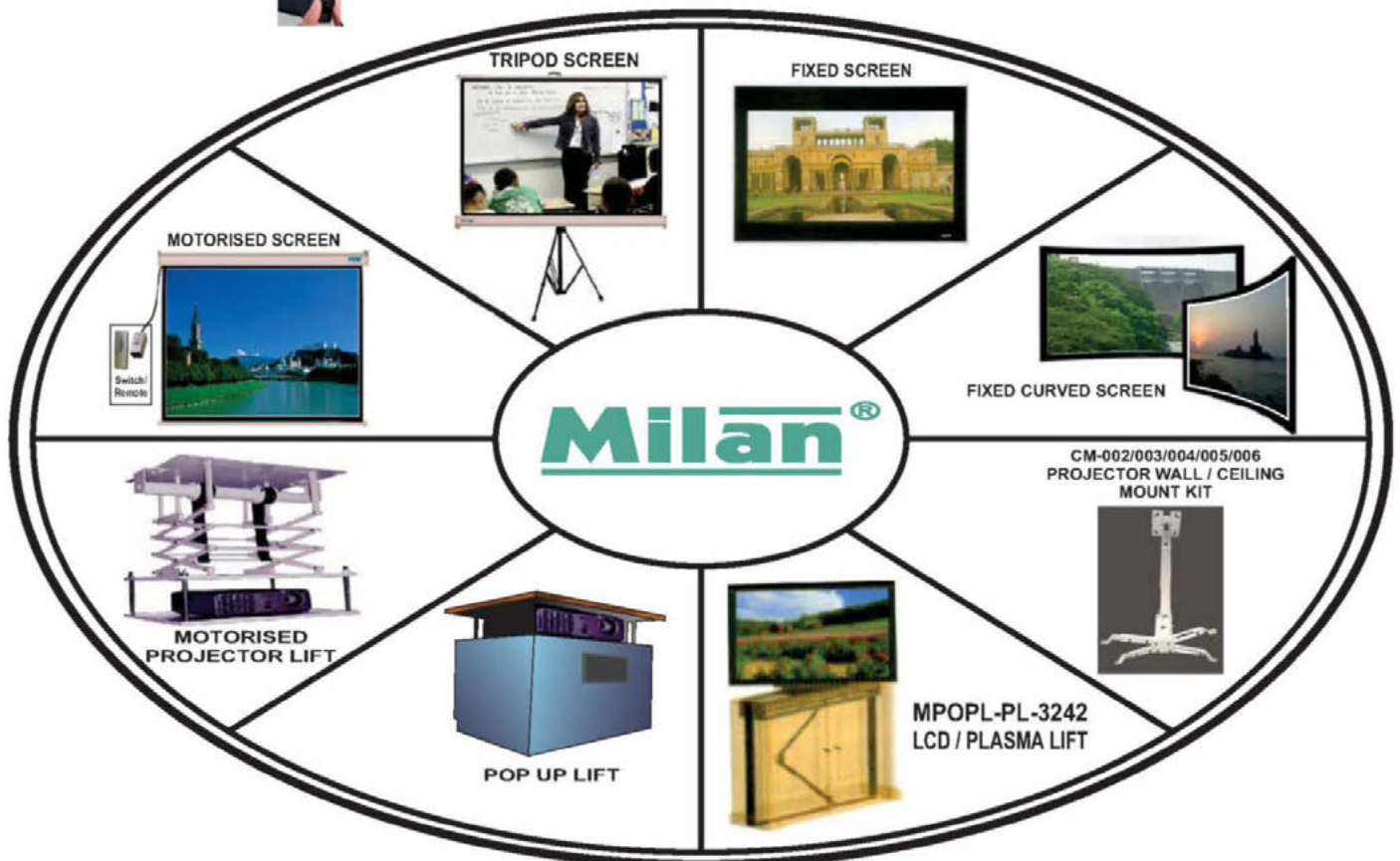


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TOP SHELF

Audeze EL-8 TITANIUM

World's first headphone with an integrated Apple Lightning cable



Not too long ago, we were fortunate enough to sample Audeze's sonically magnificent EL-8 and LCD range of headphones. Which is why their new EL-8 Titanium has us more than excited. It is the world's first headphone to feature a fully integrated Apple Lightning cable and they are Apple MFi certified. That means, if you are an Apple user, you can enjoy high resolution audio and voice calls too.

On the exterior, they look a touch similar to the EL-8 closed back, however, the Titanium finish just adds that bit of exquisiteness to these headphones. They feature the same iconic industrial design by BMW DesignWorksUSA and look purposeful.

While the exterior looks stunning, the technology on the inside impresses even more. The EL-8 Titanium is capable of doing justice to 24-bit audio for music and voice. That is made possible through a high quality DSP and DAC. Then comes the 100mm Planar Magnetic driver which features the largest surface area when compared to headphones in its class. Audeze's very own Fluxor Magnetic technology makes it easy to drive these without compromising on sound quality. This new

patent-pending tech was introduced in the EL-8 and it is capable of delivering twice the magnetic flux density of the highest-grade neodymium magnetic circuits available. This enables Audeze to lower the overall weight of the headphone while making them efficient enough to work with mobile devices. The innovation doesn't stop there. With another patent-pending Uniforce Diaphragm tech, an industry first - variable trace widths in the voice-coil effectively capture variations in the magnetic field within the magnetic gaps by equalizing the forces of the individual traces, creating a uniform driving force across the entire diaphragm surface. This greatly enhances audio resolution, improves imaging and lowers distortion.

Last but not the least, the EL-8 Titanium also employs Fazor technology, which was first introduced in the LCD Collection. Fazors are special acoustical elements positioned on either side of the magnetic structure that improve transparency by affecting the sound waves generated by large planar diaphragms. The end result is extended frequency response and improved high-frequency extension.

The built-in microphone can be used for phone calls and is SIRI compatible. An accompanying Audeze app can be used to apply EQ and sound presets. For non-Apple device compatibility, the headphones also include a standard analog cable to work with mobile devices. We are hoping to get our hands on the Titanium soon, until then head to headphonezone.in for more information.



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