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



AV Forums 'Highly Recommended',
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If I could pick and choose, I'd choose you

I'll be the first to admit £2000 is a significant sum of money. I reckon anyone contemplating spending that sort of sum on pretty much anything at all should have a long, hard think before parting with the cash. And that goes double (triple, even) when the money's going on hi-fi, the performance of which can be pretty subjective at the best of times.

But while we may not be able to completely make your mind up for you, we can at least narrow things down considerably. We've built **four of the best £2k-ish stereo systems you can buy (p32)** using a variety of sources, so taking a big slice of the uncertainty out of the process. As we always say, you need to hear systems for yourself before you commit the cash - but in these four instances it's safe to say your money's well spent.



Simon

Simon Lucas, editor

My products of the month

Rega RP6/Exact

Systems p40

...or How To Get The Best From a Venerable Technology



Tidal

Streaming services p57

Never mind the attendant hoopla, Tidal is an outsounding streaming service

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Ced Yuen News editor



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Verity Burns Multimedia editor



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Becky Roberts Staff writer



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Kashfia Kabir First Tests editor



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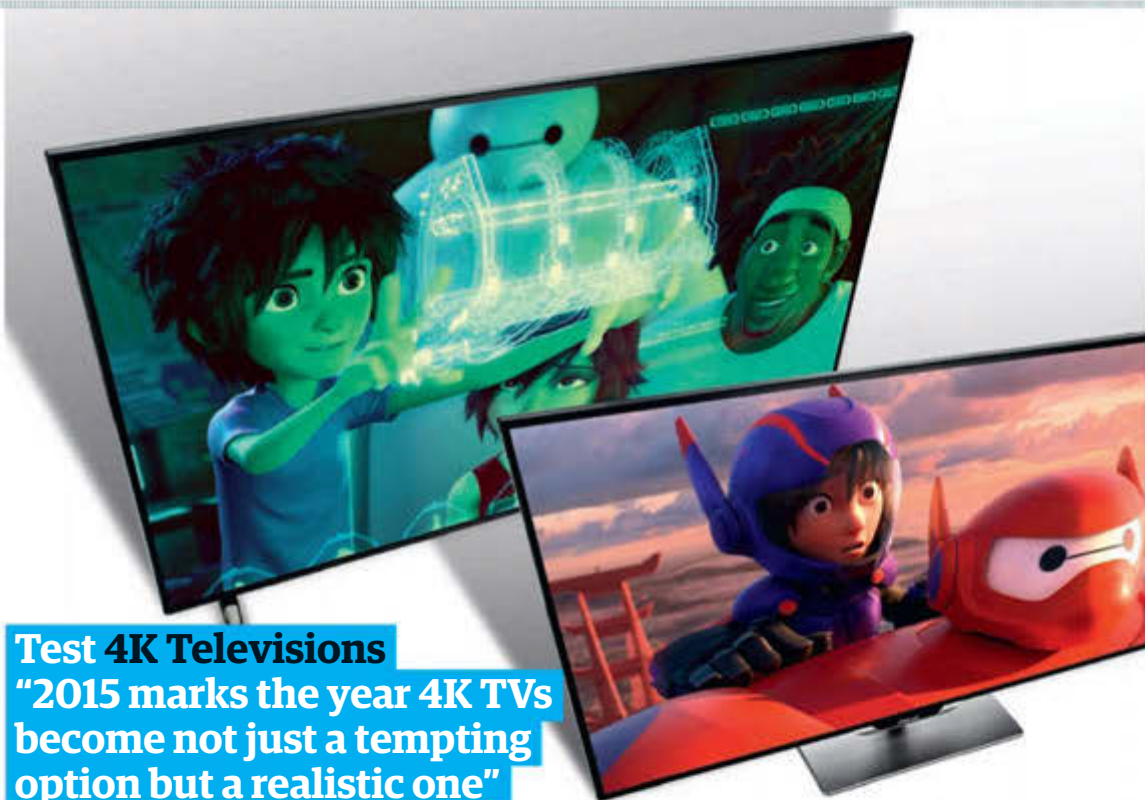


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"Portable, desirable and super-sounding, these over-ears demand an audition"

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"2015 marks the year 4K TVs become not just a tempting option but a realistic one"

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First tests

"It is lovely to handle, fitting into your hand more naturally than a flat slab of the same size"

06 First Tests Sennheiser's Momentum range is back with the 2.0 over-ears, Tannoy's Revolution XT8F floorstander is an impressive effort and LG throws a curveball with its G Flex 2 smartphone.

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We talk to Peter Comeau, the director of acoustic design at IAG, on how speakers are manufactured

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This month the spotlight is on the A&R Cambridge's A60 amp

Test Music streaming "Do you want to pay more for high-quality streaming or not?"



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72 Temptations This month we have the the very tempting 326S/532H pre/power amp from Mark Levinson, and in the Electra 1038Be floorstanders Focal has wonderfully polished performers.

80 Playlist *Big Hero 6* and *Ex Machina* kick off our look at the month's latest releases, with Disco's elder statesman Giorgio Moroder returning with *Déjà Vu*. And we preview an eclectic month of TV with *Hannibal*, *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* and *Sense8*.

Our ratings explained

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

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



WHAT HI-FI?
TEST WINNER

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



Test Speaker packages "It's hard to deny having a tremendous amount of fun with this test"



Temptation
"By high-end standards it's a compact unit, yet there's also an undeniable aura of class about it"

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

Revamped hi-fi guide!
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For a full list of specifications and other useful info, visit whatifi.com

Exclusive reviews of the latest kit

FIRST TESTS

**MORE
FIRST TESTS**



**Sennheiser
Momentum 2.0**

£270 Page 15

A plusher, punchier version of one of our favourite pairs



Sony BDP-S5500

£110 Page 21

Can Sony's Blu-ray players shine on?



Clint Audio Odin

£320 Page 22

Booming wireless sound from new Danish company

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product reviews!

EXCLUSIVE

All-round excellence from a high-res wonder

Cambridge CXN | Musicstreamer | £700

Cambridge Audio is back with a splash. The new CXN streamer – part of the company's new CX series launched earlier this year with all-new design and improved sound – is a stonkingly good high-resolution network streamer for £700.

The Cambridge CXN streamer is built on the success of the Award-winning Stream Magic 6 v2 (also £700), but the new CXN's fresh, modern design makes it feel like a complete overhaul.

But it's the hugely enjoyable sonic performance that really singles the CXN out. It sounds fantastic.

Enthusiasm and entertainment

There's an enthusiastic drive to the CXN's performance, combining subtlety, snappy timing and rich detail to deliver a sound that's just wonderfully entertaining.

It's a punchy sound that has a really good grasp of rhythm and low-end impact. We've seldom heard a Cambridge product sound so muscular. Basslines are meaty, textured and bound along happily to the lively sense of rhythm. The stop and start of notes are precisely and snappily delivered, and there seems no end to the streamer's energetic

drive. The CXN is skilful at conveying the space between instruments too, a point made obvious when we hear Ghostpoet's atmospheric *X Marks The Spot* filling the room with effortless dynamic headroom.

No holding back

The sound isn't overly smooth, but the Cambridge does deliver a full-bodied performance that's hugely pleasing to listen to. The CXN certainly doesn't hold back from delivering the full impact of a song: the intensity of The Dead Weather's brooding, screeching *60 Feet Tall* is fully conveyed, while you'll be blasted with the full force of Extreme's funk-metal anthem *Rest in Peace*.

The admirably balanced tone in evidence on these samples never puts a foot out of place, either. Drums hit accurately, the bass digs deep, and the top end sparkles – yet stops shy of sounding bright or coarse. The midrange in particular sounds lovely, with voices fully fleshed out and packed with character. This streamer is not fussy with file type, either, sounding fluid and dynamic with high-resolution and Spotify-streamed tracks alike.

The CXN is fully decked out with all the latest streaming features, so it's crucial you

have a stable network connection. You can connect to your home network via ethernet, but Cambridge does include a wi-fi antenna in the box if you prefer the flexibility of a wireless connection. All you need to do is make sure your NAS drive, laptop or smartphone is connected to the same network, then just press play. Setting up the network is swift, and we experienced no dropouts while streaming.

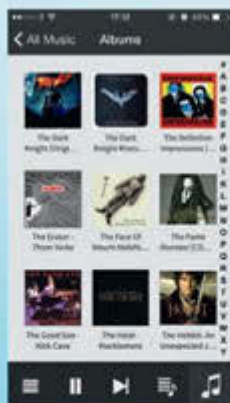
Apple users can stream songs stored on their devices using AirPlay, but we're not too keen on the rather weedy sound quality that is the result. Instead, we'd suggest hard-wiring your iPhone or iPod into either the front or back USB port for a more solid sound. Those ports will charge your device while playing, too.

Ready-made music – in any form

The CXN also features Spotify Connect and internet radio, so you have access to a few million songs from around the globe. File support is extensive: all the popular formats such as WAV, FLAC, AIFF, ALAC and MP3 are supported, as well as DSD 64



The app



Cambridge Connect app on Android/Apple

The Cambridge Connect app is free to download and has a neat interface. And it's the app – rather than the streamer – that accesses and sorts through the music stored on your server, laptop or 'phone. This means your smartphone's powerful processor is doing the grunt work, so songs load more quickly. The app is speedy, displays album artwork and track information, and is especially handy for scrolling through your vast music collection. You can also queue up tracks for an immediate playlist.

There's no substitute for a neat, easy-to-use interface



It really is a thing of beauty front-on. It's clean and unfussy but that display carries a bundle of information



files (which you can only play using the back-panel USB input).

Ready for high-resolution

All digital inputs on the CXN are capable of playing high-resolution files of up to 24-bit/192kHz, and they can be upsampled to 384kHz too. That includes the USB type B input for your laptop, and the optical and coaxial inputs. There's also a pair each of RCA and balanced XLR outputs, along with two digital outputs.

We have to hand it to Cambridge Audio – the CXN is one classy-looking streamer. It's a neat, modern construction that's

moved away from the more traditional looks of the previous Azur 351 and 651 components. The 'floating design', the brushed aluminium chassis and the sleek finish (in either black or silver) look and feel premium-quality. We have to give special mention to that lovely volume dial – it has a smooth, perfectly weighted resistance, and the way the menu responds is delightful.

We also like how neat the design of the front panel is, as it shows off the crisp

vivid TFT (thin-film transistor) display in all its glory. The 4.3in screen is packed with information but never looks cluttered. Track, artist, album and sampling rate are displayed, as is album artwork in full colour.

Control options

You can use the panel buttons to control playback and access the input menu, but using the included remote control (also redesigned) is far more intuitive. We tend to



It's the hugely enjoyable sonic performance that singles the CXN out. There's an enthusiastic drive to its performance, combining subtlety, snappy timing and rich detail to deliver a wonderfully entertaining sound

Round the back



1 Wi-fi dongle There's an antenna included in the box that gives the CXN wireless abilities. Network is easy to set up, although we prefer the stable wired connection.

2 USB Media If you have DSD files stored on a USB stick or hard drive, plug your stick into this USB port to access them. It will charge smart devices, too.

3 Digital inputs All of the CXN's digital inputs – whether optical, coaxial, USB or wireless – will support 24-bit/192kHz high-res files.

4 Labelling The upside-down labelling is a stroke of genius. No need to crane your neck or squint your eyes when connecting inputs from above.

5 Control bus Use the cable included to link the CXN to either of the CXA60 or CXA80 amplifiers, and you'll be able to control both using the Connect app.

use the remote interchangeably with the new-look Cambridge Connect app, as the app is more suited to scrolling and selecting lists of songs. There are some hiccups in operation, but they're relatively minor and certainly not enough to stop us from using the app on a regular basis.

It's the little things...

Another masterstroke from Cambridge Audio is its ongoing policy of writing input labels upside down, which means you can easily read the inputs when you're leaning over the unit.

It's clear a lot of thought and attention went into the creation of the Cambridge CXN. The functionality, design and ease of use are the best we've seen at this price, and the engaging, vigorous sound is sure to win buyers over. Those in the market for a streamer should really give this one a listen – and be prepared to put it at the top of their wishlist.

Well worth the extra

The closest rival to the CXN is the excellent Pioneer N-50A, an updated version of our Award-winner that easily won five stars recently. Yes, the Pioneer does cost £200 less than the Cambridge Audio, but we

would happily dish out that additional cash for the Cambridge. The CXN feels more special, is nicer to use and delivers a more robust, more revealing sound.

TECH SPECS

High resolution 24-bit/192kHz, DSD64 • **Streaming features** UPnP, AirPlay, internet radio, Spotify Connect • **Inputs** 2 x USB type A, USB type B, optical, coaxial • **Outputs** Optical, coaxial, balanced XLR, RCA • **Network** Ethernet, wi-fi • **Remote** Yes • **Finishes** 2 • **Dimensions (hwd):** 9 x 43 x 31cm • **Weight** 4kg

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Impressive and enjoyable sound quality; sleek design and high-quality build; excellent features and file support; lovely to use

AGAINST Nothing at this price

VERDICT A stylish, feature-packed streamer that sounds great and is a joy to use

Needs to beat

Pioneer N-50A
£500 ★★★★★

This excellent Pioneer makes it a tough contest, especially when it costs £200 less, but it isn't quite as subtle or burly as the CXN, nor as much fun to listen to.



SYSTEM BUILDER

These three will complement the CXN in a way that'll make streaming more fun than ever



Stereo amplifier
Arcam FMJ A19 £650
★★★★★

Our Award-winner's refined, dynamic sound and subtle detail make a fine match for the CXN



Stereo speakers
B&W 685 S2 £500
★★★★★

Hefty, loud and detailed with deep, rumbling bass – these B&Ws are bags of fun



Tablet
Apple iPad Air 2 £400
★★★★★

You'll want to use that slick Connect app on a large, crisp display... Great interface, too

Total build £2250

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

REVIEWER'S NOTES... GETTING TO KNOW THE CAMBRIDGE CXN

1 We love the sleek, uncluttered design of the CXN. We immediately peel off the British flag sticker to keep it neater still.

2 The back panel's labels are written in both directions – that's a great touch that'll make connecting inputs easier.

3 That volume dial feels lovely to use. We spend a while just playing around in the menus and admiring its smooth action.

4 We download the Connect app and find it works instinctively with the CXN. Artwork doesn't always appear, though...

5 Time to start streaming – wow, it sounds brilliant! The muscly, detailed and lively rhythm is utterly engaging to listen to.

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Life's Good

Acoustic Energy 101 | Stereo speakers | £250

Reconnecting the Energy supply

The hi-fi industry isn't short of speakers around this price – quite the opposite, in fact. A handful of brands rule the roost at the budget end, the likes of Wharfedale, Dali, Cambridge Audio and Q Acoustics topping the pile. A few years ago, we'd have added Acoustic Energy to that list, but lately the British company had dropped off the radar somewhat.

Aesthetic influences

We're told Acoustic Energy is currently undergoing changes – being 're-energised' at the business end – so we're rubbing our hands at the prospect of new products.

The 101 standmounts are one of the brand's more recent offerings and the smallest member of its entry-level 1-Series. Acoustic Energy says the range has evolved from the mid-range 3-Series, so the 101s owe their heritage to their five-star elders, the 301s. From technical to aesthetic design, influences are clear: they share the same 28mm fabric dome tweeter and 11cm aluminium cone mid/bass driver.

Acoustic Energy has preserved its classic design. The straight-edged boxes are neatly finished with black ash or walnut veneers, while little touches like the silver trim on the driver cones and the silver 'AE' badge neatly tucked inside add a touch of class.

Articulate midrange

The cabinets are compact enough to occupy shelf space, though sitting them atop stands such as Atacama's Moseco 6s (£120) should ensure you get the best from them.

Like the 301s, they have a front-facing slot-ported arrangement, designed to control air turbulence and allow for flexible positioning. It seems to work: the 101s perform well both in the middle of a room or close to a rear wall (though the latter brings more solidity), and toeing in isn't compulsory for a good stereo image.

The resemblances continue into performance too. The 101s sound clean and crisp, their presentation tonally balanced and nicely refined. Consistently pleasing across the frequencies, they revel in clear and articulate mids, crisp highs and taut, agile lows. For the 101s' size, the bass on offer in Supertramp's *Give A Little Bit* takes



In looks and performance, the Acoustic Energy 101s owe their heritage to their 3-Series predecessors

us by surprise. It's deep, tuneful and does its bit to help drive the song rhythmically.

Generous bass levels can sometimes hamper pace and tempo, but that isn't the case here: the 101s employ bite and energy where needed. Strings are enthusiastic, while the chorus is delivered with gusto.

Sensible match

The Acoustic Energys aren't the weightiest or richest speakers we've heard – they favour the lean side of neutral – so avoid partnering them with similarly thin-sounding kit. Smooth, full-bodied electronics such as Marantz's 6005 Series CD/amp combo are a sensible match.

It's clear they fall just under the level set by the class leaders. The Q Acoustics 3020s (£60 cheaper at their most

The 101 is a very good speaker – and an encouraging return to form for Acoustic Energy



economical) understand the texture of each instrument better, proving more subtle and transparent. These speakers really are very good, but competition is the toughest it's ever been and 'very good' won't necessarily grant you access to the five-star club. Still, if the 101s are a sign of things to come from Acoustic Energy, we're very encouraged.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Clean, crisp sound; tonally balanced; fun, lively delivery; compact and versatile

AGAINST Not subtle enough; competitors have more detail

VERDICT Appealing in more ways than one, these little speakers are good buys

Also consider Q Acoustics 3020 £190 ★★★★★

Q Acoustics' latest offerings are the best in their class for insight and subtlety



System builder total build £1040

Amplifier

Marantz PM6005 £300 ★★★★★

This five-star amplifier will give you superb sound for a modest spend



CD player

Marantz CD6005 £280 ★★★★★

Sonically, this CD player ticks a lot of boxes. And it works brilliantly with the PM6005



Turntable

Pro-ject Essential II £210 ★★★★★

This great-value record-spinner nails the basics to a tee and will get the most from the 101s



Mitchell & Johnson CDD-201V | CD player | £250

Budget music for the masses

There's a new kid on the British hi-fi block and its name is Mitchell & Johnson. It's a company assembled by Paul Mitchell and Dave Johnson, the same duo that brought products from electronics company Sansui to the UK in 2011. Those products have been rebranded and re-engineered under the new name, and there are some shiny new ones in its roster too, comprising stereo amps, streamers and DACs, headphones and, as here, CD players.

The brand has a mission: to make good hi-fi accessible (ie. affordable) to the masses. Of course, Marantz and Cambridge Audio already do this successfully, but the budget CD player market is hardly swarming with competition, so the arrival of Mitchell & Johnson is a welcome one.

Sturdily built

The CDD-201V is a remodelled version of the £200 Sansui, to which we gave four stars in 2012. There's more advanced circuitry under the hood, and the faceplate is brushed-metal rather than plastic. That may have knocked the price up slightly, but £250 is still reasonable for those on a budget.

Aside from the different branding on the machine and remote control, looks are similar. We wish a little more flair had gone into the casework, but the CDD-201V is sturdily built and generally finished to a good standard. The smart front panel features a readable display and nicely spaced buttons. We like our sample in black, but a silver finish is available too.

Design-wise, that's all we used to expect from budget electronics before Marantz radically upped the bar for aesthetics, finish and build at this price, raising the bar for its competitors in turn. The Mitchell & Johnson looks and feels a tad economical in comparison: its buttons are looser and sound more clicky, while the transport is a little noisy when fed discs. Still, it's functional all the same, and helpfully compact if space is an issue.

Punchy and upbeat

Less appealing is the 'credit-card' remote which, due to its size, is just asking to be

lost down the sofa. On the plus side, it works perfectly well and will also operate the company's matching (and also re-designed) SAP-201V amp.

Whatever amplifier you use, it can connect to the digital- and analogue-friendly CDD-201V through the RCA, optical and coaxial outputs. Connections haven't changed from the unit's Sansui days, but three years on what you get remains good for the money.

A welcome new arrival, Mitchell & Johnson is on a mission to make good hi-fi accessible - and affordable - to the masses

Insert Eminem's *The Eminem Show* (the player reads MP3, CD-R and CD-RW discs as well as standard CDs) and memories of Sansui's clean, crisp sound come flooding back. The sonic presentation is well balanced, clear and direct.

Add 'punchy' and 'upbeat' to that and you've got an enjoyable sound. It jumps to the album's catchy tunes and edgy beats: the hard-hitting bassline in *Without Me* has enough kick, and the track's momentum is delivered with a healthy dose of attack.

There's fair insight into Eminem's distinctive vocals, though the Mitchell & Johnson makes no secret of the fact it favours body, clarity and solidity over outright finesse - that's true across the

The CDD-201V is sturdy, reasonably compact and has a good standard finish

frequency range, yet it never fails to open the window into a piece of music wide enough to paint the general picture.

Mind you, it doesn't quite do justice to a song like Michael Simone's *Any Other Name* (from *American Beauty* OST), which relies heavily on precision and subtlety to carry its intimate piano sequences. The notes are clear, the leading edges crisp, but a lack of dynamic subtlety and a few timing issues mean they don't flow together as fluently as they should.

The Award-winning Marantz CD6005 is more convincing in this respect, showing more determination to express the intricate piece's depth, dynamics and subtleties.

Worth the wait

Having first got wind of Mitchell & Johnson's arrival at CES 2014, we have been keen to get our hands on its goods - we've waited patiently for a Mitchell & Johnson product to land in our test rooms for over a year. So has it been worth the wait? In a nutshell, yes. The CDD-201V might not be quite good enough to trouble the first-class Marantz, but it's a proficient player in a market where talent is sparse.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Crisp, clean sound; upbeat delivery; compact build; feels solid; looks smart;

AGAINST Not dynamically expressive; competition has more detail; poor remote

VERDICT Overall, a good value proposition for CD advocates

Also consider

Marantz CD6005 £280 ★★★★★

Promises a smoother, more refined ride with as much insight as you'll get for the money



The new kids

In 2011, Paul Mitchell and Dave Johnson brought Sansui to the UK and are now on a mission to make good hi-fi accessible to the masses. It took a while to get our hands on an M&J product, but it was worth the wait

System builder total build £640

Amplifier

Onkyo A-9010 £200 ★★★★★

A wonderfully entertaining amp for those on a restricted budget



Stereo speakers

Q Acoustics 3020 £190

★★★★★ Terrific little speakers that raise the bar in the budget market



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LG OLED TV

Stuff
★★★★★
LG S5EG960V
JUNE 2015

WHAT HI-FI?
★★★★★
LG S5EG960V
MAY 2015

Sennheiser Momentum 2.0 | Headphones | £250

Carried away by the Momentum

When Sennheiser announced the Momentum 2.0s (or M2s as they're called in some quarters) at the beginning of the year, we were intrigued as to how they planned to tinker with what was already a winning formula. After all, the company really struck a chord with the original Momentums. They brought a level of style, refinement and sound quality that was extremely tough to beat at the money.

Folding design

The only negatives were a slight lack of portability compared to some rivals and the fact they came with quite a large, bulky carry-case. So guess what? Sennheiser has addressed this by simply adding a couple of hinges, making them foldable and easier to store. They've also been able to wave goodbye to the old chunky case too.

But a new folding design is just the tip of the iceberg. The biggest changes are to the earpads and earcups, both noticeably larger on the 2.0s. The new larger design does a better job of enveloping your ears, and they're also asymmetrically shaped to further enhance the fit.

It does add a bit of extra bulk, but the benefits are better noise isolation and an even higher level of comfort, especially for those who wear glasses. We think the changes have been well worth it.

As well as new earpieces, the headband has also had a tweak. It still uses high-quality Alcantara, but the band itself now has a more rounded profile.

Premium appearance

The eagle-eyed among you will notice the headphone cable now runs out of the right earcup instead of the left. It's just something to bear in mind depending on which pocket you keep your phone in.

The in-line remote has been redesigned – it's now smaller and made out of black instead of silver plastic. Also, the 3.5mm jack is now fixed, as opposed to being hinged as on the original Momentums.

It would have been nice to keep these little flourishes on the new design, just to complement the premium appearance of the actual headphones. The brown finish here is exclusively for Apple device users, who also get to choose from the ivory and black finishes available to Android or Windows fans. The 2.0s come in two flavours, the AEi for iPhone users, the AEG for the rest.

Greater detail

According to Sennheiser the drivers inside the earcups remain the same, but the earpad coupling allows for less bass leakage. After a quick blast, you can tell that, although general character hasn't drastically changed, the quality level has gone up. They now lavish you with greater detail and insight, sounding more confident and stopping and starting with greater precision.

Play The Temper Trap's *Sweet Disposition* and the rolling guitar plucks show clarity and nuance. Drum kicks and vocals have definition, as each element knits seamlessly together.

Switch to Drake's *Started From the Bottom* and the Sennheisers have no trouble serving up weighty bass. The headphones do a great job of communicating the different tones to the tune's bassline.

Classical music is welcomed with open arms too. There's beautiful ebb and flow to *La Traviata, Act 1*. Strings rise and fall dynamically as the Momentums show their flexibility and fluidity. Timing is spot on, and there's a great balance of energy and finesse that keeps you listening long-term.

There's always an element of concern when a manufacturer takes a great product



In the fold

In 2013 we were impressed with the style and sound quality of the original Momentums, but noted their rather hefty size. Sennheiser has addressed this issue with hinges, making the 2.0s foldable and easier to store.

The Momentum 2.0s are more comfortable and portable than their predecessors

back to the drawing board, but the Momentum 2.0s successfully build on everything we love about the originals. They've retained their looks, but now boast extra portability, comfort and improved sound quality. As far as premium portable headphones are concerned, the Momentum 2.0s tick all the boxes, and then some...

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Gorgeous design; foldable; comfy fit; beautifully balanced and full-bodied sound

AGAINST Nothing of note

VERDICT Blessed with brilliant sound, the Momentum 2.0s are a cut above their rivals

Also consider

Bowers & Wilkins P5 Series 2 £250 ★★★★★

The revamped P5s fire out a punchy, crisp sound, a little different in balance to the Sennheisers



The in-line remote has been redesigned. It's now smaller and made of black plastic

LG G Flex 2 | Smartphone | from free on contract

LG's new flexible approach pays off

LG likes curves. That much is clear just from looking at some of its TVs. But those curves extend to smartphones too. The LG G Flex 2 is the company's second crack at a curved smartphone and, thanks to better ergonomics and a sharper screen, it's an improvement over the original.

Eye ergonomics

There is a reason for that curve, and it's not what you might think. It is lovely to handle, fitting into your hand more naturally than a flat slab of the same size. It will hug your derrière when you put it in your back pocket, and the side of your face during phone calls. And if you happen to drop the device, the curve keeps it from landing flat on the screen. But LG dismisses suggestions that a curved screen has any visual benefits, and it's nothing to do with eye ergonomics or other buzzwords either. Essentially, it makes little difference in everyday use. The focus here is on the user experience.

We've been here before, with LG's original G Flex. That was a monster of a phone with a 6in screen, which some found difficult to use regardless of the curve. The G Flex 2's 5.5in screen means a smaller footprint. A gentler curve also helps make the G Flex 2 sleeker and more manageable than its predecessor.

Brilliant whites

On the subject of the screen, we're pleased to see LG has got rid of the original G Flex's 720p screen. Now it's Full HD 1080p. The picture is noticeably crisper than before, but it's still not up there with the Quad HD (2560x1440) display of the LG G3 or Samsung Galaxy S6 Edge.

It's sharp enough most of the time and images are well defined, with no jagged edges. The OLED panel offers much stronger contrast than smartphones with LCD screens. Dark scenes go properly black, and colours are strong. But it's not the most subtle picture when it comes to details in dark areas. Whites are also not quite as brilliant as we'd like.

The standard palette is on the bold side of realistic, but you can tweak that by changing the picture mode. Use 'Vivid' if you want to sear your retinas, or for bright outdoor use, but we preferred the 'Natural' mode.

There are some issues: the screen doesn't go dim enough - even the lowest setting is bright, which is not ideal for bedtime viewing. We also notice an occasional bit of graininess.

Balanced sound

The G Flex 2 is capable of playing back high-resolution files up to 24bit/192kHz. It's a clear, balanced sound, neither harsh nor overly weighty. There's a good amount of detail. Clear textures and leading edges make instruments easy to identify.

In the past, LG phones tended to lack excitement in sound, but this has been addressed. There's a decent amount of energy, although it's still not quite as agile and entertaining as we'd like. In comparison the Sony Xperia Z3 offers more precision, making for a more exciting listen.

Self-healing cover

Build quality is very good on the whole. The phone feels solid despite its removable plastic back. Yes, it's plastic - but it looks very smart in metallic silver (with a red option to come) and attracts plenty of compliments. It doesn't feel tacky either.

The G Flex 2 also has a good degree of elasticity. It's not flexible, as the name might suggest, but you can put it face down on a table and push it flat. While that's a little extreme, it means you could conceivably sit on it without incident.

The other party trick is the unique self-healing polymer on the back of the device. On the original G Flex, the healing process took minutes. Scratches now disappear in 10 seconds, but it's only designed to withstand normal wear and tear. Light scratches are fine as long as they



Essentially, the G Flex 2's curved screen makes little difference in everyday use - the focus here is on the user experience

don't penetrate the self-healing coating. Don't go digging at it with your keys.

However, even after a week of careful use we found irreparable scuffs on the back. It seems the self-healing needs more work before it can be something to boast about.

Intuitive interface

There's more to boast about when it comes to features. There's a microSD card slot, for cards up to 2TB. And out of the box, it runs Android 5.0 Lollipop.

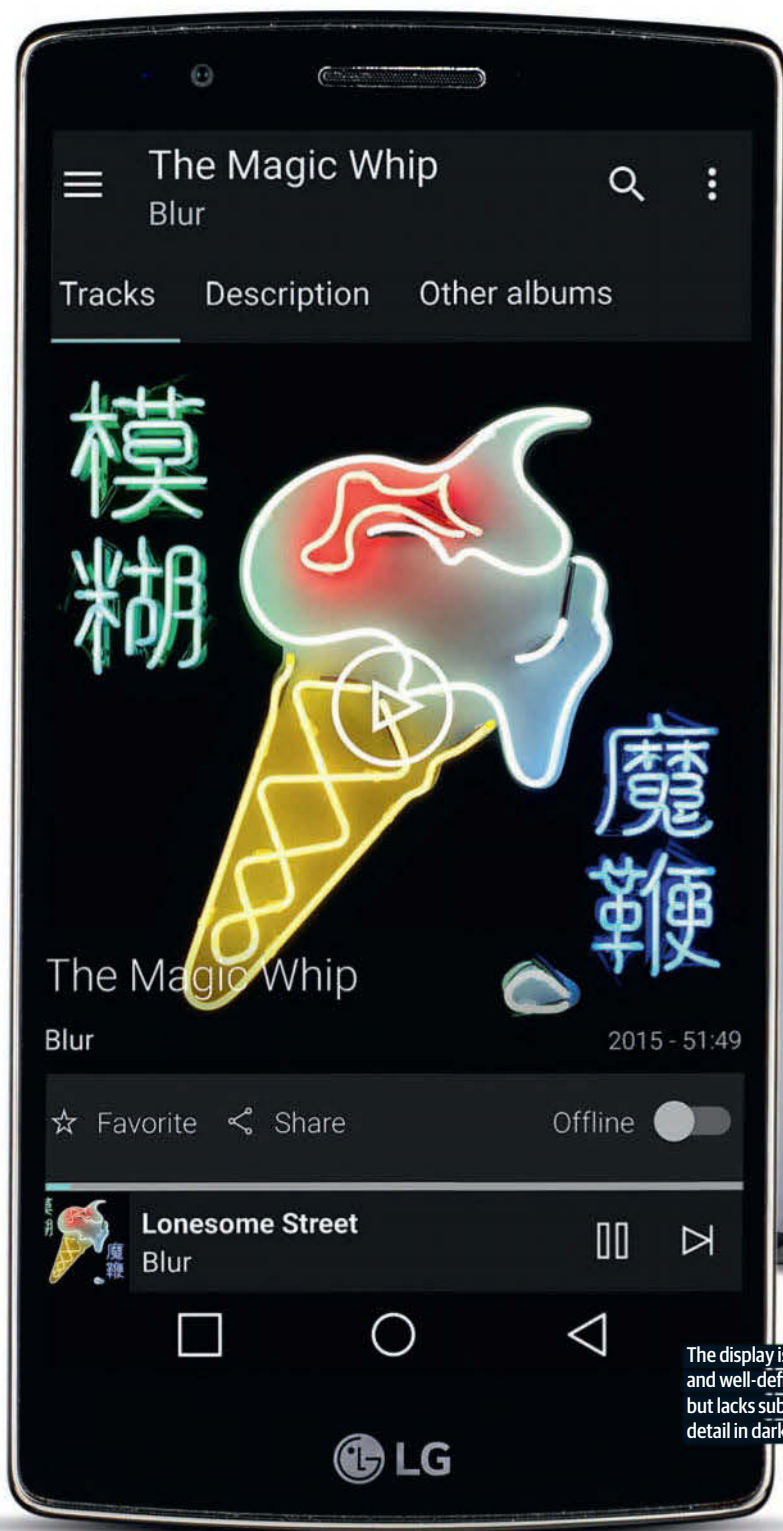
That means you have the option to interact with notifications directly from the lock screen, without having to open up the appropriate app separately. It's a cleaner and more intuitive interface than before.

There's also an effective Battery Saver mode, which comes in handy when you're running out of juice. You may not need it often - with normal use we managed to get a day-and-a-half out of one charge. The 3000mAh battery - sadly non-removable - has a Fast Charge feature that goes up to 50 per cent in 40 minutes.

LG's own software tricks include Glance View, which lets you swipe from the top to

A gentler curve means the G Flex 2 is sleeker and more manageable than its predecessor





The G Flex 2's party trick: a self-healing polymer which can repair small scratches

The display is sharp and well-defined, but lacks subtlety and detail in dark areas

peek at crucial information without turning the screen on full. There is also an advanced Knock Code, which lets you unlock the phone by tapping on certain points of the screen, without the need for a lock screen.

Slick operation

The camera has been taken from the LG G3, and that's a good thing. The 13MP sensor is aided by a laser, which makes for superfast and accurate focusing. Optical image stabilisation, meanwhile, plays nicely with shaky hands. You get sharp pictures and accurate tones in light and dark conditions, although in the dark the LG needs more thinking time.

USE IT WITH

B&W P5 Series 2

Gorgeous looks and a punchy sound make these great partners for the G Flex 2



The LG G Flex 2 features a 2Ghz 64-bit octa-core Qualcomm Snapdragon 810 processor. This is supported by 2GB of ram and either 16 or 32GB of storage. It sounds speedy – and it is. At its best, the operation is slicker than John Travolta in *Grease*. You can bounce between menus and apps with no hint of stutter.

That is, until things warm up a bit. The device is fast when fresh, but after a while it slows down a little. On a few occasions, it took a good 10 seconds to load up our video gallery. This can be helped by clearing unused apps and freeing up some memory, but it's hardly ideal. Thankfully, this is quite rare and day-to-day operation is just fine.

We have mixed feelings about the LG G Flex 2. When it's good, it's great. But the user experience is let down by a few hiccups, which keep the device from being on the same tier as flagship smartphones. This is a good choice if you want a powerful device that stands out from the crowd. But if you're after a multimedia beast that ticks all the boxes, there are better options.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Deep blacks; strong contrast; lovely to handle; slightly flexible

AGAINST Occasional stability issues; self-healing back easily damaged

VERDICT A good device for standing out from the crowd – but not for keeping ahead of it

Also consider

Sony Xperia Z3 £450 ★★★★★

The design isn't so fancy, but it has superior picture and sound quality



Tannoy Revolution XT8F | Stereo speakers | £1300

There's a Revolution in the air

Tannoy's new Revolution XT range has made quite an impact. The XT6F floorstanders (£1000) waltzed away with a test win in our May issue, while the XT6 standmounters delivered a strong showing the month before. Having spent a considerable amount of time with the new XT8Fs, we think they're arguably the best of the bunch.

In essence, these are just larger 6Fs, using an 8in (20cm) version of Tannoy's dual concentric driver rather than the 6in version. Tannoy has put a lot of work into this latest generation of drive unit, honing just about every aspect of the design from the motor system to the tweeter waveguide in an attempt to push performance standards higher.

Smart finish

By putting the tweeter in the middle of the mid/bass driver, integration is improved over the separated arrangement used in most rivals, as is the time alignment of the drive units and uniformity of dispersion. In the XT8F, a dedicated 20cm bass driver augments the dual concentric's output. The additional unit comes into play below 250Hz.

We think Tannoy has done a great job with the cabinet. It's solid and smartly finished, though with a volume of almost 50 litres it's pretty big. There are two finish options: Medium Oak and our review pair Espresso (pictured), which is a dark walnut. We think both look smart.

There's more to this 108cm tall cabinet than just crisp edges and angled sides (to reduce the build up of internal standing waves). Tannoy has designed a coupled cavity bass reflex system to optimise low-frequency performance. A downward-firing port exits into the gap between the base of the cabinet and plinth.

Power and precision

When we start listening, it's obvious the work has paid off. We begin with Hans Zimmer's *Time* (Inception OST) and discover the Tannoys are capable of producing oodles of low-frequency information. Not only is it deep, it's delivered with real power and precision. There's plenty of agility here, coupled with a solid punch.



The Revolution XT8Fs are hefty speakers, and they produce a sound to match too

If you place them in a small to medium-sized room – say anything less than 4x4m – then it's possible the quantity of low-end may prove too much. But give them a larger room to play in and the XT8Fs will shine. In a suitably large space, these speakers deliver a scale of sound, loudness capability and dynamic reach that's hard to better for the money.

There's more to these towers than just bass and brawn, though. Move up the frequency range and they're articulate and communicative; alt-J's *Breezblocks* is delivered with enthusiasm and coherence. There's a fine degree of rhythmic drive and

Spaced out

The powerful sound of the Tannoy Revolution XT8Fs may be a little constrained in a smaller room. But give them space to breathe and they deliver a scale of presentation and dynamic reach that is hard to beat.

plenty of attack on offer. Vocals are crisply rendered, lacking nothing when it comes to subtlety and precision. There's a lovely directness to the way these speakers produce sound that just draws the listener into the music.

Tonally, these aren't the sweetest-sounding performers around. You'll have to take care not to partner these Tannoys with anything that sounds overly forward or harsh, because they'll do little to tone these qualities down. But feed them with well-balanced electronics and these floorstanders will deliver appropriately.

We're pleased with the stereo imaging. These speakers shine when placed well out into the middle of our test room and given just a touch of toe-in towards the listening position. Once the Tannoys are positioned with care, their sound stage is crisp, nicely layered and pleasingly solid.

Makes music fun

Given a suitably talented system and a large enough room there are few rivals that match the XT8F's combination of muscle and subtlety. Most of all they make listening to music fun and that, more than anything else, is the reason why we're happy to recommend them wholeheartedly.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Huge scale, with plenty of bass; go loud with ease; excellent build and finish

AGAINST Need a larger room to shine; need care in system matching

VERDICT These floorstanders are an excellent buy. Little else at this price can match them

Also consider

Tannoy Revolution XT6F £1000

★★★★★

Smaller, but still with charm of their siblings



System builder total build £3595

CD player

Naim CD5si £995 ★★★★★

A fluid and musical performer that will work perfectly with the Tannoy speakers



Stereo amplifier

Rega Elex-R £900 ★★★★★

Delivers plenty of sparkle for the money, and has expressive dynamics



DAC

Arcam irDAC £400 ★★★★★

Detailed, refined and a really entertaining listen, this is a great value DAC



See the Great, Feel the Great

LG G4



See the Great
Feel the Great

The Visibly Smart LG G4

Stuff
★★★★★

LG G4, Stuff.tv, May 2015

Combining style with substance, the hotly anticipated LG G4 delivers a truly breathtaking visual experience. Featuring a pro-quality 16MP camera with an F1.8 aperture lens and 8MP front-facing camera for 'super selfies,' you'll be able to capture professional-looking pictures that 'pop' with detail and clarity. Combine this with the stunning IPS Quantum Quad HD Display, and the G4 will be your perfect smartphone companion to capture and enjoy the moments that matter to you.

In-stores and online from the end of May 2015

www.lg.com/uk/G4



LG

Life's Good



Revolution XT



Revolution in design. Revolution in sound.

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

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

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

TANNOY®

"The Tannoy Revolution XT6Fs are incredible speakers for the money and you must seek them out for an audition."

Tannoy Revolution XT6F



What Hi-Fi website March 2015



What Hi-Fi May 2015

Sony BDP-S5500 | Blu-ray player | £110

Less is more for this budget player



On the wire

The BDP-S5500 also has what Sony calls "Advanced Super Wi-fi" on board. It certainly seems snappy enough – we found little difference in load times between wired and wireless connections, which is quite something.

It may be smaller than its predecessor, but this Sony Blu-ray player packs a mighty punch for its size

Is it just us or are Blu-ray players getting smaller? Sony's most recent budget deck, the BDP-S5500, comes in at little more than the size of a hardback book, shrinking even further from last year's already dinky S5200. But don't let its size fool you – this little player goes big on performance.

Sony has tweaked the design of this year's players, ditching the fussy geometric

When it comes to apps, Netflix, BBC iPlayer, Demand 5 and Amazon Instant Video are all on board, but there's still no ITV Player or 4OD. It's a shame but far from a deal-breaker.

As before, Netflix has a short-cut button on the Sony's small but perfectly formed remote, though this time with the official Netflix logo (sometimes it's the small things), while the shortcut to the Sony

Upscaling from DVD is handled with aplomb – we watch the testing combat scene from *Robocop* and the S5500 delivers crisp lines, well-balanced colours and very little picture noise. You certainly wouldn't mind revisiting some old favourites with this.

Engaging performance

When it comes to sound, the S5500 delivers a wide, sturdy and engaging performance, which pips its predecessor for excitement. Voices sound more direct and there's a sense of solidity across the frequency range.

For such a small box, there really is a lot to love in this Sony. From features to design and performance, it tops its Award-winning predecessor in every way. Budget Blu-ray

Pictures are crisp and full of detail, with a great sense of depth and texture. At this price, there's very little to fault here

Sense of Quartz design for something a little more straight-laced. It's still a lightweight bit of kit, but the change in design does make it feel more solid compared with last year's units. There's less shiny plastic, which is a good thing, and the eject and power buttons placed on the front feel much more sturdy.

No deal-breaker

It's had a makeover on the inside too. Sony has ditched the XrossMediaBar interface for something a lot cleaner and easier to use. There's less scrolling, and you'll find most of the things you want on the main homepage within one click.

Apps are presented in a "featured" tab ordered in most popular, but you are able to select your own favourites and pin them to a separate section so they're easy to get to.

Entertainment Network has been replaced with a favourites button for you to store as another of your most-used apps. That aside, they're nigh-on identical.

Convincing image

We load *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* on Blu-ray and notice that the loading time has been almost halved from last year's model. From selecting the disc, the Paramount screen loaded within around 10 seconds; it was nearer 20 seconds on the S5200.

Pictures are crisp and full of detail, with a great sense of depth and texture to the Turtles' shells. Blacks are very slightly deeper and colours a little punchier than on last year's model too. Switch it up to 3D and the image is convincing in its depth, with processing stable – there's very little to fault here at this price.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Crisp, detailed picture; enjoyable sound; easy setup; fast load times; good interface

AGAINST Very little at this price

VERDICT Well featured and a great performance at a superb price, the S5500 is a top budget buy.

Also consider
Q Acoustics 3020
£190 ★★★★★

Q Acoustics' latest offerings are the best in their class for insight and subtlety



System builder total build £1410

Television

Samsung UE48H6400 £550 ★★★★★

This Award-winner offers an impressive picture that we found hard to fault at £700. Now available at £550, it's a steal



Amplifier

Sony STR-DN1050 £400 ★★★★★

A hugely capable amp that offers features and performance by the bucketload



Speaker Package

Tannoy HTS-101 £350 ★★★★★

5.1 sound for the price of a soundbar – we've not found a speaker package under £700 to top this Tannoy package in the past four years



Clint Audio Odin | **Wireless speaker** | £320

Odin isn't quite a great Dane

It's not often a manufacturer evokes the might of Norse gods, but that's exactly what you get from Clint Audio. The Danish brand has experience in DAB and internet radio technology, and is now invading the UK with its Asgard series – a three-strong range of wireless speakers. In keeping with Norse mythology, Odin is the big daddy of the family. But does it have what it takes to earn a place in the hallowed halls of Valhalla?

Impressive specs list

Standing at nearly 40cm tall, it's bigger than it looks. It will certainly take up a lot of desk space, which is why Clint Audio recommends that it should live on the floor instead. There's an easily assembled stand, which lifts the Odin off the floor by 5cm and tilts it upwards by eight degrees, but this is sold separately for £46.

We have mixed feelings about the aesthetics. There's something smart and neat about the rounded triangular design,

If you have multiple Asgard wi-fi speakers, you can set up a multi-room system, or just set up a pair for a stereo set-up. If you don't have a wi-fi network you can use wi-fi direct, which lets you send music directly to the Odin. If that's not enough, you can go down the cable route: USB (for iOS devices) and 3.5mm inputs.

Mixed connectivity

As is now common with wireless speakers, there is no remote control. There are a few buttons on top, but mostly you will control the device with the free Clint Asgard app for Android and iOS, which is cleanly designed and easy to navigate. Besides some basic track and volume controls, you get to choose input, choose speakers, and activate/deactivate the multi-room feature. You'll also find options for settings (simple tone adjustments) and firmware updates.

Connectivity to the app is a mixed bag. Even when the speaker was connected to

Once it's connected, the Odin puts out a thunderous bellow – as you might expect from a speaker named after Thor's dad

but our white version looks like a portable air conditioning unit. Thankfully you can also get it in dark grey, which is a lot cooler.

Look at the spec-list and it's more impressive. The Odin is a stereo speaker with 2x25W of Class D amplification and a bass reflex enclosure. It has a smörgåsbord of wireless skills: over a wi-fi network, it can handle AirPlay, Spotify Connect, DLNA streaming, and internet radio. Sadly there is no Bluetooth, which is a shame.

our smartphones, it often wouldn't show up on the app without a fight. The Odin was also fussy when we tried playing from networked storage devices.

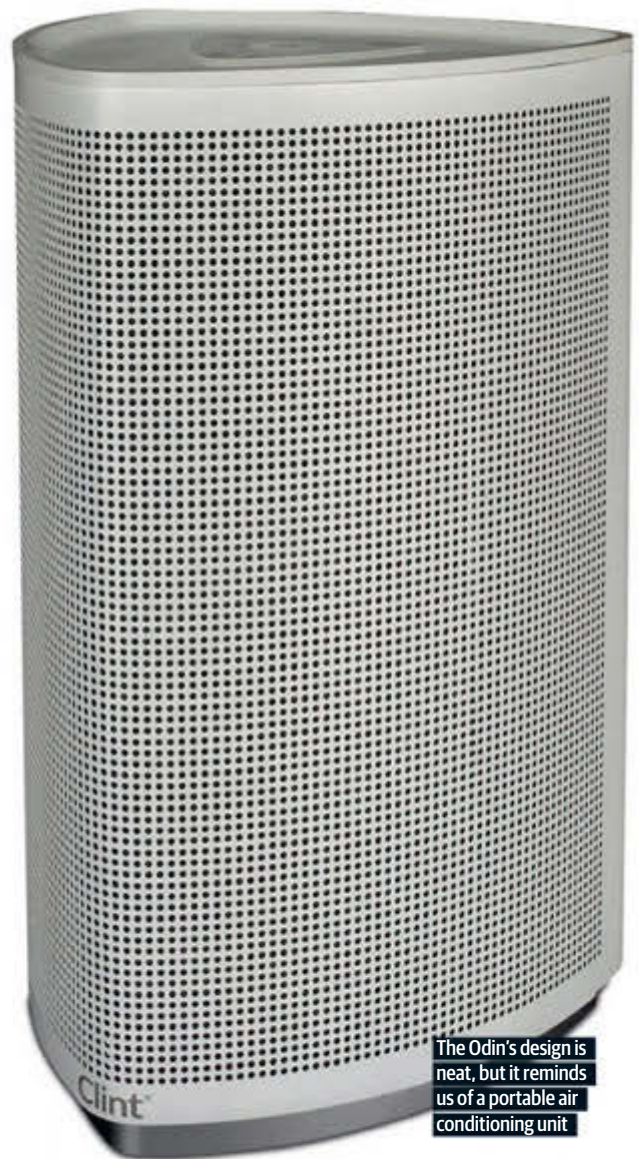
We could connect and even browse through our albums but sometimes songs would not play, suggesting that either the Odin or the app isn't fully sorted. That said, we didn't have any issues when playing tunes by wi-fi direct, Spotify Connect, or Apple Airplay.

An impressively loud sound

Once connected, the Odin puts out a thunderous bellow – as you'd expect from something named after Thor's dad. It has no problems filling larger rooms and the spread of the sound is wide, no doubt helped by the triangular, sideways-firing design. The speaker is meant to work off your walls, with the recommended placement being in a corner. For the best spread use the dedicated stand, which lifts the presentation up significantly.

Bass goes impressively deep, there's a good amount and it's fairly well defined. It's a weighty sound that nobody could accuse of being insubstantial.

Elsewhere there are a few issues. The Odin is tonally uneven. The upper bass part of the frequency range needs more energy, and the treble could do with more precision. In the midrange, voices have a hollow, boxy quality.



The Odin's design is neat, but it reminds us of a portable air conditioning unit



USE IT WITH Spotify

A huge catalogue of tracks, ease of use and versatile listening options make this our favourite free music streaming service

On the subject of dynamics, the Odin does not punch as hard or as firmly as similarly priced rivals. The notably smaller Geneva Model S Wireless DAB+ and the Libratone Zipp both offer a lot more in the way of detail and subtlety.

For the money, we'd expect a more seamless wireless experience, if not a better sound. And that stand really ought to be included in the price. Sorry Odin, you won't be packing your bags for Valhalla just yet.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Large-scale sound; good amount of bass; wide range of connections

AGAINST Unpredictable connectivity; tonally uneven sound; no Bluetooth; expensive stand

VERDICT Not the strongest UK invasion from Nordic lands we've ever experienced

Also consider

Geneva Model S Wireless DAB+ £300 ★★★★★

Smaller sound, fewer features, but a much more detailed, dynamic, coherent listen



It has a smörgåsbord of wireless skills, but unstable connectivity lets the Odin down



Connectivity without compromise.

*Balanced
Design
Concept.*

Music brings us so much joy. Your favourite artist. Your favourite song. The last thing you want is for anything to come between you and the emotionally satisfying experience of listening. Your audio system should deliver the intricacies and beauty of your favourite track, but without any superfluous distractions.

That's exactly what Rotel's RA-1570 Stereo Integrated Amplifier is designed to do. The 120 Watts per channel Class A/B amplifier partners proven analogue design with advanced digital circuitry to bring your music to life. Whether you choose to listen to LPs, CDs, via your smartphone or tablet, or even 24-bit/192kHz PC-USB digital streams the RA-1570 takes you to the very heart of the performance. Without compromise or complication.

Want to find out more? Visit rotel.com to find your nearest authorised Rotel retailer.



Revox Joy S120 | Musicstreamer | £1940

Past master plays a new game

Revox is a brand that's steeped in history. Born in 1952 as the domestic arm to professional audio brand Studer, it made its name in tape recorders, producing some of the most highly regarded reel-to-reel and compact cassette recorders in the business throughout the '60s and '70s, before expanding into loudspeakers.

In 1990, with the retirement of founder Willi Studer, the company was sold to investors, and while it continued to produce products the brand went quiet in the UK and we've heard little from them since.

Resurgence of a brand

That was until ISE (Integrated Systems Europe) 2015. Among the halls of the Amsterdam RAI at that show, we found Revox, fresh from a period of focusing on multi-room in foreign markets and showing off a new stereo range named Joy.

Made up of an audio server, CD player, three network receivers and a convenient all-in-one, it's launching alongside a five-strong loudspeaker range in a bid to reignite the love for the brand in the UK.

We have here the top-end network player of that range, the Revox Joy S120. It's an amplifier and a streamer, wrapped up in a smart aluminium half-rack design.

It's a very modern design - sleek and minimalist. So minimalist, in fact, that there's not even a display on its front panel, just an LED that changes between dark blue and white to show when it's off or on.

App or optional remote

While we'd have liked a display or, at the least, a few more LEDs to show what input is selected, the idea is that you use the free iOS or Android app or the optional S208 remote control (£300) to get your system set up, make selections and see what's playing.

The remote is rather like the one Cyrus offers for its streamers, and is nicely

designed and easy to use, with a full-colour display at the top that makes easy work of navigating through menus. It also doubles up as a universal remote for any other kit you want it to control, and has the nice touch of a motion sensor on board (so it will jump to life as soon as it's picked up).

Whether it's worth the £300 outlay is another question - the app does well enough for basic controls, though we do find it rather unintuitive and occasionally unreliable. It crashes or freezes several times during testing, and also doesn't manage to pull album art through from our server - the remote does.

Considering this box's compact size, Revox has managed to fit rather a lot into it. First, there's an impressive 120W per channel, which is augmented by a good complement of connections.

Alongside a pair of speaker terminals there are two coaxial and two optical ins, a USB-A port, two analogue inputs, one each of analogue and digital outs and a subwoofer output should you want it.

Network capability

There's also an ethernet port for hardwiring the S120 to your network, a connection for the Joy CD player to enable universal control, and the option to add an FM and DAB+ tuner module. AptX Bluetooth is on board for streaming from mobile devices.

We're seeing more and more high-end kit choosing Class D amplification over more traditional methods, and that's what Revox has gone for in the S120. While some may well prefer the idea of Naim's Unidrive 2 and its AB amplification, opting for Class D here will allow the S120 to run more efficiently, offering plenty of power from a small box while still running cool.



Revox has packed a good deal into a relatively compact box, which is stylish in a minimal sort of way

Hooked up to our reference system, the S120's set-up is quick and easy. It swiftly finds our wireless network and connects to it without issue. To put it through its paces, we point the S120's attentions to our Naim music server and begin playing.

We test it with music ranging from Spotify streams right up to 24-bit/192kHz, and find a similar character across all, aside from the expected drop in quality in Bluetooth streams.

It's worth noting that we encounter some stop-start playback issues with the 24-bit/192kHz tracks and were unable to ascertain why. We had no problems with any other bitrates, so can only assume there's a handover problem somewhere between the two.

Up-front from the start

A CD-quality rip of alt-J's *Breezeblocks* immediately uncovers a rather forward quality to the S120, which takes a little weight and authority from its performance.

It does have pace on its side though, with real drive behind the more up-tempo parts of the song. Unfortunately, this doesn't necessarily translate into good timing across the board. In fact, it can come across as a little impatient in the more brooding, ponderous parts of the song when we want it to be a little gentler, and it can't portray those shifts in tempo as well as it should.

Give it the right music though, and this can work in its favour. Its forward character



We can't fault the Joy's connectivity, which includes an ethernet port and aptX Bluetooth

There's stacks of power here, and matched with the right speakers you can find a balance that'll make the Joy S120 sonically impressive when playing big, loud music

You'll have to pay an extra £300 for the S208 optional remote, but it's an advanced, well designed handset that's much easier to use than the free control app

does give it plenty of punch for something like Faithless's *Insomnia*, making for a powerful, energetic performance.

Dynamically indifferent

Nevertheless, while the pace of the S120's delivery certainly carries the tune forward with plenty of urgency, it once again struggles to convey the song's changes in momentum. Its inability to develop a sense of excitement as the song builds and drops is not what we'd expect from kit at this level.

Detail levels are pretty decent across the board, but it's the finer subtleties that are missed most here. It means instruments and voices don't have much of a sense of depth or texture to them, making them sound a little one-dimensional.

This lack of subtlety, mixed with its impatient character, can lead to some organisational issues too, meaning it can struggle to give clear definition of the stopping and starting between a complicated grouping of notes.

To try to address some of these issues we substitute our rather neutral ATC reference speakers for something a little warmer and more laid back, namely the Q Acoustic Concept 40s.

This definitely helps add more weight to the low end and decreases the Revox's overly forward nature, but the overall character is still a little on the thin and inexpressive side. It lacks the kind of full-bodied openness you'd expect to hear from an AB amplifier.

That said, even using the pre-outs to bypass the amplifier section and purely employing the streaming module of the S120 shows up similar qualities, so it appears that this is a character flaw that affects both sides of the device.

Overall, the Joy S120 lacks the subtlety to provide us with the expression, excitement and eloquence we expect at this price. No matter what genre we throw at it - different paces, tones, voices - it struggles to drive home their relative differences in dynamics, like a performer unable to change his or her act to suit their audience.

Liking it loud

There's stacks of power here, and matched with the right speakers you can find a balance that will make it sonically impressive with big, loud music. It's not, however, one that will hold your attention with subtler passages over extended listening periods.

Some of the biggest problems for the Joy S120 are the excellent products that fall a little way below its price, such as the UnitiQute 2 (which even comes pretty close in spec). We'd take its open, more expressive character at the expense of a bit of power and a couple of inputs any day - and it's £700 cheaper to boot.

Revox's return hasn't proved to be quite as iconic as its history might suggest, and at its current price, this unit is a tough one to recommend.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Powerful; fast, punchy character; well connected; sturdy, stylish design

AGAINST Short on subtlety and expression; struggles dynamically; app is buggy

VERDICT Lacks the wherewithal to be a convincing buy at this price

Also consider

Naim UnitiQute 2

£1300 ★★★★★

This Award-winner offers a punchy, more dynamic sound for £700 less



Loudspeaker design

The secrets inside the box

Interview

Peter Comeau Director of audio design, International Audio Group



This month, we've gone a little mad with loudspeakers. There are two pairs in our

First Tests section, and about 20 of them in our speaker packages test on page 60. So what better time to investigate the science – and indeed, the art – of building a speaker?

To get the insider word we spoke to Peter Comeau, director of acoustic design at International Audio Group, and responsible for brands such as Quad, Mission and Wharfedale.



1 Driver assembly marks the start of speaker production at IAG's manufacturing plant in Shenzhen, China

WHF: How do you decide on what kind of speaker to build and, when it comes to production, where do you begin?

PC: "First of all, you must work out a concept. This concept has to be based on the reality of what people actually want to buy. Not all great designs make it into people's homes.

"Over the past five decades I've seen speakers diminish from popular models sporting 12-inch bass units, down to today's hi-fi bookshelf systems with four-inch drivers. Ignore market trends at your peril!

"On the other hand, you also have to consider the physics of the speakers. What sound quality is required and which drivers and cabinet system will best provide it? How does this fit in with the visual concept of the design? In the end, it has to be a compromise between what the market wants and what is physically possible for the price."

As soon as the first prototype is complete, it's time to start listening. It is important, early on, to know what the product might sound like. A discerning ear is key to a loudspeaker's fate, although having the latest tech also helps.

"Nowadays it is relatively easy to create a starting-point crossover using computer software and, even at this stage, you should be able to hear

whether the drive units are behaving as you would like.

"My main target is to achieve a system that portrays the music in an enjoyable and convincing way. That's not as easy as it sounds! You have to make sure all the instruments and vocalists can be easily heard and that the dynamics of how they are performing are translated as accurately as possible. Timing and rhythm also have to be transmitted to the listener with precision.

"You should be able to close your eyes and feel that you're at a concert listening to a real, live and thoroughly enjoyable performance. It's tough to get that right for rock, jazz and classical all at once, but it has to be done!"

A working prototype

"After developing a concept, you move on to building a prototype. This does not need to look aesthetically pleasing. It can be a rough and unfinished wooden box, complete with staples and splinters. This is the stage where the most research will take place, along with the most changes.

"It only has to be good enough for you to judge whether the drivers and the system achieve the performance required. Expect to make a lot of changes before you can decide how you're going to put the production model together.

"For example, in the Wharfedale Diamond 200 Series I did a lot of



Back in 2001, we awarded a Product of the Year gong to the Mission 780s, the design for which Peter was directly responsible

TOP 5 New launches

Rega turntable, Q Acoustics speakers, Canton soundbase



*In-car DAB adapter

The Pure Drive Digital is designed for VW-group cars and features two tuners and a pause/rewind function <http://whfcm/PureDriveDigital>



2 Floorstander cabinets are finished in the polishing shop 3 Standmounters being readied for final assembly in the veneer workshop 4 Hand-crafted vinyl cabinets

research into the slot-loaded port because I really wanted to achieve a powerful bass performance that made it sound as though you were listening to a much bigger system.

"After developing a working prototype, it's time to build a pre-production unit. There is still plenty left to tweak, but the design has the cabinet in its final form, along with the approved drivers that will make it into the final product.

"At this point, you'll expect to make design changes that 'fine-tune' the performance. When you're satisfied with the pre-production unit and all the

You should be able to close your eyes and feel that you're at a concert listening to a real and thoroughly enjoyable performance. It's tough to get that right for rock, jazz and classical all at once

engineering wrinkles have been ironed out, you can hand over the drawings to mass production.

"Of course, a speaker company rarely puts out just one speaker design. People want different sizes of speakers. A decision must be made on which variants of the speaker are made."

Range requirements

"I'm handling brands that sell worldwide so, at the very least, you need two standmount models - one small, one larger - plus a smaller and larger floorstander, as well as a centre-channel unit. If you know you'll be selling lots of AV systems, a dedicated surround speaker is also a bonus to the range."

"The practical application of the speaker also matters. Will it be used in a stereo configuration, or in a surround set-up? This should be factored into the design.

"The genetic makeup of a loudspeaker is a complicated decision, based on price and performance. Nobody wants a poor product no matter how wallet-friendly it is, but there is no point in a fine product

nobody can afford. So the choice of materials and components is crucial.

"A lot of the choices made are down to price. For example, can you afford to use a woven carbon-fibre cone in a budget speaker? Or would you achieve better performance using a cheaper (but still good-sounding) paper cone and put more money into the magnet size?

"You need a Bill Of Materials as early as possible so you can see whether you're on track to meet the price target. It's helpful to know what materials make the most difference sonically, so that you can adjust compromises without having a dramatic effect on sound quality.

"A lot of that is down to experience. Unless you're designing a no-compromise loudspeaker, the black art of speaker design is knowing how to juggle with components to get the best performance you can at the price."

So there you have it. Speakers are not the most complex products, but plenty of thought and effort goes into their design. Sure, you can just bung some drivers in a box, but without someone like Peter Comeau, they won't really sing.



For an example of Peter's handiwork, turn to p69, where the Wharfedale Diamond 220 steps into the ring with other 5.1 packages

***Denon AH-GC20** The AH-GC20 noise-cancelling headphones feature 40mm drivers and Clear Voice Capture technology. They're available now for £250. <http://whfcm/DenonAHGC20>



1 Sonus Faber Chameleon from £430

High-end speaker manufacturer Sonus Faber has unveiled a new entry-level range of speakers, comprising three models: the Chameleon B bookshelf (£700/pair), Chameleon T floorstanders (£1670/pair) and Chameleon C centre (£430 each). All models are wrapped in leather and come with a set of detachable side panels. The drive units on all models are made in-house and use polypropylene for the bass/midrange cones and 29mm fabric soft-dome tweeters. For more information, head to <http://whfcm/SonusFaberChameleon>

2 Denon and Marantz AV receiver upgrade £144

Both Denon and Marantz have announced their respective AVR-X7200W and AV8802 AV preamplifier models will receive an HDCP 2.2 update, allowing them to support 4K pass-through. The upgrade needs to be carried out at an approved service centre. Both brands will release models with the upgrade fitted later in 2015. <http://whfcm/DandMUpgrade>



TOP 5 New launches

3 Sony 4K Ultra Short Throw projector £tbc

Sony has announced that its LSPX-W1S Ultra Short Throw 4K projector is coming to the UK. It can project a 147in image onto a wall from just 28 inches away, with a minimum image size of 66in. Its Laser Light Source is claimed to deliver a bright and colour-accurate picture, and can reach full brightness quicker than conventional projectors. No UK price as yet, but brace yourselves: in the US it's yours for \$50,000. <http://whfcm/Sony4KProjector>



4 Pioneer/Onkyo budget AV receivers from £250

Pioneer has announced three budget models for 2015, starting at £400. All three support high-res audio, while the VSX-930 and VSX-1130 get Dolby Atmos too. <http://whfcm/Pioneer2015>

Onkyo has two models, starting at £250 for the TX-SR343 and £450 for the TX-NR545. The '545 features Dolby Atmos and high-res audio support. <http://whfcm/Onkyo2015>

5 Astell & Kern AK Jr £400

Astell & Kern's newest portable music player is its most affordable yet. It supports 24-bit/192kHz high-res audio, along with DSD audio. It benefits from a 1.95V RMS headphone output, which is said to drive headphones more effectively than rivals. It can double up as a USB DAC and comes with 64GB of expandable storage. The player also supports Bluetooth 4.0, for connecting to wireless headphones. For more information, head to <http://whfcm/AandKJr>



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THE WORLD'S MOST ADVANCED TV. EVER.

Staggering colour and contrast, supreme detail,
great sound... your eyes and ears deserve it

Remember the first time you saw Full HD? The difference in quality? The immersiveness? We're back at that point. This is the **LG 55EG960V**. It's OLED 4K – and it's the TV you've been waiting for.

Each pixel emits its own light, so one can be white while its neighbour is black – which means staggering contrast and amazingly accurate yet vivid colours. Perfect black truly creates perfect colour. But this TV also has more pixels – four times as many – as a Full HD TV. It makes for astonishing detail, boosted

by OLED's superb motion handling and true-to-life colour. Get this and you'll want to shout about it; to get people round for movies, sport and games.

And it's not just the picture. There's also the harman / kardon™ speakers that pack punch not usually associated with ultra-thin screens. And the stand – which makes the TV appear to float.

The set comes with LG's acclaimed webOS smart platform too, and with it, outstanding entertainment from the likes of Netflix, NOW TV, Wuaki.TV and Amazon Instant.

LG 55EG960V

Display 65in OLED

Resolution 4K (3840 x 2160 pixels)

Audio 4.0-channel speakers by harman / kardon™

WHAT HI-FI?



LG 55EG960V
MAY 2015

Stuff



WHERE TO BUY Find your nearest LG OLED 4K stockist at www.discoveredoled.com

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LATER IN THE YEAR

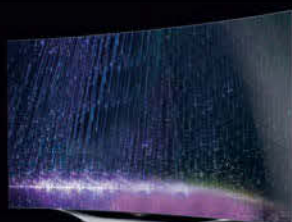
The curve... now available flat

But LG isn't finished with its 2015 OLED offering.

There will be four new models later in the year, including the stunning, first-of-its-kind, flat 65EF950V (pictured) also available in 55 inch. There's also the 65 inch EF980V (flat) and the 55EG920V (curved) and the amazing flexible 77EG990V.



ALSO AVAILABLE ...




LG 55EC930V

Not ready for 4K yet? No problem. Full HD OLED looks every bit as stunning. The LG 55EC930V has the same self-lighting four-colour pixels as its 4K brethren, the same amazing contrast and the same silky-smooth motion-handling. Its curve immerses you and its webOS interface puts a world's worth of content at your fingertips.

Display 55in OLED
Resolution Full HD
(1920 x 1080 pixels)
Audio 2.0-channel



THE BEST FOUR SYSTEMS £2000 CAN BUY

 **Join us on Spotify**
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A perfect hi-fi system will bring the best out of your music collection – whether it's on vinyl, laptop, CD or streaming

If you have a budget hi-fi system, chances are you can improve it significantly. Or, if you're new to the world of hi-fi and want to start off with a bang, this is your stepping stone.

Building that perfect system, however, can be tricky. It's not about picking five-star products, shoving them together and hoping they work. It's about experimenting with combinations and keeping an ear out for that perfect balance – at one point, it'll sound just right.

It depends on the way you listen to music. A record player is no use for someone whose entire music library is stored on NAS drives and a laptop. Similarly, you may only have space for a desktop system – no floorstanders for you, then.

But we don't cater for just one audience: everyone should have a fair chance at owning the best sounding system. With that in mind, we've assembled four exciting systems based around four different sources: streamer, laptop, CD player and turntable. We think you'll find your dream team here.

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



STREAMING SYSTEM £1850

STREAMER

Cambridge CXN £700

AMPLIFIER

Arcam FMJ A19 £650

SPEAKERS

B&W 685 S2 £500

What do you do when you have music stored in bits and pieces all over the place? Say you've ripped your entire CD collection and have stored it on a NAS device or your laptop. Or you've ventured into the realm of downloading high-resolution files for that leap into higher-quality sound. And then, of course, there are all the songs and playlists you have on your smartphone - it's a mishmash of file types, and you simply can't stick to just one format. What you need is a streamer to bring them all together.

Cambridge Audio's new CXN streamer is the perfect foundation for your hi-fi system if you have music stored over various devices. Its extensive streaming features mean it can play just about any music file from anywhere (by wired or wireless means), and it's a joy to use, too.

Conversion experience

We originally started off the system with the five-star Pioneer N-50A (£500). But once we heard the new Cambridge CXN, we switched instantly. It's a richer, more detailed and entertaining performer - easily worth the additional £200.

Add to that a tried-and-tested combination of the Award-winning Arcam FMJ A19 stereo amplifier and B&W 685 S2 speakers, and you have an exceptional system that fits together like pieces in a puzzle.

The Arcam A19 amplifier's impressive detail and refined tonal balance lend a lot to the system's overall smooth sound. Played through the punchy B&W 685 speakers, you get a sound that's full-bodied, packed with bold rhythms and full of vibrancy. The speakers aren't afraid to go loud, either: they can easily fill a medium-to-large room with big, spacious and dynamic sound.

Inclusive approach

The smooth approach bodes well for a varied music collection, as the system isn't fussy whether you're playing an MP3, a 24-bit/96kHz FLAC or if you're streaming songs from Spotify. While you'll be able to spot a poorly recorded album when you hear one, this CXN/A19/685 combination feels no need to snub its nose at the quality. It's far more interested in delivering the smoothest, most enjoyable performance possible.

That rumbling bassline in The White Stripes' *Seven Nation Army* sounds deep, punchy and agile enough that you'll be

humming it the second you hear it. The tempo changes are deftly handled, and the screech of distorted guitar riffs full of grunt and aggression. There are no hard or sharp edges at any point, nor does the snappy rhythm ever miss a step.

The crunch and crackle in Massive Attack's *Teardrop* is crisply delivered. There's also plenty of breathing space in between the harpsichord, drums and delicate, breathy vocals - it's an immersive listen. What strikes us most is just how solid the system sounds. The Arcam's refined subtlety permeates through the song, while the B&Ws lay on the muscle and excitement.

Go up the price scale and you'll find that components at £1000 each will offer greater precision and insight, but this combination of products is very hard to fault at this price.

You wouldn't think it at first glance, but the Cambridge and Arcam actually match visually. They share similar

dimensions and uncluttered fascias. The Arcam is available only in black, but the CXN comes in silver or black. You can get the B&W 685 S2s in black or white, too. The speakers are well made, a protective grille covering the delicate metal tweeter, and the striking yellow Kevlar mid/bass driver adds a splash of colour.

No-nonsense approach

The A19 isn't quite as flash as the sleek, modern design of the CXN, but we can't argue with its sturdy build quality. The display just spells out the input name and volume in large letters - it's appealingly simple and easy to read from a distance. In contrast, the CXN's more informative display shows off the track, artist, sampling rate and album artwork in full colour.

We love using the CXN streamer. It has a lovely control dial that responds smoothly with the menu, while the included remote and free Connect app are just as intuitive. The app can be used on Android and Apple devices, and is handy for scrolling through radio stations and your music collection. It's a breeze to use. Arcam's remote is a bit more basic, but works just as well when adjusting the volume.

Connection priorities

For setting up, the first thing you'll need is a good network connection. We always prefer the stability a wired connection gives you, so we'd recommend hooking up the CXN to your home network using the ethernet port. You can still go the wireless route: Cambridge includes a wireless antenna in the box that you can plug into the back panel. A network is quick to set up and our CXN had no problem picking up our two NAS boxes and accessing internet radio.

Once you have your devices - laptop, smartphone, tablet - connected on to the same network, all you have to do is press play. Streaming is seamless and uninterrupted, and we experience no dropouts with the CXN.

Those with Apple devices can stream over AirPlay, but it's not the best sound quality you'll get out of this system. Plug your smartphone into the USB port if you want to play stored songs (it will charge your phone as well), or use Spotify Connect to stream your playlists.

You don't have to go wireless all the way. There's a USB type B input for plugging in your laptop, while optical

NOW ADD THIS:

Apple iPad Air 2 £400 ★★★★★

The Cambridge CXN works just fine with the control dial and remote, but clicking repeatedly to scroll down a list of songs can get tiring. Download the Connect App on to an iPad Air 2 (it works on Androids as well) for a slicker experience. You can flick between inputs, access Spotify with a tap, and fine-tune station searches. The Air 2's slick interface is ideal, and the crisp, bright screen makes the app's neat design pop with rich colours.





We love using the **CXN streamer**. It has a lovely control dial that responds smoothly with the menu, while the included remote is just as intuitive

and coaxial inputs are also available. All the digital inputs are capable of playing high-resolution files of up to 24-bit/192kHz, while the USB port at the back panel supports DSD64 files.

Once you're set up with your streamer, plug it into any of the Arcam's six line-level inputs. We used the tuner input to keep things simple (the input's name will show up on the amp's display), but there are enough inputs if you want to plug in your Blu-ray player, CD player, set-top box and more. The A19 also houses a good-sounding moving-magnet phono stage, should you want to dust off that old turntable and give it a spin.

And now for the finishing touch: the speakers. While the B&Ws can be propped up on top of a shelf, we would advise against it. They need a bit of space

to breathe, and you don't want to restrain the immense sense of scale and space they can produce. Invest in a good pair of stands (the Custom Design Signature FS104s are long-standing favourites at £200) and secure the speakers with little blobs of Blu-tack. You can biwire the 685 S2s, but it's not necessary: single-wiring works just fine.

Verdict

If you want the most convenient system for playing your sprawling music collection, this is it. Not only is it packed with features and seamless to use, the sonic performance is among the best you'll find at this sub-£2000 price. We can't think of a better combination in this price range, and we don't think you'll want to stop listening.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Smooth, full-bodied sound; plenty of streaming features; excellent file support

AGAINST Nothing - this is a very hard system to criticise at this price

VERDICT Talented products that combine beautifully for a refined, entertaining sound

Listen with this



Public Service Broadcasting - The Race For Space

Blaring trumpets, funky beats and snappy tempos co-habit with more atmospheric pieces, all interspersed with snatches of space-related vocal broadcasts. Evocative and occasionally dance-worthy.

LAPTOP SYSTEM £1870

LAPTOP

Apple MacBook Air 13in £1000

DAC

Audiolab M-DAC £600

HEADPHONES

Grado SR325E £270

Can you create a great-sounding hi-fi system out of a laptop? Of course you can – you just need the right elements. In this case, you'll need an Award-winning £600 DAC that is talented enough to make your laptop-stored music shine, and a pair of open-back Grado headphones to enjoy a winningly airy, engaging and punchy sound.

They've got the look

As far as systems go, this is a sleek and compact set-up. The 13in MacBook Air is Apple's thinnest, sexiest laptop yet, and we've long been fans of the Audiolab M-DAC's smart looks and compact, stylish design. The Grado SR325es also add a touch of ruggedness, but then some of us rather enjoy looking like a 1950s radio controller.

The MacBook Air is a gorgeous machine. It looks sophisticated perched on a desk, and the M-DAC looks natural sitting right next to it. The silver aluminium chassis matches the silver finish of the laptop, but you can also get the M-DAC in black. The M-DAC is kitted out with USB type B and twin optical and coaxial inputs, while the MacBook Air takes a more minimal approach, offering two USB ports and a 3.5mm headphone socket.

Both products are impeccably built. The M-DAC's 2.7in OLED display is crisp and easy to read. The MacBook Air doesn't have a Retina display, but the screen is nevertheless sharp, crystal clear and bursting with rich colours. We like using MacBooks in particular for their smooth operation and slick interface – crucial if you'll be using this system every day.

Remote option

The M-DAC comes with a wand-like responsive remote, but we find it much easier just to reach over and twiddle the control dial (which has a lovely smooth response) or push the buttons to control this desktop DAC.

It's a good thing this is your home system, as these Grado headphones are as leaky as a faulty colander. This would be a problem if you were out and about, but in the privacy of your home you can listen to '80s hair metal and bubblegum pop without annoying others. Or embarrassing yourself.

Don't be put off by the Grados' steely, no-nonsense design, either. No, they're not as stylish as rival headphones at this

price, but they are built to last. These cans will survive more than a few knocks and scrapes, the ear cups rotate 360 degrees without creaking, and the thick cable is sturdy and effectively designed to remain tangle-free.

They do feel heavy at first, but the headband and foam ear cups are surprisingly light on the head. Crucially, they don't grip too tight, but neither will they fall off easily, and the airy foam cushions ensure your ears don't get hot over long periods of listening.

Easy set-up

The Grados have a 6.3mm plug that neatly slots into the M-DAC's headphone port. Connecting the MacBook Air to the M-DAC is almost as easy. You can connect via USB or optical, although bear in mind that those inputs limit file support to 24-bit/96kHz. Those wanting to play full-fat 24-bit/192kHz files will have to use the coaxial input.

Apple's closed ecosystem insists on using iTunes to play all tracks, but it doesn't support certain formats, such as FLAC or DSD files. There's a way out of this: you can download alternative music players that can cope with a wider range of file types. They often sound better than iTunes, too.

The Air's 256GB onboard storage isn't massive, but will hold a few dozen high-res albums. If your music collection keeps expanding, a neat solution is to get a NAS box that rips CDs. That way, not only do you gain vast amounts of space to store your music, you can also stream those songs straight to your laptop – provided both devices are connected to the same network.

External drive

There's no ethernet port, but there is a USB adapter as well as wi-fi and Bluetooth. Streaming services such as Tidal and Spotify work smoothly once we're connected to the internet. More pressing, however, is the absence of a CD drive: how are you going to rip all your CDs? Well, you can get a separate USB SuperDrive (£65 from the Apple Store), or invest in that NAS box.

Start listening and you'll immediately hear why the Audiolab has been our favourite DAC for years now, and why we love clapping those industrial-looking Grados over our ears. It's a remarkably clear and airy sound, packed with sky-high detail, precise edges and effortlessly agile rhythms.

We did test this set-up with a variety of headphones, after which the rich, smooth and wonderfully plush Sennheiser Momentum 2.0s nearly took the SR325es' spot in this system. But there's no turning back once you hear those Grados. Leaky as they are, they're instrumental in delivering the wonderfully open sound of this system.

Height, depth and breadth

The sense of scale and depth in Inception's *Time* is impressive, and there's no limit to how deep and how high the instruments can go. Dynamically, the music soars freely and reaches peaks without ever sounding restrained. You won't get that kind of clarity and openness with a closed-back headphone design.

This trio has a great grip on rhythm, too. The blues-tinged guitars on Sonhoy Blues' *Soubour* sound taut and

SWAP WITH THIS:

Sennheiser Momentum 2.0

★★★★★ £270

These have been long-standing favourites in our office for their elegant design and soft, plush cushioning. The updated 2.0 version is even more comfortable, with larger, plusher ear cups. That shiny copper trim is a nice new touch, too. Where the original Momentums favoured an easy-going, gentle approach, the updated cans have kicked it up a notch with more drive. Just make sure you get a 3.5mm to 6.3mm adapter for the M-DAC.





The **MacBook Air** is a gorgeous machine. It looks sophisticated perched on a desk, and the **Audiolab M-DAC** looks natural sitting right next to it

funky, and the system breezes through the upbeat tempo with a light but speedy and controlled touch. It's a lively, expressive performance. There's a muscular depth to those jangling strings, but it never bogs down the tune. Basslines have texture and rumble deep, while the top end sparkles. It's an attacking, punchy sound that maintains its urgent delivery without ever veering into sharp or brash territory.

The system further proves its worth when we listen to a lossless FLAC file of Marilyn Manson's *Killing Strangers* via recently relaunched streaming service Tidal. It certainly doesn't shy away from delivering the crunch and rasp inherent in the track, while every vocal nuance and drawl is laid bare. Despite that edge, there's a smoothness to the sound that

doesn't take away any of the subtlety or attack from songs – a forgiving approach that works well with streaming services such as Tidal and Spotify.

Compact and affordable

Not everyone has the space for a dedicated separates system or is freely able to blast music out loud. Laptops, downloaded music files and streaming services are becoming increasingly popular ways of listening to music, and this system proves you don't have to break the bank or sacrifice much space or effort to create a system that you can use at your desk and that won't compromise on sound quality.

Musical, insightful and full of attack – this is one classy, talented system that you can be proud of.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Expressive, insightful sound; punchy, open performance; compact and stylish; intuitive laptop interface; comfy headphones

AGAINST You'll need additional software to play FLAC and high-res; laptop lacks CD drive

VERDICT Remarkably open, subtle sound from a stylish, compact system that's a breeze to use

Listen with this

Tidal ★★★★★ £20/month

With a 25 million-strong catalogue and a weighty, detailed sound quality, we're more



than happy to pay £20 a month for Tidal's CD-quality content.

CD SYSTEM £2670

CD PLAYER

AMPLIFIER

STEREO SPEAKERS

Naim CD5si £1080 **Naim Nait 5si £990** **Triangle Esprit Titus EZ £600**

Reports of the demise of the CD have been greatly exaggerated. It's true that, sandwiched between the ever-growing popularity of streaming services and the vinyl revival, CDs feel like the ignored middle child. But don't dismiss those shiny discs so easily - CD isn't dead. There's still life left in them yet.

What is certain is that there simply isn't an abundance of great-sounding mid-market CD players out there. We had a hard time building the best CD system at this price.

Superbly entertaining

If you're on a stricter budget, the Marantz CD6005 is your best bet at £300. However, for the next step up in performance, you're looking at something like the Audiolab 8200CD at £800 and higher. And at £1080, the Naim CD5si is yet another step up.

It's only natural that we'd want to partner the Naim CD player with its matching amplifier, the Naim Nait 5si. The £990 amp is a former Award-winner, and sonically it's near-impossible to tell where the CD player ends and the amplifier starts.

But when it comes to speakers, we know exactly what will match. The memory of the superbly entertaining Triangle Esprit Titus EZ speakers is still fresh in our minds, and not just because of that gorgeous finish and distinctive shiny tweeter design. Their winning sense of agility, precision and musicality still excites us, and works brilliantly with the punchy, insightful character of the Naim components.

Driven nature

It's an exciting performance. There's power and muscle behind the sound, but the overall impression is of unbridled drive and enthusiasm. The Triangles zip along with glee no matter what song you throw at them, with an accurate ear for rhythm that will keep your toes tapping and your head bobbing.

The Naims are similarly driven in nature, favouring pure enjoyment over transparency. There's a stunning level of detail retrieval: the growling edges of Corey Taylor's voice on *From Can To Can't* are fleshed out, sounding intimate and expressive as the song increases in intensity. Drums hit with impact, guitar strums are layered and sound almost tactile - there's a satisfying sense of weight that underpins the sound.

What we're most impressed by is just how cohesive the system sounds together. The individual strands of The Dead Weather's *60 Feet Tall* are easy to pick out in the larger soundstage, but it takes real skill and precision to sustain the sense of tension and brooding atmosphere present in the song.

A great sonic combination

Crashing cymbals and blaring trumpets have plenty of breathing space to hit their high notes, but the Naims have a slightly rolled-off treble that prevents the sound from getting too shouty or bright. It works beautifully with the Triangles, whose spiky treble is kept in check. This does lend an attacking tone to songs, though, which makes it all the more exciting to listen to.

Dynamic upheavals are handled with authority and subtlety. The system's accurate grasp on rhythms takes any abrupt changes in pace in stride:

UPDATE WITH THIS:

Tannoy Revolution XT8F £1300

★★★★★

If you have a bigger room, you'll naturally want a bigger speaker. While the Triangles have a surprisingly large reach that you might not expect from their petite size, they're no substitute for a pair of floorstanders.

The new Tannoy XT8Fs are astounding. They handle big-scale dynamics with grace and agility, while subtle detail is delivered effortlessly. The depth of bass they dig up is thunderous, but never flabby.

Yes, they're double the price of the Triangles, but the sound quality is a leap forward.



Sia's *Chandelier* spins and turns gracefully, and the system never misses a beat as the song slows down and ramps up throughout.

Solid chunks of aluminium

The Naim CD player and amplifier are identical black boxes machined out of aluminium. Not just any aluminium either - very heavy aluminium. There's something about a sturdy, hefty piece of hi-fi that exudes a premium quality feel, and the Naims' construction and finish won't leave you feeling short-changed.

After a while, the discreet finishes make them almost invisible in your room. Only the subtle glow of green LEDs - the simple display, the ring of light around the input buttons, and the volume level indicator - make their presence felt.

The Naims may look plain, but the Triangle Esprit Titus EZ speakers demand attention. They're quite compact speakers, but they make a big impact. The smooth finish - in either walnut, black or white - is impeccable and feels of a much higher quality than a £600 price tag would otherwise suggest. The pointy, horn-loaded titanium tweeter adds some much-needed glitz and style to this system.

Full bodied

We've long admired the CD5si's manual swing-drawer mechanism. It makes loading CD discs that bit more involving. The drawer opens and shuts smoothly and silently, and the CD player reads the disc the second the drawer is closed.

Don't forget to unscrew the transit bolt holding the drawer in place (it's underneath the unit), otherwise it won't open. You also don't want to lose the magnetic puck that goes on top of the discs to hold them in place. The CD simply won't read the disc if it isn't there.

The only connections on the Naim CD5si are a pair of RCA outputs and a DIN connector, which connect straight into either the DIN or any of the three line level inputs available at the back of the Nait 5si amplifier. A DIN cable is helpfully included in the box.

It'd be nice if there were some digital outputs alongside the analogue ones, as it takes the upgrade potential out of the equation. There's no power supply input either - an unusual choice for Naim. However, there is a 6.3mm headphone port on the amplifier's front panel.



CDs lose out to streaming services for ease of use - and vinyl for nostalgia - but the **Naim CD5si CD player** will breathe life back into your old discs

Make sure you run in the entire system for a good few days to get them sounding their best. The Naim products open up, sound cleaner and more full bodied after about a weekend's worth of running in, while the initially somewhat spiky treble on the Triangle speakers calms down eventually. We would recommend toeing in the speakers slightly towards your listening position, too.

Simple and satisfying

It's a simple, fuss-free set up, with very few features to make a song and dance about. Playback functions and repeat options are present on the CD5si, all of which are mirrored on the remote. You'll get the same well-made remote with both Naim components, so pairing them

has the advantage of being able to use just one control for both.

The amplifier responds to volume changes instantly. Press the buttons to switch inputs or skip to a particular track, and the action happens instantly. There's no lag or hesitation and, best of all, the overall operation is so straightforward and swift that it becomes second nature to use.

As far as systems go, this is one of the most enjoyable performances we've heard at this price. The Naim/Triangle system is full of energy, and it couldn't be simpler to use. The premium quality components are worth every penny, but it's their infectious enthusiasm and superb rhythmic precision that you'll love listening to for hours on end.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Punchy and detailed performance; superb agility and rhythmic precision; powerful sound; excellent build quality; intuitive controls

AGAINST No digital connections or upgrade path; some might prefer a more relaxing sound

VERDICT An enthusiastic performance from a stunningly agile and punchy system that simply wants you to have fun

Listen with this



Nina Simone - Sings The Blues

Raw passion and cutting attitude simply ooze out of this classic 1967 collection of songs from the queen of soulful, sultry and smoky blues

TURNTABLE SYSTEM £2900

TURNTABLE

Rega RP6/Exact £1000

AMPLIFIERS

Rega Elex-R £900

STEREO SPEAKERS

Tannoy Revolution XT6F £1000

There's something about the act of playing a record that still feels like hi-fi nirvana. The tiny, explosive pops and rustling crackles, the delicate operation of placing the needle on to the groove, the way the black vinyl record catches the light when spinning - they bring about the rose-tinted nostalgia in all of us, whether you've owned a turntable system before or not.

The Rega RP6/Exact has been one of our favourite and most coveted turntables for years, and the superb Elex-R works so seamlessly with it we wouldn't dream of separating them. This Rega combination is so good, we kept auditioning speakers with them until we hit the right pair. It's not that the speakers weren't any good (they're all five stars), but it's just finding that one pair that sounds just right.

Ridiculously good

For instance, the B&W 685 S2s sounded rich but bottom-heavy with the Regas; Dali Zensor 3s were lively, but we wanted greater subtlety; the agile and attacking Triangle EZs nearly got the job until we realised their excitable treble wouldn't always play nicely with the Rega's slightly lean character.

And then we heard the Tannoy Revolution XT6Fs, and we had our system. These floorstanders - apart from having the obvious advantages in delivering a large scale of sound and being able to hit bass notes while maintaining an articulate, enthusiastic performance - are ridiculously good speakers for their price.

Nimble and versatile

We start off by spinning Nirvana's *Nevermind* and as the first strains of *Smells Like Teen Spirit* kick in, we know we've got a brilliant system on our hands. The classic early-1990s grunge anthem bursts forward with punchy detail, angry strumming and drums that hit with so much impact that it's actually felt more than heard.

The Regas are terrifically musical and agile, and they zip through the charging rhythm with sheer enthusiasm. They handle all the rhythm changes with accuracy too. The stop and start of notes are incredibly precise, and the abrupt changes in tempo and dynamics are delivered effortlessly thanks to the nimble and versatile Tannoy speakers.

Kurt Cobain's voice is all gravel and hoarseness, and the Rega/Tannoy system doesn't flinch from delivering the full aggression of the vocals as the song reaches its crescendo. It's an attention-grabbing system from the get-go.

The Regas are guilty of a slightly lean character, but there's no brightness in sight. The system also doesn't lack the grunt and depth in the low frequencies - basslines are ferociously taut and punchy. Couple the Regas' authoritative tone with the Tannoy's immense sense of scale and you have the kind of solid, articulate and spacious sound that's unrivalled at this price.

Raw and intimate

Switch to the more soulful, melodic tones of Dusty Springfield's *Spooky* and you'll be swept away by how raw and intimate her voice sounds. Despite the occasional crackles and pops littered throughout the recording, the sound is incredibly clear and forthright. Once again, it's that effortlessly fluid character that captivates us - you'll forget just how hard the Tannoys and Regas are working when the music sounds so good.

UPDATE WITH THIS:

Rega Fono MM MkII £200

★★★★★

If you're looking to upgrade this system, you don't need to change your speakers or even buy the next turntable up in Rega's range (the excellent RP8, at £2200). No, all you need is this Award-winning phono stage that will barely make a dent in your hi-fi budget.

The Elex-R's onboard phono stage is great, but the Fono MM MkII sounds even better in every single way. Place the Fono between your turntable and amplifier, and you'll hear a marked increase in detail, dynamics and scale. It adds a touch more punch and muscle, while the wide and tall soundstage becomes even more expansive. It's a small but hugely effective upgrade.



This is one good-looking system, and not just because it has a turntable in it, although we can't deny the glossy finish of the RP6 looks utterly desirable. Officially, it comes in the standard red, black and white, but other colours are also available, including our review sample's eye-catching bright green. The finish is excellent, and everything from the RP6's platter to the tonearm is built to the highest standard.

Rega continues its good form with the Elex-R. Build quality is impossible to fault, with a sturdy and hefty metal chassis that some may call functional - but we'd rather call it understated and neat. The red indicator lights contrast nicely against the hulking mass of black, while the buttons click satisfyingly when pressed.

Swift and smooth

The remote that comes as standard doesn't quite have the same authoritative design, but the controls are simple and work intuitively with the amp. Response is swift and smooth.

Completing the picture (and sound) is a pair of classy looking Tannoy floorstanders. They're tall, but the trapezoid shape, while crucial in eliminating internal standing waves, also keeps them slim enough that they don't dominate the room. Tannoy's Dual Concentric driver looks striking as always, and finish is pretty much perfect. We like the little design flourishes such as all the exposed bolts having 'TANNOY' etched on them - all these touches add up and show just how much care and attention has gone into constructing these speakers. The XT6Fs are available in either dark walnut or medium oak finishes.

Don't be scared to release the nerd

This is one system where you'll really want to take time and care when setting up. Don't be afraid to get nerdy here, either. The RP6 has no suspension, apart from three rubber feet that aren't adjustable, so make sure the support is level (nerdy tip: use a spirit level for this), has low resonance and is solid.

The key is to keep the turntable as still, flat and vibration-free as possible. We know from experience that most of us don't have a lot of flexibility in their living spaces, but if you can, position the turntable far away from the speakers to avoid



With sales up and nostalgia at a high, vinyl is back again. The **Rega RP6/Exact** turntable system will get you spinning your record collection like never before

vibrations. To go one step further, install a wall stand for even greater isolation.

If you've never set up a turntable before, head to YouTube for tutorials. You'll need to know the tracking weight for the RP6's Exact cartridge (it's 1.75g), adjust the counterbalance so that the tonearm just floats on its own, and don't forget to lock the tonearm in place when you're not using it.

Needle positioning

The RP6 comes with its own power supply, too. Once connected and assembled, plug the RP6 into the Elex-R's rather excellent sounding phono stage (always input 1 on Rega amps). There are four other line level inputs for plugging in extra sources. You get the option to biwire or single-wire the

Tannoy speakers. Once you're set up, you'll start obsessing about being able to position the needle precisely at the start of a track. See? This is the fun part of using a turntable.

Gorgeous system

For those with a vast vinyl collection hidden away in the attic, now's the time to get them down. Spinning your old 33s and 45s on this system will have you listening to records like you've never heard them before.

Vinyl sales have been at their highest in almost 20 years, and we couldn't be happier. The revived interest in vinyl can only be a good thing, and if this Rega/Tannoy combination is your first ever hi-fi system - you couldn't pick a better way to start. It's a gorgeous system.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Articulate and rich detail; clear, spacious sound; excellent build quality

AGAINST Turntable set-up will need lots of care and attention

VERDICT Dust off your vinyl - this system will make you fall in love with hi-fi all over again

Listen with this



Giorgio Moroder - Deja Vu

The Italian groovemaster has enlisted the help of Kylie Minogue, Kelis and Britney Spears, among others, for his 21st studio album - a slick, star-studded mix of disco beats and sparkly pop-tastic electronica

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a purple shirt and a green bracelet, is seen from behind, reaching her right hand up towards a bright sun setting over a city. The city lights are visible in the background, and the sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and blue. The sun is positioned directly behind her hand, creating a silhouette effect.

Panasonic

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4K PRO
STUDIO MASTER UHD



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HEAD TO HEAD

£0.7k into

They're no longer just huge screens with price tags to match,

This is the year 4K TVs become a realistic option. They've come a long way since their 2012 debut as huge screens with five-figure prices. Now, they're dominating manufacturers' line-ups and more affordable than ever. A lack of 4K content was a burning issue last year, but with streaming services paving the way, and 'Ultra HD Blu-ray' due before the year's out, it's on the rise.

You no longer have to make room for 65in+ screens either, with some 40ins around. A bigger screen will make the most of the pixel-packing technology, though, so here we welcome four 55in screens covering broad budgets.

Finlux takes on Polaroid in the sub-£1000 arena, while LG and Samsung battle it out (yet again) with more typically priced flagships. Ready to plunge into the 4K pool? You're in for a treat...



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4K does go

more content means now is the time of the 4K TV

The Finlux is a valid budget option, but if you want full 4K you'll have to dig deeper



The new remote is an improvement, with flatter build and logical button layout

Finlux 55UT3E242S-T £1000 ★★★★★

See a 55in 4K TV for £1000 and you'd be forgiven for jumping at the chance. Most on the market are double the price (see over page). But then, eye-popping prices are Finlux's forte - and often pleasing for the performance their televisions offer.

Sadly the same can't be said here, for the tribulations of 4K, and the knotty specs that go with it, are personified in this Finlux set.

Lacks technology

While the television is indeed the 3840x2160 resolution, 8.3 million pixel-packing affair it promises, it lacks the technology to play most 4K material available today. Although the Netflix app sits at the centre of its smart portal, the Finlux doesn't have the necessary coder-decoder hardware (codec) to stream material in 4K. Nor does it have Google's VP9 decoder, so that's YouTube's 4K content out of the window too.

Although three USB inputs enable media playback and live TV recording (programmes can be momentarily paused when one is attached), none can support video formats over 1920 x 1080. The Finlux does have the HDMI 2.0 spec needed to support 4K, so feeding it content from an external 4K source via HDMI connection should work.

Clearly this isn't your best bet for 4K playback, but for high-def content - by far the biggest slice of the content cake - it's pretty good.

Thanks to the Finlux's decent upscaler, you get a quality HD picture. It has no problem filling the 55in screen with sharp outlines and good detail levels. Plunge into *Fury* on Blu-ray and there's texture to torn-up fields, subtlety in shading and detail in the soldiers' muddled faces. The picture could easily look dull and lifeless, but the bold, rich hues make even the bleakness of war look interesting.

With 'Film Mode' activated in the picture settings, motion is largely well handled as the tanks bump along uneven ground. But in faster motion scenes, a hint of judder is present.

Resolution drop

Try the Finlux with standard definition - *Exodus: Gods and Kings* DVD - and, as much as the upscaler tries, it can't hide the resolution drop. There are traces of picture noise, and you can detect a slight blur around galloping horses.

Clarity levels are reasonable enough for you to tuck into action scenes. Colours are bright and punchy, the golds and reds of the ornate armoury and chariots bright and vivid, but rather overdone. The Finlux struggles to keep a lid on its exuberant colour palette with standard-def TV channels, though: colours are pretty 'out there', with little sign of nuance, and the picture loses its cleanliness. High-def channels fare better, though neither look as good as on

FINLUX FINALLY GETS ITS APP

While other brands ditch their app remotes, Finlux has finally come onboard. Its Smart Centre App is a convenient, intuitive way to perform basic functions and share smartphone content with the TV

some of last year's cheaper Full HD-only sets. It supports passive 3D, with eight pairs of glasses supplied. *Hugo 3D* on Blu-ray is bright and clear, although it's not the most stable picture we've seen.

Dig deeper

Finlux's interface has gone in a different direction (literally). Gone is the horizontal gold-on-black menu, and in its place a vertical sidebar which trails down to the left of the screen. It's a far cry from the lavish affair on big brand TVs, but it's an improvement. There's direct access to settings, live TV, media browser and full-page smart portal. The separate installation tab is superfluous when it's often a one-off process.

The moral to the story: if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Without broad 4K playback compatibility, it's barely worth buying this telly. If you are bothered about 4K, you'll have to dig deeper into your pockets. And if you aren't, you can still pick up a better Full HD TV for a similar price.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Upscales HD content well; improved operating system; nice remote

AGAINST No 4K streaming; struggles with SD channels; not great value for money

VERDICT Not quite 4K fulfilment, but a reasonable picture for the money



A perfectly functional remote - once you've worked out some of the ambiguous icons

The Polaroid's 4K won't rock your world, but it's a big TV at a decent price

Polaroid P55D600 £700 ★★★★★

A few years ago, the name Polaroid would have conjured up images of nostalgia-inducing cameras and pocket-sized prints. Lately, the company has proved itself in the TV market as one of the few go-to brands for budget sets.

Visual punch

Exclusively sold in Asda supermarkets in the UK, Polaroid TVs have been consistently pleasing in offering good-quality pictures for peanuts. Bearing that in mind, it's not surprising that its debut 4K TV will undoubtedly be one of the cheapest of its size we (or you) will see this year. And perhaps even the next.

The P55D600 is the only 55in in the brand's 4K line-up - there is a 65in model too, just toppling into four-figure territory. But ultra-cheap and Ultra HD 4K isn't necessarily a recipe for success (last year's one-star review for the £450 4K Bush set can vouch for that), so is this Polaroid a pleasant surprise?

In terms of 4K, not especially. Much like the Finlux 55UT3E242S-T, there are compromises when it comes to 4K compatibility. Without the necessary codec hardware, it can't stream 4K from Netflix or YouTube - the platforms driving the 4K content movement at the moment. Its HDMI spec meets the new 2.0 iteration, so should be compatible with Ultra HD Blu-ray players when they arrive later this year.

For now though, our test mostly comprises regular content. Regardless of resolutions, £700 is still a cracking price for a TV of this size - especially when its performance-per-pound is so good.

Play *22 Jump Street* on Blu-ray and we're happy with the Polaroid's upscaling quality even if the comedy disappoints. Every edge is well etched and the clear, high-contrast picture is full of visual punch (translating well into 3D performance when we try it out).

The film is an attack of colour, giving the Polaroid a chance to flaunt its dynamic (and slightly overblown) display. In the American football scene the grass pitch is lush, and the blues and reds on the jerseys are vivid. There's not much subtlety, the Finlux is capable of an iota more, but you get the gist.

Colour temperature

Running the Polaroid with a THX Optimiser disc is highly recommended, particularly for sorting out the colours. We find them more natural-looking on a cooler colour temperature setting.

Up next is the not-so-epic conclusion to *The Hobbit* trilogy, *The Battle of the Five Armies*, on DVD. It's a movie that deserves Blu-ray treatment, but the Polaroid does its best. Lines are well sculpted - every soldier in the mass army has definition - and there's enough detail to enjoy even the darkest scenes. In the final battle, bodies flung through

TOP APPS GIVEN EXCLUSIVE TAB

Polaroid hasn't built on its core smarts of Netflix, BBC iPlayer and YouTube since last year, but these apps now get an exclusive tab in the smart hub. The new interface, the gateway to settings, the media browser and smart hub, is identical to Finlux's vertical bar. It's hardly sophisticated, but is responsive and easy to operate

the air draw a bit of motion instability that we couldn't eliminate with picture settings. We're disappointed by the SD channels too, which involve soft lines and misjudged shades of colour.

Comfortably loud

In terms of sound quality, it goes comfortably loud and has reasonable body, but we'd invest in a soundbar such as the Philips HTL5140 for a welcome boost in solidity and detail.

You aren't paying for a premium design, and the Polaroid is fairly unadorned. A word of caution about the stand: it requires a tabletop roughly 110cm wide and 35cm deep. Not ideal. Polaroid sticks with last year's chunky remote. It's not the most luxurious affair, but perfectly functional once you've worked out the ambiguous icons.

This Polaroid isn't going to rock your world with 4K streaming and the like. But if you can live without it and simply want a decent-performing big TV at a good price, the Polaroid is worth a punt.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Crisp, clean picture with Blu-ray and DVD; punchy colours; easy-to-use interface

AGAINST Limited 4K playback; not very subtle; impractical stand

VERDICT No 4K streaming, but offers decent performance-per-pound

The LG is a good advert for 3840 x 2160 resolution, but lacks a little subtlety



The traditional and smart remotes have been merged into one multi-tasking unit

LG 55UF950V £2600 ★★★★★

LG has had an encouraging start to its 2015 TV campaign. Its mid-range 4K TV (65UF850V) got our hearts racing with its vivid hues, ultra-sharp lines and super-speedy operating system – even if it did just lose out to its Samsung rival. Ever since clapping our eyes on it, we’ve been dying to get our hands on the company’s flagship 4K range.

Solid base

Here we have the 55in UF950V model, and we’re instantly drawn to the stand. The range introduces LG’s premium ‘Auditorium’ stand: a curvaceous, angled slab of metal that provides a rock-solid base for the TV. More importantly, it’s designed to improve audio performance by reflecting the downward-firing sound towards the listening position.

Last year LG debuted its fresh-faced operating system, WebOS, which received much praise for its slick, user-friendly interface – the ‘launcher’ menu with its pop-up cards proved a welcome sight among competitor’s ‘hub’ designs. This year’s sets have the second iteration, WebOS 2.0, and it’s even better. More fine-tuning than a full-blown revamp, what you get is a speedier, more streamlined experience. LG claims boot up time has been reduced by up to 60 per cent, and it runs like clockwork – menus load in a flash, and getting around the TV is generally a swift experience.

The most useful connections – three USB and four HDMI (2.0) inputs – are all handily side-facing if your TV needs to be shoved up against a wall, and can accept 4K material. LG tellies are now up-and-running with 4K Amazon Instant Video, so with Netflix Ultra HD on board too there’s hundreds of hours of 4K goodness at your fingertips. BBC iPlayer and Demand 5 apps appear for regular (non-4K) catch-up TV too.

The LG Content Store provides a platform to watch movies, download apps (Twitter and Deezer among them) as well as manage items in ‘My Page’.

Palpable detail

Despite the advances in 4K content, most people will continue to binge on high-def for a while to come, so we’ll begin there. It’s a good start for the 55UF950V, proving an excellent upscaler as we load *The Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 1* on Blu-ray. Despite the TV guessing three of every four pixels, there’s the sharpness and detail we’d expect from the best Full HD sets.

LG’s ColourPrime technology aims to boost colour gamuts and deliver ‘more than 20 per cent additional colour.’ The set has an eye-popping (and not entirely natural) palette, which revels in lush greens and bold reds but lacks the Samsung’s subtlety and shading. 3D playback is equally pleasing, the image filling the screen with detail and clarity.

APPS WILL HAVE YOU IN A SPIN

Last year’s pair of traditional and smart remotes have been rolled into one multi-tasking unit. Controlled via an on-screen cursor, and operated by gyroscopic sensors, there are keys too if your arms get tired. The roller button is useful for scrolling pages and browsing channels. The voice recognition feature also works well

Move down in resolution to *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* DVD and the quality is a far cry from the blurrier 4K sets of a few years ago. Lines are crisp, and detail in the orcs’ faces is palpable.

Saving the best until last, we end by dabbling with 4K streams of *Breaking Bad* on Netflix and *Bosch* on Amazon Instant Video. If you’ve never seen 3840 x 2160 resolution before, this LG TV is a good advert for it. Colours pop, from the shadings of purple on Walter White’s striped shirt, to the rich colours in his home’s upholstery and woodwork.

Class act

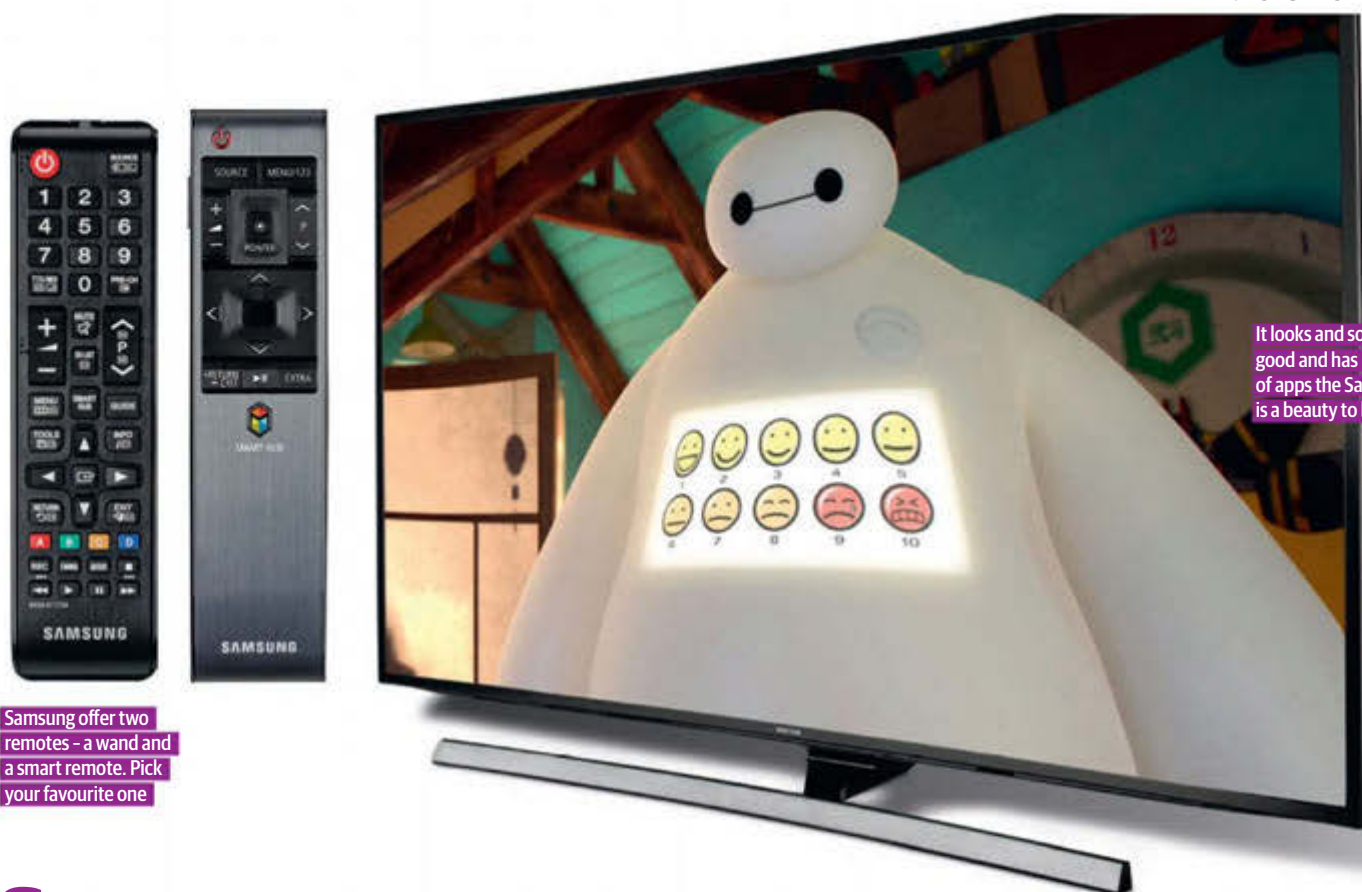
LG has put some work into bulking up its TV’s sound, not just with the bespoke stand but by partnering with Harmon Kardon. It sounds substantial enough to put you off buying a budget soundbar. All in all, the 55UF950V is a class act, and a decent option for those deciding that now’s a good time to invest in 4K. It’s merely a little bit of video subtlety away from five-star fame.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Sharp, insightful performance; consistent across resolutions; fast OS; lovely remote

AGAINST Picture can look over-processed; competition has more subtlety

VERDICT Bettered by rivals, but puts in a strong 4K performance



Samsung offer two remotes - a wand and a smart remote. Pick your favourite one

Samsung UE55JS8500 £2600 ★★★★★

Last year was stellar for Samsung, and the TV giant has picked up where it left off. The first 2015 model we saw (UE65JU700) received five stars and this UE55JS8500, a 55in TV from the range above, is yet another triumph. It marks the first of Samsung's three flagship SUHD ranges, comprising nine models. Like the brand's Galaxy S smartphone range, the acronym's arbitrary 'S' stands for whatever you like.

Fine detail

The SUHD talking point is Samsung's take on nano-crystal technology - a thin layer of tiny crystals in the display panel that emit light in various colours according to their size. Samsung says it offers 64 times more colour expression and 2.5 times more brightness than traditional tellies. And we're duly impressed by what we see. With every object precisely drawn, 4K *House of Cards* on Netflix is an engrossing watch even if the drama isn't your cup of tea.

Switch to the first episode of Marvel's new *Daredevil* and even in the title sequence the razor-sharp lines and the way the pink graphics leap off the screen blow us away. If we can get that quality from streaming, we can't wait to see what a 4K physical disc will deliver.

For now we'll have to make do with Full HD 1080p Blu-rays, but in light of the Samsung's performance this hardly feels like a compromise. The picture is

still remarkably defined: its sharp yet subtle outlines prove more realistic than on the LG and it has no problem filling the 55in screen with fine detail. Spin Oscar-nominated *Whiplash* and you can see every crease in J.K Simmons' screwed-up face.

Deeper hues

Colour reproduction is the Samsung's forte, its palette rich, solid and ever-truthful. Whereas the LG's delivery brings a touch of glitz - brass instruments resplendent, the wooden cello a shiny reddish-brown - the Samsung has more natural, deeper hues. Contrast is exemplary too, the blacks especially impressive. The sea of suits in the orchestra is properly deep without sacrificing detail.

Drop down to *Star Trek Into Darkness* on DVD and the TV upholds the standard very well. The picture is notably steady as Spock chases Khan through the city.

The Freeview HD tuner (there's Freesat HD too) doesn't let it down: high-def channels draw no complaints, and although SD channels clearly deliver the worst picture of the test, they're still perfectly watchable. Samsung keeps active 3D onboard, although no glasses are supplied in the box this time round.

Curved screens account for almost a third of Samsung's 4K models this year, not to mention its entire SUHD line-up. The stylish TV looks like it's suspended

CHOICE OF REMOTES

Samsung offers two remotes - a traditional and fairly functional wand, and a stylish, rectangular smart remote. This is lovely to use and there are lots of hidden shortcuts - holding down the 'Extra' key brings up the EPG, for example - so it's worth flicking through the literature first

above the metal stand (curving parallel in front) but rest assured, it's sturdy.

Driving force

Samsung set the benchmark for app services in 2014, and it's a reputation it is likely to preserve. You can get your 4K kicks from YouTube, Netflix and Amazon Instant Video (that's the most on the market at the moment). The driving force behind its smarts is its new open-source platform, Tizen. Like LG's WebOS, it features snazzy pop-up tiles overlaying the screen. Here you can access apps, channels and other content.

Input selection runs along a bar at the top of screen, as do menus for settings, EPG and a new feature called Multi-link, which lets you split the screen in two, so you can watch a programme and check news headlines simultaneously.

Overall the Samsung 4K TV is a dream to use. Both fantastic to watch and enjoyable to listen to, the UE55JS8500 is a beauty to behold. Perhaps the 'S' in SUHD stands for 'success'. Or 'special'.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Superb detail; natural colours; intuitive, user-friendly OS; rich, full sound; lots of apps

AGAINST The TV has 3D, but there are no 3D glasses supplied

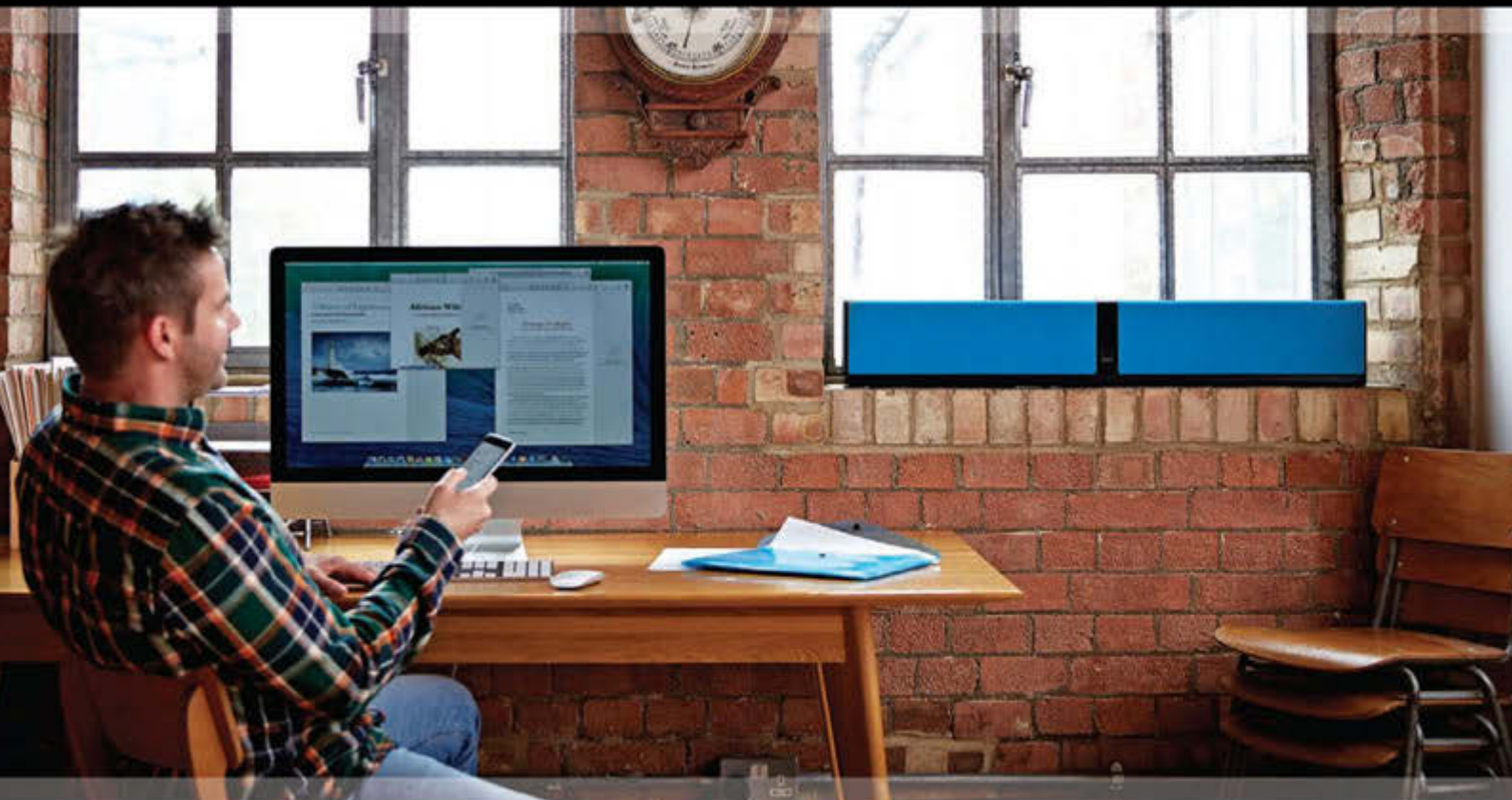
VERDICT Our first impressions of Samsung's SUHD line-up are very favourable indeed



IN ADMIRATION OF MUSIC

DALI KUBIK ONE

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TEST VERDICT



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



THE WINNER

Polaroid £700 ★★★★★☆

THE WINNER

Samsung £2600 ★★★★★★



If 4K television is uncharted territory, our test winners **Polaroid** and **Samsung** will help you steer clear of pitfalls

The question of 4K or not 4K can be a real headache. The technology may now be a realistic proposition for the home, but it's still a tricky business. It's not just about panel resolution. To stream 3840 x 2160 content or play it from other sources, 4K TVs need certain hardware (codecs, HDMI iterations) and to meet specific copyright protection (HDCP 2.2) requirements.

As our first (cheaper) pair demonstrates, not all sets with '4K' in their title are capable of playing the 4K material available at the moment, so we can't stress the importance of checking specs before you buy.

For Finlux and Polaroid, the jury must be out on 4K Blu-ray performance until the discs arrive. We can report they perform decently with Blu-rays and DVDs. Performance-wise, there's not much in it: both upscale well to produce clean, sharp pictures with decent detail and bright colours. The Finlux is more subtle, but that doesn't justify the premium over its rival. So in terms of our performance-per-pound ethos, the plaudits go to Polaroid.

Our second pair are model examples of the finest (future-proofed) TVs available today – as you'd hope for £2600. Yes, it's a high price to pay when tellies of this size start around a

third cheaper, but these are sets from flagship ranges. And frankly, we'd welcome them on our AV stand any time – especially if 4K streaming is high on your priorities.

The Samsung is one of the best TVs we've seen this year. We're big fans of the new Tizen platform, and its performance is hard to fault. It trumps the LG with greater colour expression and detail, and has a richer sound, too, so no need to buy a soundbar.

The LG isn't down and out though. A super-sharp picture; clear, crisp sound and seamless operating system (our favourite) are all good reasons to splash your cash.

Facts & figures



Polaroid P55D600
£700 ★★★★★☆

Type LED • Aspect ratio 16:9 • Screen size 55 • Resolution 3840 x 2160 • Accepts 1080p yes • 24fps yes • HDMI 2.0 0 • Integrated digital tuner yes • HDMI in 4 • PC in 1 • Component in 1 • RGB scart in 1 • Scart in 0 • Composite in 1 • USB in 3 • Phono audio in 1 • Digital audio out 1 • Dimensions (hwd) 80 x 125 x 24 • Weight 18.2kg • Smart TV Yes • 3D Yes • Freeview Yes • Freesat No



Finlux 55UT3E24S-T
£1000 ★★★★★☆

Type LED • Aspect ratio 16:9 • Screen size 55 • Resolution 3840 x 2160 • Accepts 1080p yes • 24fps yes • HDMI 2.0 0 • Integrated digital tuner yes • HDMI in 4 • PC in 1 • Component in 1 • RGB scart in 1 • Scart in 0 • Composite in 1 • USB in 3 • Phono audio in 1 • Digital audio out 1 • Dimensions (hwd) 71 x 124 x 5 • Weight 24.2kg • Smart TV Yes • 3D Yes • Freeview Yes • Freesat No



LG 55UF950V
£2600 ★★★★★★

Type LED • Aspect ratio 16:9 • Screen size 55 • Resolution: 3840 x 2160 • Accepts 1080p yes • 24fps yes • HDMI 2.0 0 • Integrated digital tuner yes • HDMI in 4 • PC in 1 • Component in 1 • RGB scart in: • Scart in 1 • Composite in 1 • USB in 3 • Phono audio in 0 • Digital audio out 1 • Dimensions (hwd) 72 x 124 x 5 • Weight (kg) 22 • Smart TV Yes • 3D Yes • Freeview Yes • Freesat No



Samsung UE55JS8500
£2600 ★★★★★★

Type LED • Aspect ratio 16:9 • Screen size 55 • Resolution 3840 x 2160 • Accepts 1080p yes • 24fps yes • HDMI 2.0 0 • Integrated digital tuner yes • HDMI in 4 • PC in 0 • Component in 1 • RGB scart in 0 • Scart in 0 • Composite in 1 • USB in 3 • Phono audio in 0 • Digital audio out 1 • Dimensions (hwd) 72 x 124 x 9 • Weight (kg) 28 • Smart TV Yes • 3D Yes • Freeview Yes • Freesat Yes

NEW WAVE

WHAT'S ON TEST

Deezer, p54

Qobuz, p54

Spotify, p56

Tidal, p56

The waters are growing turbulent in the sea of online music streaming. Can the long-time big fish Spotify stem the tide of ever-improving rivals snapping at its heels?

When one of music's biggest names buys a streaming service, the whole world sits up and pays attention. In the first month after Jay-Z bought CD-quality streaming service Tidal, it racked up more column inches than it had in the whole six months previously. That's no bad thing - the exposure has created the perfect opportunity to get people talking about both the level of sound quality in music-streaming services and how to find the perfect balance between quality and convenience.

But Tidal isn't the only CD-quality streaming service out there - French outfit Qobuz was among the first to offer it, and now Deezer has launched its Elite service in the UK too.

As we sit on the cusp of what feels like a high-quality streaming revolution, we think it only right to see how these services compare with one another, and against the ever-popular Spotify. Can Spotify still impress at 320kbps or is the smart money spent elsewhere? You know what to do to find out.





DEEZER

From free ★★★★★☆

Deezer's roots in the streaming industry go right back to the very beginning. While Spotify is credited with being one of the first services to launch, Deezer was on the scene as much as a year earlier, but with a limited catalogue.

Wide platform support

Now its reach is huge (it's available in 182 countries) and its platform availability is similarly extensive - you'll struggle to find a device it's not available on rather than one it is.

The experience on a laptop, via the web or desktop app, is by far the best way to use Deezer. Though the mobile apps are easy enough to navigate once you know the layout of the service, they lack a little inspiration.

Feature-wise, Deezer is a strong competitor for Spotify and works hard at helping you to find new music. One new feature is 'Flow', which is presented to you on the homepage across platforms as the first thing you see. The idea is that Deezer does the hard work for you, picking songs from its catalogue it thinks you'll like based on your listening habits. We found it to be pretty good in its

selections, and it's helpful if you just want to get to some music quickly.

Elsewhere you have the Hear This tab, which picks out new curated content and accurate "if you liked that, then this" suggestions, the New Releases and Top Playlists tabs and lastly Mixes, which are ultimately genre and mood-based radio stations.

While Spotify has quietly ditched third-party apps, Deezer continues to offer them, as well as a handful of its own. Some of the better ones include Deezer Sessions (exclusive videos of live music sessions) and Spotizr, a hugely helpful app that replicates your Spotify playlists in Deezer.

Free option

Like Spotify, Deezer still offers an ad-supported free tier at 128kbps. There's no offline listening, so you'll want to go steady if you have a data allowance.

For £9.99/month, users get access to the ad-free Premium+ with 320kbps playback and offline listening; or, for £14.99, Sonos users only can sign up to Deezer Elite for everything Premium+ offers plus 16-bit/44.1kHz playback.

Subscriptions

Deezer Free;

Deezer Premium+

£9.99;

Deezer Elite

£14.99

Platforms

Windows, Mac, web player, iOS, Android, BlackBerry, Windows Phone, Chromecast

Catalogue

Over 30 million

Sound quality

128kbps/
320kbps MP3,
16-bit/44.1kHz
FLAC (Sonos only)

As for performance, Deezer offers a similar sound to its Big Green Rival. Critical ears will hear that 320kbps streams have a similarly hard edge when heard through unforgiving kit, but in practice this will go largely unnoticed.

The benefits of joining the Elite

Detail levels are good and timing is tight, but you'll hear a much more open, dynamic and punchy presentation if you upgrade to Elite through a Sonos speaker.

Spotify's refreshed interface shows that Deezer has been left behind in that department. While we applaud the introduction of Elite, more attention needs to be given to the user experience. Until then, it's hard not to fancy other services more.

Rating ★★★★★☆

FOR Well featured; good catalogue; wide support; local MP3 syncing; CD quality available

AGAINST Mobile apps need more development; Elite service is restricted

VERDICT Deezer comes very close to Spotify in many ways, but its apps need work

QOBUZ

From £4.99/month ★★★★★☆

Qobuz has been around for almost as long as Spotify, but was largely unknown until it launched outside its home country of France in late 2013.

Even now, it's not a service you'll find trying to appeal to thousands of subscribers. Instead it focuses on attracting a somewhat more niche audience from the audiophile world.

They've got company

As the first CD-quality streaming service to hit the UK, that made sense - but now, with the launch of Tidal, there's plenty that needs working on if Qobuz is ever going to become a streaming service to be reckoned with.

When it comes to subscription options, Qobuz offers quite the selection. There's the headline 16-bit/44.1kHz streaming for £19.99/month (though you can pay £14.99 for access to only the service's classical catalogue), a 320kbps option for £9.99/month and a basic option at £4.99/month which restricts mobile and offline listening.

Since we last looked at it there have been some interface tweaks across both the desktop and mobile apps that make

the overall look a little cleaner, but usability still leaves much to be desired.

Search is still flaky, and results often feel cluttered, unorganised or irrelevant. A search for Beyonce turned up nearly 67,000 artist results, with most there purely because they started with 'Be'.

We noted in our 2014 review that much of Qobuz still felt rooted in France, and while we'd hoped that would improve with time, it's still the case.

On the main Discover page, the majority of suggested playlists are in French, and there are more French albums suggested throughout the various genres than on other services.

Speaking of music discovery, Qobuz loses marks here too, lacking popular features such as artist radio, suggestions for similar artists or recommendations based on your listening habits.

Different focus

When you browse what's new, Qobuz often picks out more jazz and classical picks than Spotify's more contemporary options. This, plus its classical-only subscription tier, gives a hint as to the audience Qobuz is courting.

Those people probably will overlook a less-than-perfect interface for a catalogue that suits them, particularly given the sound quality you get from Qobuz - its 16-bit/44.1kHz streams sound superb.

Tracks sound more spacious and have stacks more detail and subtlety than a Spotify or Deezer stream, even pipping Tidal's CD-quality streams for detail.

We don't picture many people taking Qobuz up on its lesser subscription tiers - there are better options at the prices. We'd take Tidal over Qobuz, despite the latter having the best sound quality of any streaming service; its interface quirks and sparse features are frustrating. Classical fans should consider taking a look, but Qobuz needs to up its game if it wants to compete with the likes of Tidal.

Rating ★★★★★☆

FOR Great sound quality; strong catalogue; good platform support; extensive subscription options

AGAINST Poor interface and functionality; lacks features found elsewhere

VERDICT It might be the best-sounding service, but the experience leaves us wanting more



SPOTIFY From free ★★★★★

Since its launch in 2008, Spotify has led the streaming revolution with confidence. While its model has evolved, its motto has stayed the same - 'Music for Everyone' - and it remains one of the only streaming services that still offers a free, ad-supported subscription tier alongside its premium service.

Nevertheless, the concept of music for nothing is one that still divides artists, not least because of royalty payments - Tidal claims to pay out three times the amount that Spotify does per stream.

Be that as it may, as the biggest and longest-running streaming service out there, Spotify has managed to woo many an exclusive over the years, giving it an enviable catalogue of over 30 million songs and the influence to secure more.

Interface lift

Spotify's interface has had a lick of paint since we last looked at it, with some welcome additions such as the Your Music section for storing favourite songs, albums and artists, as well as playlists which can now be synced to mobile too.

The Browse page is a well-managed, regularly updated section that throws up

context-based playlists, constantly updated charts and new releases for your attention, as well as content based on things you've previously listened to.

We found the latter generally contained rather dated suggestions - older albums of artists when there are newer ones available - but it's a handy tool for music discovery nonetheless.

The sharing aspect

Spotify has a big social element to it, with the ability to connect your social networks to see what friends are listening to, collaborate on playlists and follow artists and their new music.

The free subscription tier allows users to shuffle any artist or playlist - on a laptop or mobile device - with adverts cropping up every few songs and the ability to skip a song 6 times per hour. The sound quality is capped at 160kbps and you'll need to be connected to the internet at all times.

Take the jump to Premium and you'll get much-improved 320kbps streams, offline listening, freedom to skip tracks as you please and of course, no adverts. There's no lossless option yet, though.

Subscriptions
Spotify Free;
Spotify Premium
£9.99. Discounts
available for
students and
families

Platforms
Windows, Mac,
web player, iOS,
Android,
BlackBerry,
Windows Phone,
Amazon Kindle

Catalogue
Over 30 million

Sound quality
96kbps/
160kbps/
320kbps,
Ogg Vorbis

For now, its 320kbps streams offer decent detail levels and a tonally balanced presentation. There's more space, punch and nuance to its lossless competitors though, and it sounds altogether less refined in comparison.

It's half the price of those services though, and is available on the widest number of platforms. It also offers one of the best catalogues and interfaces. Also, Spotify Connect is included in equipment from the likes of Sony, Onkyo, Yamaha, LG and Samsung, allowing Premium customers to play their music directly through TVs, speakers or systems.

Accessibility, ease of use and content - Spotify has it all and then some. As an all-round service, Spotify is hard to beat.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Great catalogue; well-designed interface; good platform support; free option; ample features; well connected

AGAINST No lossless option

VERDICT If you don't want to pay for lossless, this is the most complete streaming service

TIDAL From £9.99/month ★★★★★

Tidal's relaunch in March 2015 was quite the media spectacle. With new owner Jay-Z at the helm, Tidal was introduced to a US audience by its 16-strong star-studded line up of shareholders, including Beyonce, Rihanna, Madonna and Calvin Harris.

Several strings to the bow

With a focus on CD-quality lossless music, its other promises include big-name exclusives, HD video content and better royalty payments for artists.

We've been fans of the service since before it got cosy with some of music's biggest names, so what's changed? The main thing is a new, more accessible £10 subscription tier for standard 320kbps AAC streams, taking the fight to the likes of Spotify and Deezer while still offering the lossless option at £20/month.

Elsewhere, changes are a little less obvious. Exclusives have started to trickle through, with Beyonce and Rihanna both having songs and videos make their debut through the service.

The general look and feel of the service hasn't changed since its new owners took over, and across the web

player (HiFi subscribers will need Chrome for lossless sound) and mobile apps, it's slick and easy to navigate through Tidal's various menus.

As well as a handy area to keep all your favourite albums, artists and playlists, Tidal throws up plenty of chances for music discovery, including two whole sections dedicated to new music - Tidal Rising and Tidal Discover.

These offer a selection of up-and-coming and unsigned artists respectively, with artists even able to upload their music directly to the service themselves - no record label required. It's a nice touch that shows a dedication to giving new artists a platform as well as the established ones.

Video is on offer as well

As well as music, Tidal also offers 75,000 HD videos that you can browse, including interviews and behind-the-scenes footage. Others dabble in video, but no other service comes close to this.

We'd recommend going the whole hog and signing up for Tidal HiFi if you can. It can't quite take its lossless rival Qobuz for the best in subtlety and timing, but

Subscriptions
Tidal Premium
£9.99/month,
Tidal HiFi
£19.99/month
Platforms
Web player
(Chrome only
for lossless),
iOS, Android

Catalogue
25 million

Sound quality
96kbps AAC+,
320kbps AAC,
16-bit/44.1kHz
FLAC

it's a much better interface and stronger catalogue for the average listener, plus all 25 million of its tracks are available in 16-bit/44.1kHz lossless FLAC.

The added sound quality does make a difference. Tracks streamed in lossless offer much more detail, a better sense of space and a tighter handle on timing than their 320kbps counterparts, though there's an occasional delay for buffering.

The 320kbps streams are still good if your budget won't stretch beyond £10/month, and we'd say they just pip their Spotify and Deezer equivalents too.

There are still a few things we'd like to see - such as gapless playback - but the level of choice and interesting USPs have helped Tidal become a truly compelling streaming proposition.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Excellent sound quality; intuitive interface; well featured; strong catalogue

AGAINST No gapless playback; some buffering

VERDICT A superb streaming service where great sound quality is matched by a strong interface and extensive music catalogue





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BEAUTIFULLY
ENGINEERED
SOUND

TEST VERDICT**THE WINNER****TIDAL** From £10/month

★★★★★



While other services offer tempting USPs and, in one case, better sound quality, **Tidal** has evolved into a do-it-all resource that now shades them all

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

When we looked at these four services, what felt quite obvious from the off is that you need to make a simple decision. Do you want to pay more for high-quality streaming or not? Once you know the answer to that question (and most services offer a trial to help you decide), your decision as to which service would suit you best is much more easily made.

With Deezer high-quality streams restricted to Sonos users right now, the only real choices for 16-bit/44.1kHz playback are Tidal and Qobuz – a battle of new versus old.

While Qobuz tops Tidal on sound quality, the rest of the scales tip rather convincingly in Tidal's favour.

Interface and features

Its user interface has been more carefully thought out across the board, it packs in more useful features, plus its catalogue has a much wider appeal and fewer gaps. Tidal scores an easy five stars for all the above reasons, but Qobuz's interface and Francophile tendencies keep it at a four – even though it does sound superb.

If you'd prefer not to spend the extra cash on sound quality and

are more bothered about convenience, Spotify and Deezer offer two of the best 320kbps services going. There are a lot of similarities between the two, with great catalogues, features and subscription options, but what divides them is their mobile apps.

Spotify looks much better after last year's interface makeover, but Deezer appears to have been somewhat left behind. It's not hard to use, just rather pedestrian.

Deezer may well have the option of high-quality streams through Sonos, but that's too limited to have any clout here – Spotify is the better all-rounder.

When it came to deciding a winner, we went with the service we felt offered the best all-encompassing solution, which is Tidal. For a service still in its infancy, it's made great ground on playing catch-up with the best, and can now challenge them.

Now you can have it all

Even better, it has huge potential for exclusives that could hit other services hard, not to mention the all-important choice between high-quality or not. Spotify is still a solid decision for getting plenty from the streaming world, but with Tidal you can have it all.

Facts & figures**Deezer****From free** ★★★★★

Catalogue Over 30 million • **Sound quality** 128kbps/320kbps MP3, 16-bit/44.1kHz FLAC (Sonos only) • **Subscription options** Free; Premium+ £9.99/month; Elite £14.99/month

**Qobuz****From £5/month** ★★★★★

Catalogue 24 million • **Sound quality** 320kbps MP3, 16-bit/44.1kHz FLAC • **Subscription options** Hi-Fi £19.99/month; Hi-Fi Classical £14.99/month; Premium £9.99/month; Basic £4.99

**Spotify****From free** ★★★★★

Catalogue Over 30 million • **Sound quality** 96kbps/160kbps/320kbps Ogg Vorbis • **Subscription options** Free; Premium £9.99. Discounts available for students and families

**Tidal****From £10/month** ★★★★★

Catalogue 25 million • **Sound quality** 96kbps AAC+, 320kbps AAC, 16-bit/44.1kHz FLAC • **Subscription options** Premium £9.99/month; Hi-Fi £19.99/month

Acoustic Energy
1 Series 5.101
p63



Go



Dali Zensor 1 5.1
p64



Immerse yourself in your movies with
a surround sound speaker package.
We put four of the best to the test...

and go home

Wharfedale Diamond
220 HCP
p69



Q Acoustics 3000
Series 5.1 Cinema Pack
p66

Movies are better with surround sound. You haven't lived until you've experienced the sound of a bullet zing past your ear - fact! Nowadays you can get all manner of virtual surround modes - but they don't come close to offering what five speakers and a subwoofer can. But there's no need to remortgage the house to experience it. We've chosen four 5.1 speaker packages for under £1000 to fight for your living-room space. The two-time Award-winning Dali Zensor 1 5.1 takes on new challengers from Acoustic Energy, Wharfedale and Q Acoustics. It's about to get very noisy indeed.

STREAMING WITH STYLE

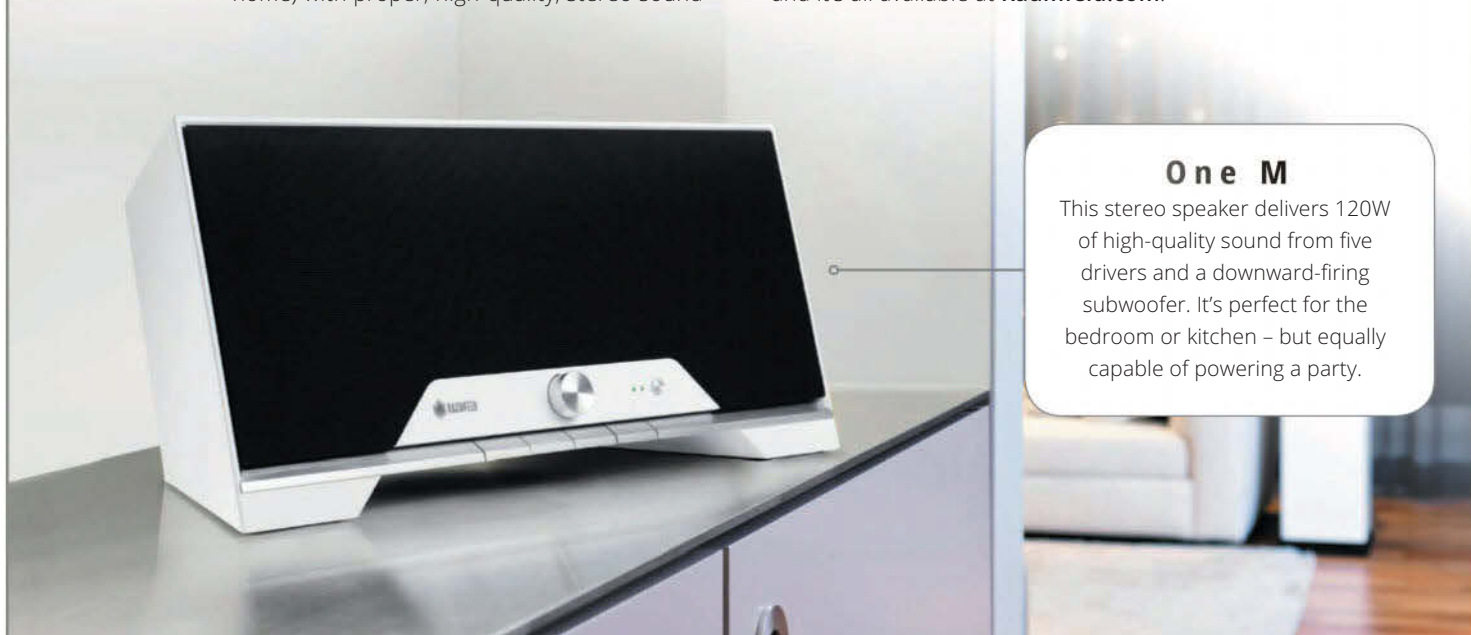
High-quality stereo streaming – big or small, throughout your home

German engineering. Two words that conjure up ideas of quality, precision, style and purity. They're the same ideas that were placed front and centre when Raumfeld's engineers created its Bauhaus-inspired range of multiroom streaming systems.

There's no shortage of choice, either. The range includes smaller speakers for the bathroom or kitchen, right up to larger models that can fill your living room (or your entire home) with proper, high-quality, stereo sound

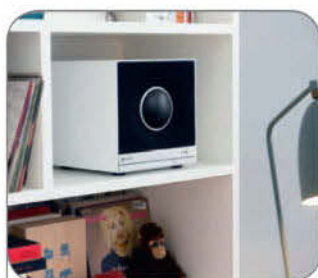
– all of it exactly the way the artist intended the music to be. Whether it's coming from an existing hi-fi source or streamed from providers such as TIDAL, Spotify, Napster, Simfy or TuneIn, your music is sent through advanced DACs and tuned components – all controlled by the free Raumfeld App. What you want to hear is just a finger-tap away.

And it's all served up by precision hardware. It's genuine German quality, inside and out – and it's all available at **Raumfeld.com**.



One M

This stereo speaker delivers 120W of high-quality sound from five drivers and a downward-firing subwoofer. It's perfect for the bedroom or kitchen – but equally capable of powering a party.



Stereo Cubes

They might only be 20cm across, but these 160W speakers pack real punch. They're available in black or white, and use a two-way coaxial driver arrangement with double bass reflex.



Stereo L

These floorstanders house a 400W amplifier and a three-way crossover for big, clean, exceptionally clear sound. Stream music to them wirelessly, or connect to your own high-res source.



Stereo M

Plug-and-play in the truest sense: the Stereo M speakers can connect to online services and existing set-ups. They'll fill a room, too, thanks to 320W of integrated amplification.



One S

Small and mighty. The One S uses coaxial drivers and twin passive bass radiators and a 60W Class-D amp for punchy sound. Got favourite internet radio stations? Assign them to presets for easy access.

Come in pairs with an active and a passive speaker to deliver an authentic stereo panorama



It's a big and punchy performance, but it's refined too. The sound is clear, with a healthy balance to the tonal diet

Acoustic Energy 1 Series 5.1.01 £1000 ★★★★★☆

There was a time, about 10 years ago, when Acoustic Energy ruled these parts. Since then the company has got close on occasion, but never quite managed class leadership. But now, after some big changes on the business side, AE is giving it another go.

The first of the new products to come through our doors were the freshly minted Acoustic Energy 101s (reviewed on page 11). They do rather well in a stereo configuration, so we're expecting great things from a surround set-up.

What we have here is two pairs of AE101s, the smallest in the entry-level 1 Series. These are joined by an older 107 centre speaker, and a 108 subwoofer. The 1 Series' design was informed by the mid-range 3 Series, which is good as far as we're concerned – the AE301s are the proud holders of a five-star rating.

Flexible positioning

All the speakers in the 1 Series use common drive units. The fronts feature 28mm fabric-dome tweeters and 11cm anodised aluminium mid/bass cones, housed in straight-edged boxes and finished in black ash or walnut wraps (as opposed to the piano gloss of the 301s).

Instead of more traditional circular reflex ports, the 1 Series features a front-firing slot port. This is designed to

reduce air turbulence and increase flexibility in positioning. It works, but they sound more solid when placed near walls. The subwoofer is relatively unfussy about placement, largely thanks to its downwards-firing driver, but it still benefits from being away from the walls and room corners.

A punchy, engaging performance

We get stuck into a Blu-ray of *Birdman*. It's a vibrant, dynamic soundtrack with a constant bed of effects and voices all around. With the Acoustic Energy package hooked up, it's a fun listen.

Both low-key and high-octane events are handled with far-reaching dynamics. Subtle conversational shifts are apparent, while the beating of a cymbal has all the texture of a trash can lid thrown in your direction. It's a punchy, lively and engaging performance.

The soundfield, meanwhile, is tall and wide – bigger than from the Q Acoustics 3000 Series 5.1 Cinema Pack. It's a blanket of sound that easily covers medium to large listening rooms.

Big and punchy, then, but that doesn't mean it's not a refined performance. The sound is clean and clear, with a healthy balance to the tonal diet. Highs are crisp, and lows are of the taut, agile variety and consistent across the board.

The Acoustic Energy package isn't too fussy about placement in your listening room

The speakers integrate well with the subwoofer, which won't worry your light-fittings but still packs a solid punch. Overall it's an enjoyable, entertaining listen and easy to live with. But while the Acoustic Energy package doesn't have any particular weak points, it failed to impress us as much as some of its similarly priced rivals did.

Detailed textures

On their own, the AEs are dynamic and punchy, but not as unrestrained as the Dali Zensor 1 5.1. There's a good deal of detail in the textures, but Wharfedale's Diamond 220 HCP and the Q Acoustics 3000s are more subtle and analytical.

The Acoustic Energy 1 Series 5.1.01 package offers good sound for the money, just not enough for a fifth star. But if you're tight on space and looking for something easy to accommodate, this package is well worth investigating.

Rating ★★★★★☆

FOR Well integrated; clean, detailed sound; easy to accommodate

AGAINST Not quite the last word in dynamism or subtlety

VERDICT This package is a great all-rounder and easy to accommodate in your home



With both nuance and strong, far-reaching dynamics, you have an invigorating listen here. This is good, sophisticated fun

Dali Zensor 15.1 £980 ★★★★★

This needs no introduction, but deserves one nonetheless. The Dali Zensor 1 5.1 package is our reigning champion. Not only has it won Awards in the £700-£1500 arena, it has also been our traditional speaker packages Product of the Year for two years in a row. It will take something spectacular to knock down these Danish warriors.

A fluid, dynamic presentation

In the package are two pairs of Dali Zensor 1 standmounters, former Award-winners in their own right. Accompanying them is the Zensor Vokal centre and the E-9F subwoofer. Together, they run like clockwork. What you get is arguably the most stunningly entertaining sound this money can buy.

It's a fluid, dynamic performance that soars with excitement before easily dropping right down for a bit of hush-hush. We put on a Blu-ray of *Whiplash* to watch JK Simmons torment a drumming Miles Teller.

The Dalis have no problem shifting up from Teller's tearful sniffing to Simmons' seething barks. It's 0-60 in less time than you can say 'oooh'. There is plenty of pop, to the extent that 'lively' really doesn't quite cut it.

It's not all about the excitement, though. The Dalis are as articulate as

they are expressive, and demonstrate great attention to detail. Dialogue is delivered with insight and delicacy. There is as much subtle texture as you like, from the rustling of sheet music to the leading edges of a full orchestra.

Combine this level of nuance with the strong, far-reaching dynamics and you have yourself a thoroughly invigorating listen. This is good, sophisticated fun.

It also helps that whole package is a uniform presentation and beautifully integrated. Sound effects that travel across the room maintain a consistency of character. That includes the subwoofer, which is authoritative yet articulate. It's fast, precise, and a seamless part of the ensemble.

Attractive package

The competition? We'd say the Wharfedale Diamond 220 HCP is comparatively more analytical and measured. Then again the Dalis are far from vague or sloppy, and any incremental gains in precision are outweighed by the Dalis' colourful, dynamically free delivery.

As for the physical side of things, what you get matches the quality of the performance. This is an attractive and well-built package. The speakers all use the same 25mm soft-dome tweeter and

It will take something spectacular to beat our reigning champ, the Dali Zensor 1 package

13cm wood-fibre mid/bass driver, and the centre doubles up on this for extra authority and better dispersion.

Top of their game

A word on placement: it's pretty easy. Dali designs its products to have wide sound dispersion, and they tend to perform best when firing straight ahead. That means you don't need to angle them towards the listening position.

They work best on a solid pair of stands, positioned fairly close to a wall. Wall-mounting works too, which lends the package a degree of flexibility not enjoyed by many rivals.

We have tremendous respect for the Dali Zensor 1 5.1 package. That it's lasted this long is impressive, but it's doubly admirable that it's still at the top of its game. If you're after a surround speaker package for under £1000, you must seek the Zensors out.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Punchy dynamics; bags of detail; articulate and expressive; impressive integration

AGAINST Nothing at this price

VERDICT Still arguably the best-sounding package available for the money

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SYSTEM

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CYRUS



This package occupies a comfortable spot between excitement and refinement - an insightful listen with the subtlest textures

Q Acoustics 3000 Series 5.1 Cinema Pack £700 ★★★★★

Few manufacturers have such a consistent record of punching above their weight as Q Acoustics. Since arriving on the scene less than 10 years ago, the company has amassed a disproportionate number of our Awards, many of which went to the 2000i series.

Our first experience of the new 3000 series - the 3020 standmounters - was positive, and what we have here are two pairs of the smaller 3010 standmounters, along with the 3090C centre speaker and 3070S subwoofer.

Low-resonance cabinets

The design of the 3000 series takes lessons from Q Acoustics' premium Concept series. The new cabinet benefits from double-layered top and front panels, along with improved internal bracing. The idea, as it was with the Concept 20 and 40, is to create a low-resonance cabinet.

There are new drivers too. The '2 in 1' concentric-ring dome tweeter aims to combine the best properties of ring radiator and dome-type designs to deliver highs with low distortion and wide dispersion. The whole assembly is decoupled from the main enclosure structure by butyl rubber, which isolates it from unwanted vibrations and theoretically produces a purer sound.

As for the mid/bass driver, the cone material has changed from a paper/mica mix to Kevlar. Instead of the typical cube design of subwoofer, Q Acoustics' offering is tall, thin and rather deep, with twin, front-firing 17cm drivers.

As we've come to expect from Q Acoustics, construction feels very solid. The 3000 series comes in Matt Graphite or American Walnut finishes as standard, but you can pay extra for glossy black or white lacquer, or even 'leather effect'.

Insightful and nuanced sound

This package offers a rounded sound, occupying a comfortable spot between excitement and refinement. It's a hugely insightful listen, packed with the subtlest of textures. If you're after a nuanced listen, this is it.

We find ourselves noticing the smallest sounds, like a quietly ticking clock in the corner of Michael Keaton's dressing-room in *Birdman*. As the soundtrack gets busier with layers of speech and jazz drumming, the speakers demonstrate remarkable organisational skills. What you hear is clear and controlled, and far more precise than you might get from lesser rivals.

There's a good deal of attack, too. The dragon scene of *The Hobbit: Battle Of The Five Armies* has all the fiery bite and

With its 3000 Series package, Q Acoustics continues to punch above its weight

excitement needed to convey a sense of danger. Strong dynamics make short work of Benedict Cumberbatch's magnificent roar. It's not quite up to the Dali Zensor 1 5.1's level of intensity, but then there's a £280 price gap to consider.

Extraordinary value

The soundfield is tall and wide given the compact dimensions of the speakers. It doesn't go as big as the Wharfedale Diamond 220 HCP, but you'll have no problem filling a medium-sized room.

It's not an entirely flawless package, however. It is let down slightly by the subwoofer, which sounds a little soft and needs better definition and control to put out the taut, punchy bass we're after. It's far from disastrous, however.

Overall, Q Acoustics' latest continues the company tradition of punching way above its weight. For the money, what you get here is extraordinary.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Stacks of detail; subtle and atmospheric; a fun listening experience

AGAINST Subwoofer could do with firming up and being a touch tauter

VERDICT Q Acoustics does it again: this package offers extraordinary value for money



TP TUBE



TP200
MADE IN DENMARK

DANISH DESIGN CRAFTED IN DENMARK

- All our knowledge and enthusiasm combine in this all-in-one sound system.

Whether it's **wireless** or cabled, the **TP200** supports all music devices – and with its patented HDSX® function it's also a powerful **soundbar** for your TV. There's no need to hide it either – carefully selected materials and great attention to detail make this speaker one to show off on a kit-rack, optional wall bracket or floor stand.

The TP200 delivers authentic sound as it should be, and reaches low bass like no other – so there's no need to add a subwoofer to get that cinema experience at home. It's sound for those who demand the best.

See www.tptube.co.uk for more information

Size: 70 x 16 x 16 cm - Power: 200 W - Material: Aluminum - Connections: Bluetooth aptX® / Minijack3.5 / Optical / USB



ROBERTS RADIO

*"Great looks, great sound;
this is fit for kings"*

From a small factory in London, financed by the sale of Harry Roberts' co-founder's motorbike, was born the most successful British manufacturer of portable radios. This year Roberts Radio celebrate 40 years as a Royal Warrant holder.



iSTREAM 2

Roberts History in Images



1932

Harry Roberts and Leslie Bidmead founded Roberts Radio with their first small factory in Hill Place near Oxford Circus producing 3 receivers a week.



1939

War broke out but production continued until valve supply ran out and battery portables produced by Roberts were shipped to YMCA overseas.



1956

The first Revival radio was designed, based on the handbag owned by the wife of the Roberts Radio founder.



1975

The metal frame MW & LW transistor, Rambler was first produced and remained in production for 9 years, to be replaced by its successor Rambler II. Both radios are collectables today.



1999

Roberts produced the world's first portable DAB radio for trials carried out with the BBC. The first commercially available model RD1, was followed in later years by the DAB Revival, now Roberts best-selling model.



2012

The brand celebrated its 80th birthday and also marked the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, with Limited Edition Revival Radios.



2014

Wi-Fi integration in the Stream 93i and iStream2 radios gives access to thousands of Internet Radio stations from around the world, provides streaming capability for Spotify and other personal music content.



2015

Travel Pad, the first Bluetooth Speaker by Roberts, marked a further step into the world of connected audio and earned a 5 star What Hi-Fi review.

For more details about the company history and for details of the range visit www.robertsradio.co.uk

Enjoy Listening





Put it all together and what you get is a fine sound indeed. And it's big - the Wharfedales have no problem engulfing you

Wharfedale Diamond 220 HCP £850 ★★★★★

We love the Wharfedale Diamond 220s, and we're not shy about saying so. As if giving them an Award wasn't enough, we have previously used language such as 'best-sounding budget speakers on the market' to describe them. So imagine our excitement when we learned we'd get to try them in a surround package.

Immersed in sound

The Wharfedale Diamond 220 HCP (Home Cinema Package) comprises two pairs of Diamond 220 standmounters, a 220C centre speaker and an SPC-10 active subwoofer - another five-star winner in its own right.

The speakers use 25mm tweeters, set in a deeply dished waveguide to improve efficiency, and 13cm woven Kevlar mid/bass drivers. The cabinet is made of particleboard sandwiched between MDF, designed to reduce unwanted distortions from the cabinet.

The unusual element here is the 'slot-loaded distribution port', a downwards-firing reflex port that opens into a small gap between the base of the cabinet and the plinth. This design helps reduce chuffing noise and makes the speaker less fussy about its proximity to walls.

We're pleased to see this port design has made it to the 220C. This feature was

missing in its predecessor, the 101C, and we felt there was a mismatch between it and the rest of the package.

Put it all together and what you get is a fine sound indeed. It's big, for starters. The Wharfedales have no problem engulfing you. Watching *Birdman*, we were so immersed in sound that it was easy to imagine we were backstage in a Manhattan theatre.

This is a well-integrated package. The centre speaker no longer sticks out oddly and the speakers work closely with the subwoofer (which focuses on agility and detail over rearranging your organs). Effects pan across the room in a tightly knit soundfield, maintaining a consistency of character as they go.

Measured approach

It's an analytical listen, offering plenty in the way of precision and fine detail. Voices are solid and insightful, there is a high level of clarity and the timing is tight. That's not to say rivals such as the Dali Zensor 1 5.1 are sloppy, it's just that the Wharfedales take a more measured approach.

That's not to say they're not capable of fun: the sound packs a good deal of punch, handling dynamic shifts with confidence. That said, the Dalis go about it with a greater sense of zeal.

The Award-winning Diamond 220s, now available in a well-integrated package

Take care when setting up the speakers. The design may have been intended to make them less fussy about placement, but we find they actually perform best when placed close to walls. Do this and you'll be rewarded with a more solid, precise stereo image.

Atmospheric sound

It's also worth tinkering with your amplifier's output levels. On our amp's auto-calibrated settings, we initially found the sound a little clinical. Going into the settings and turning the centre speaker down one decibel or so resulted in a livelier, more atmospheric sound.

So they succeeded as stereo standmounters, and now they've succeeded as a surround package. Is there anything the Wharfedale Diamond 220s can't do? Maybe, but this package is an excellent way into the world of surround sound and at a budget price.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Precise, articulated sound; well integrated; taut and controlled punch

AGAINST Trades a little exuberance in favour of more analysis

VERDICT This Wharfedale package is an excellent first step into surround sound



WHAT HI-FI?

iPAD EDITION

July issue available on iTunes now

TEST VERDICT

THE WINNER

Dali Zensor 15.1 £980 ★★★★★

The brilliantly entertaining **Dali Zensor 15.1** package is sure to put a smile on your face



This test was a tremendous amount of fun. After a week spent in the middle of gunfights and jazz orchestras, we came out of the testing room smiling. But what we found was a group of talented speaker packages, and you can't really go wrong with any of them.

That said, one winner has emerged: the Dali Zensor 15.1 package. You'd think two years at the top would weaken the resolve of the Danish warriors, but no dice. If you want to spend just under £1000, this is still the most brilliantly entertaining speaker package you can buy.

Next up we have the Wharfedale Diamond 220 HCP and the Q Acoustics 3000 Series 5.1

Cinema Pack. Both are worthy of the full five stars, but they're rather different propositions: Wharfedale offers a strong all-round performance with a remarkable level of precision, while Q Acoustics gives you a detailed and atmospheric sound, with its rock-bottom price countering its soft low end.

Then we come to the Acoustic Energy 1-Series 5.101 package, a is a well-integrated performer with plenty to offer. With no particular fault, it misses out only because of the brilliance of rivals.

In the end, you're the winner. There's no wrong choice, so have an audition, pick one and go with it. You won't have any regrets.

SYSTEM BUILDER

Three partners to test your Dali Zensor 15.1 speaker package to the limits



AV amplifier

Sony STR-DN1050i £500 ★★★★★

Our 2014 Product of the Year is a seriously good amp, balancing muscle and subtlety with stacks of great features



Blu-ray player

Sony BDP-S7200 £220 ★★★★★

This impressive Blu-ray player serves up a classy picture and stunning sound



Television

Samsung UE55JS8500 £2600 ★★★★★

This 2015 4K set from Samsung is a great performer. Good with HD material too

Total build from £4300



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

Facts & figures



Acoustic Energy 1-Series 5.101
£1000 ★★★★★

Power handling 150W •
Sensitivity 87dB • Impedance 8 ohms
• Dimensions (AE 101)
30 x 18.5 x 25cm
• Weight 6kg • Finishes 2



WHAT HI-FI?
TEST WINNER

Dali Zensor 15.1
£980 ★★★★★

Power handling 100W •
Sensitivity 87dB • Impedance 6 ohms
• Dimensions (Zensor 1)
27.4 x 16.2 x 22cm
• Weight 4.2kg • Finishes 3



Q Acoustics 3000 5.1
£700 ★★★★★

Power handling 75W •
Sensitivity 86dB • Impedance 6 ohms
• Dimensions (3020)
23.5 x 15 x 20cm
• Weight 3.6kg • Finishes 5



Wharfedale Diamond 220 HCP
£850 ★★★★★

Power handling 100W •
Sensitivity 86dB • Impedance 8 ohms
• Dimensions (Diamond 220)
31.5 x 17.5 x 25.5cm
• Weight 5.3kg • Finishes 4

The world's most desirable kit

TEMPTATIONS

“We're greeted by a full dose of fire and fury”

■ **Mark Levinson 326S/532H** Pre/power amplifier

■ **£9300/£7500** ★★★★★

Mark Levinson can quite rightly claim to be one of the handful of brands that originated what we now call the High End. Alongside the likes of Krell and Audio Research it helped establish the segment's recognised template, which includes over-engineered electronics, lavish construction and, of course, mountainous price tags.

This 326S/532H pre/power pairing may be one of the company's more affordable offerings, but in most cases we suspect it will be all the amplifier anyone ever needs. We certainly can't think of a system in which it becomes an obvious weak link.

Classy construction

We can't help but admire the 326S preamplifier. By high-end standards it's a compact unit, yet there's also an undeniable aura of class about it. That impression starts with the superbly made casework, which combines precision build with a well-damped solidity few rivals can match. We also like the feel of the front panel controls:

TECH SPECS

326S PREAMP

Inputs 7 x line-level in, 2 x tape loops

Outputs Preamp, balanced

Tone controls No

Remote control Yes

Dimensions (hwd) 7 x 45 x 35cm

532H POWER AMP

Power 300W

Inputs Balanced, phono

Weight 34kg

Dimensions (hwd) 19 x 45 x 50cm

the input selector has a lovely, positive action while the volume control just glides as it turns.

Together, but separate

Mark Levinson's statement preamps are usually two-box designs that keep the signal and power supply circuits separated to minimise any interference. Here it's all in one case, but the engineers have worked hard to minimise any sonic degradation by covering the entire power supply section (which includes two mains transformers - one for the signal path and the other for the control circuits) in its own steel case to shield the audio circuitry from any unwanted electrical effects.

The preamp's internal electrical layout is dual-mono, where the left- and right-channel circuits are as symmetrical as possible to optimise stereo imaging. Take a look at the rear panel and you'll see this internal layout echoed in the way the left and right connections are positioned on opposite sides.

The preamp's connectivity is good, having no fewer than seven line-level

inputs in a good mix of single-ended and balanced XLRs. If you have a record player there's also the option of a built-in MM/MC phono module for an extra £1375. The 326S can be configured easily, with input names customisable and everything from display brightness to gain for each source adjustable.

The 300W-per-channel 532H power amplifier is a far simpler thing, as such units usually are. This is a sizable powerhouse measuring 19 x 45 x 50cm and, at 34kg, is heavy with it. It runs a little warm too. Not so much that it'll fry eggs, but enough to gently heat our test room after a few hours of heavy use. It's worth making sure you leave plenty of space around it to help heat dissipation.

Take a look inside and you'll find it, too, has a dual-mono configuration right down to using twin (rather hefty) mains transformers - one for each channel. There's also rather a lot of empty space inside. This is because the 532H is part of a power-amplifier range in which the mono, stereo and five-channel versions are all built using the same casework.

Multi-room possibilities

You can connect to the 532H via single-ended or balanced XLR options. A small rear-panel toggle switch allows easy swapping between the two choices. There's also an ethernet connection, but before you get too excited there isn't a streaming module built into this power amplifier. The ethernet port is there to enable the amp to be configured as part of a multi-room set-up when using ML's Media Console as the source.

The 326S/532H combination is nice to use. That's not always the case with high-end equipment, which tends to

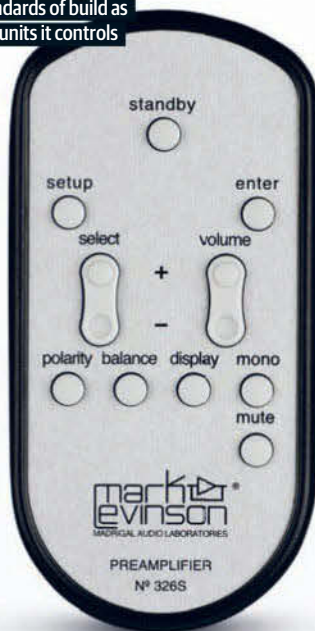
Crescendos crash with impressive force and there's plenty of rhythmic drive. This music is enthralling and quite fearsome at the huge volume levels of which this amplifier is capable



All the controls function with smooth precision - the volume knob, in particular, glides with satisfying fluidity



Exemplary in its design and useability, the ML's remote has the same high standards of build as the units it controls



compromise usability either in the pursuit of better sound or (sadly, just as often) an impressive appearance.

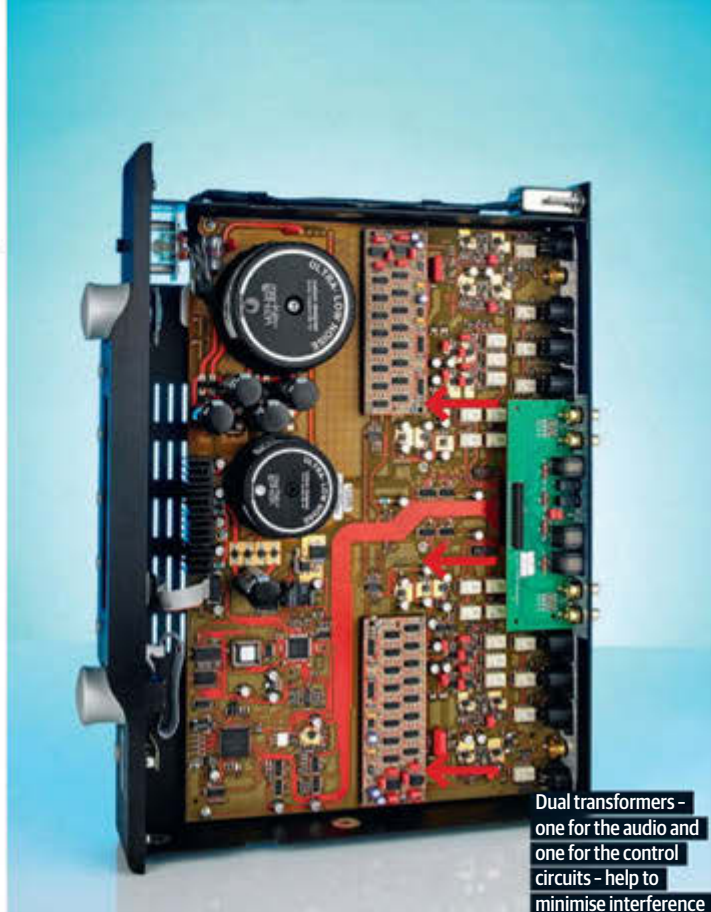
This Levinson pairing avoids both issues. It has an intuitive control layout and is responsive in use. The 326S also has one of the clearest displays around - it's easy to read from the other side of our test room - and has a nice remote.

High-end handset

That remote control is a small, chunky unit that's comfortable to hold and simple to use. Remotes are the main point of contact most people have with their kit, so we're always surprised with how few high-end manufacturers make a decent effort here. Well done to Mark Levinson for doing so.

This is a pairing that sounds promising, even from cold. Given a few days of running, the sound gains in transparency and refinement while continuing to deliver plenty in the way of scale and authority.

While the duo is undeniably talented, we initially wondered whether its presentation is just a little too subtle for its own good. There's never any shortage of volume or power - how could there be with such a muscular power amplifier? - but we did have questions over what we saw as a shortfall of punch and attack.



Dual transformers - one for the audio and one for the control circuits - help to minimise interference



There's space aplenty inside the power amp, a symptom of shared casework across the Mark Levinson range

Over time these doubts fade as we realise this impression is a result of the 326S/532H combo's class-leading refinement and composure. There just aren't any hard or bright edges in the sound, so there's never any artificially emphasised excitement.

Play a challenging piece of music such as Hans Zimmer's *The Battle* (from the *Gladiator* OST) and this pairing takes it all in stride. We're greeted by a full dose of fire and fury: crescendos crash with impressive force while there's plenty of drive to the rhythmic elements of the track. This music is enthralling and quite fearsome when replayed at the huge volume levels this amplifier is capable of. There is a massive sense of scale here and class-leading authority to the rich and insightful low-end.

Effortless might

While enjoying all the thrills on offer, we also become aware of just how composed the presentation is. Even when the music is at its most challenging this ML pairing sounds totally unflustered, almost as if it barely has to try to produce all that fury. There's no undue hardness in the presentation during dynamic peaks, and certainly no rounding-off of those extremes either. The pairing's sonic stability is breathtaking, with subtle instrumental strands remaining easy to follow no matter how demanding the music gets.

The stereo imaging is remarkable too, with a presentation that is wide, deep and very well layered. Instruments are just locked in position,

refusing to budge, even when a crescendo hits. Impressive.

It would be a real surprise if qualities such as resolution and transparency weren't straight out of the top drawer, and they are. While this amplifier is happy for you to concentrate on the big picture it's equally content if what you crave is analysis.

Clarity in the Moonlight

Low-level details are all there just waiting to be heard. You can hear the subtle clues that define the recording acoustic when listening to Beethoven's haunting *Moonlight Sonata* or revel in the lovely electronic texture of the bassline in SBTRKT's *Wildfire*. The midrange is surprisingly fluid in the way it communicates nuances, and there's an appealingly natural way with which this amplifier renders vocal-based music.

Rhythmically, this pairing does a good job communicating the changing pace and momentum of the track. The delivery is nicely agile for one so powerful, and traces the leading and trailing edges of notes nicely.

The traditional ML look endures here, and it's still a treat - good, clear display is visible from far away



Tonally we don't think these Levinsons are strictly neutral. They sound just a little rounded at the top end and a touch rich through the midrange for that. But these characteristics are mild and give this combination a more forgiving outlook as far as handling aggressive recordings is concerned.

Laudible restraint

The MLs are revealing enough to show off any shortcomings in music production (or partnering equipment for that matter) but they never overemphasise things and that's good if your collection is based around music you like (as ours is) rather than just audiophile recordings.

To sum up: the 326S/532H combination is a massively capable pairing that delivers a refined, controlled yet hugely entertaining sound. Add terrific build and the lure of the legendary Mark Levinson brand name, and it's easy to be tempted. We are.

Consider if you really value exceptional levels of composure and insight

Highlight The level of refinement and sonic stability with demanding music

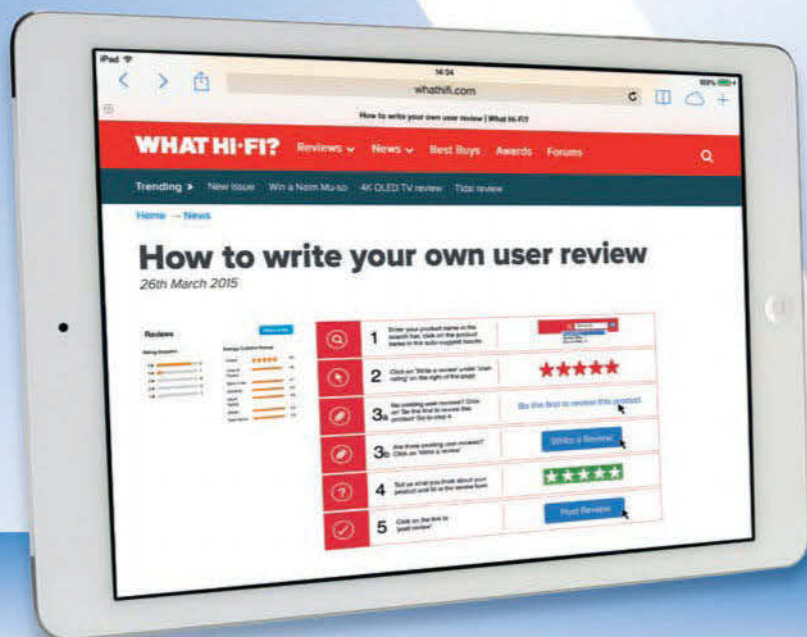
Rating ★★★★★

FOR Immense composure; plenty of muscle; excellent detail resolution; superb build

AGAINST A subtle delivery means it takes a little time to fully appreciate these talents

VERDICT Delivers a level of insight, refinement and muscle that's hard to better for the money

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TEMPTATIONS

Focal Electra 1038Be

Three dedicated bass drivers are just the start - these mighty floorstanders are substantial, robust and tall. They look stylish with it, though



Good-quality single-wire speaker terminals reflect the standards of build-quality everywhere on the Electras



“Real transparency, top-class precision”

■ Focal Electra 1038Be Floorstanders

■ £7700 ★★★★★

Sometimes we just get a good feeling about a product. That's what happened the first time we heard Focal's Electra 1038Bes, making up the front left and right channels in a 5.1.4 Dolby Atmos surround speaker package.

We liked what we heard enough to hold on to these floorstanders for a dedicated review, and we're glad we did. These speakers are great. A price tag of £7700 is hardly pocket change, but these towers give more than a taste of Focal's top-end Utopia models – speakers that cost around the same as a well-specified Bentley.

The Electra range is one down from the Utopia but still packs in a full dose of Focal's range of technologies. The most obvious example is the Beryllium inverted dome. While the use of Beryllium will rightly grab the headlines – combining, as it does, rigidity and low mass – the effect of the inverted dome shouldn't be underestimated either. Focal has been refining such designs for many years now, and has them working very well indeed.

Made to measure up

Focal has long majored on drive-unit engineering. The company makes all its drivers in-house, allowing the engineers to fine-tune the units for a specific model.

These drive units are well supported by the cabinet. It's tall (at 125cm high), feels immensely rigid (using MDF 50mm thick in places) and damped, yet there's enough style about the box to keep most people happy.

There are five standard finish options for the side panels – Basalt, Champagne or Mahogany, plus Black or White lacquer – which should fit most environments.

These are big speakers with a trio of dedicated bass drivers, so you'll need a large room to stop all that bass from dominating. A space of around 25m² is about as small as we would go. We found the 1038Bes to be most at home well out into our test room, with a slight angling towards the listening position.

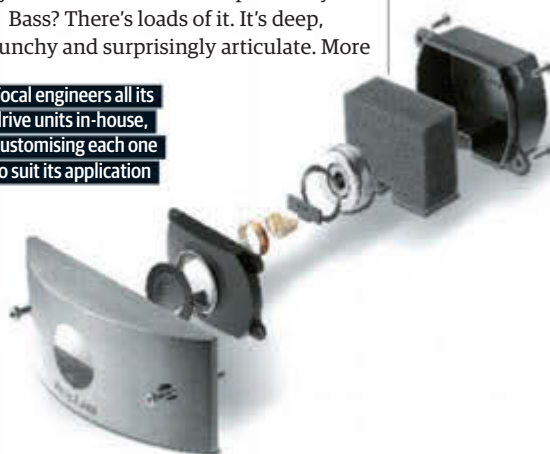
Don't skimp on the amplifier. These towers thrive on the end of something with a strong current delivery. Our usual 300W-per-channel Bryston BP26/4B SST2 combination sounded fine, but the improvement when we switched to the Mark Levinson 326S/532H (see p72) was clear. Our usual reference sources – Naim's NDS/555PS streamer and Clearaudio's Innovation Wood turntable package – serve the Focals well.

Big speakers, big sound

Once up and running there's plenty to like here. Listen to *Where We're Going* from the *Interstellar* OST at high volume and these Focals have no trouble. There's plenty of composure, and large-scale dynamics are delivered impressively.

Bass? There's loads of it. It's deep, punchy and surprisingly articulate. More

Focal engineers all its drive units in-house, customising each one to suit its application



TECH SPECS

Type Floorstander
Sensitivity 93db/w/m
Impedance 8ohms
Biwireable No
Max power handling 400W
Finishes 5
Dimensions (hwd) 125 x 30 x 40cm

surprising is the finesse on show. The track's haunting melody is rendered with impressive texture and delicacy.

We switch over to a high-resolution recording (24-bit/176.4kHz) in the form of Alison Krauss and Union Station's *When You Say Nothing At All*, and we're impressed by the 1038Be's fluid and insightful midrange. There's real transparency and top-class precision.

Detail with heart

We're most pleased by the way these speakers deliver masses of detail but avoid sounding clinical. They're not overly fussy either. Give them something hard and bright such as Bruce Springsteen's raw-sounding *Terry's Song* and they'll reveal the limitations of the recording, but that Beryllium dome has enough refinement to keep things in check. It never overstates the flaws.

There's a lot to admire with the Electra 1038Bes. They're wonderfully polished performers that work well with all types of music. Give them a decently large room and a suitably talented system and we have no doubt you'll enjoy the results.

Consider if you want a top-end floorstander that will fill a large room
Highlight We love the clear, natural midrange and treble performance

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Impressive detail resolution; refinement; dynamics; bass; timing; fine build and finish

AGAINST Need a large room to shine

VERDICT A hefty slice of the performance and technology of Focal's high-end Utopia range at a fraction of the cost

Tested – August 1981

THAT WAS THEN

A&R Cambridge A60

It might not match its modern-day equivalent (the A19) overall, but it still has plenty of charm



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



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Listen to our favourite tracks every month!

Amplification & Recording Cambridge was founded back in 1976. Now known as Arcam, the company's success was built on its first amplifier, the A60.

Back in the early '80s this slimline integrated cost £190 and was generally considered the go-to middle-market amplifier. It proved the ideal upgrade from budget champions such as NAD's original 3020.

Natural stage presence

This is a well-equipped unit, with a decent array of line-level inputs plus a capable moving-magnet phono stage. The quality of the phono input shouldn't come as a surprise considering vinyl was the dominant quality media of the day.

The tone controls are subtle in their action, and so can prove useful (on occasion) when a recording or partnering kit isn't quite balanced. And it's good to see a mono switch fitted. This can help mono vinyl recordings, replayed by a stereo cartridge, sound more stable. The A60 also has a filter switch, which rolls-off frequencies above 7.5kHz in a bid to reduce hiss from a tuner or the impact of a pop from vinyl.

We used our usual reference sources in the form of Naim's NDS/555PS CD player and Clearaudio Innovation Wood turntable. Partnering speakers ranged from the Wharfedale Diamond 220s and B&W's 685 S2s right the way through to ATC's SCM50s. We also used Arcam's Award-winning £700 A19 amplifier to give us some context for the old-timer's performance.

Just what can we expect from a 35-year-old amplifier when it comes to performance? The veteran is certainly less clear and precise than the A19. There's a slight fuzziness about its presentation that leaves the current amp sounding more transparent in the way it renders detail. Other obvious shortcomings include more rounded large-scale dynamics and notably less extension, punch and grip at low frequencies.

But it's not one-way traffic. Despite the shortfall in resolution the A60 counters with a fuller, more dynamically expressive midrange and a generally more enthusiastic attitude. In short, it's a fun listen.

Surefooted and energetic

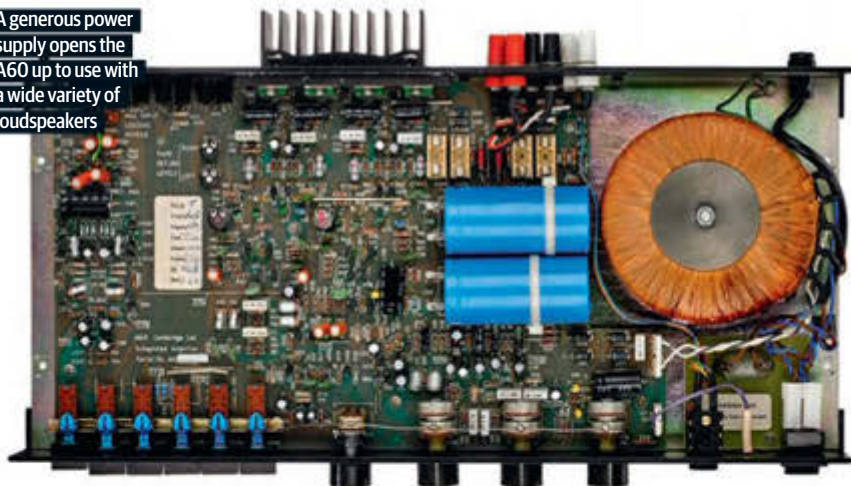
Play alt-J's *Hunger For The Pine* and the A60 delivers an upbeat sound that brims with energy. It's surefooted rhythmically and surprisingly punchy with it. A power output of 40W per channel isn't anything special but there's enough grip here to work well with a wide range of speakers. Tonally, the new amplifier is considerably more even. The A60 has a smooth presentation with a slightly rich, mid-forward balance.

It's clear that there have been significant improvements in amplifiers over the years, the A19 bettering its ancestor in most areas of performance. Still, we found ourselves returning to the older amp time and time again. There's just something addictive about its expressive, entertaining delivery. We're quite taken with that wood finish too.



Connectivity is good, and the phono stage is suitably accomplished, befitting an era in which vinyl was the dominant force

A generous power supply opens the A60 up to use with a wide variety of loudspeakers



There have been significant improvements in amplifiers over the years, but we found ourselves returning to the older amp time and time again

Rocker switch; push-button controls; grainy wood finish - the A60 is clearly of its time



The movies, music and games to test your system

★★★★☆

Picture	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
Sound	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100
Extras	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66	67	68	69	70	71	72	73	74	75	76	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	100



This Disney/Marvel collaboration is a feast for the eyes. If it weren't for the inconsistent tone, *Big Hero 6* could have been one of the greatest animated films ever made.

Spotify highlights [Join us on Spotify whf.cm/playlist15](https://www.whf.cm/playlist15)



George Fitzgerald: Full Circle Casually thrilling post-dancefloor satisfaction from the debut album *Fading Love*. May well be ubiquitous quite soon.

Mazzy Star: In The Kingdom The Mazzy Star *modus operandi* changed hardly at all in 13 years between albums – and that's something we can all be grateful for.

Ghostpoet: X Marks The Spot Obaro Ejimiwe's third album *Shedding Skin* has plenty to recommend it, but this slow-burner is the stand-out track.

Larry Adler: Summertime The harmonica's not an instrument that can easily be made to sound emotive or evocative, but then Larry Adler's not your standard harmonica player.

Music

GAMES, MOVIES
& FORTHCOMING
RELEASES
p82

Download, CD, vinyl



GIORGIO MORODER DEJA VU Out June 15th ★★★★★☆

If anyone in popular music has earned a free pass, it's Giorgio Moroder. Even if one were to overlook his myriad other achievements, the extraordinarily contemporary and sophisticated sound of Donna Summer's *I Feel Love* (1977) is enough to cement his position as a pioneer.

Now he's at the statesman/overlord stage of his career, Moroder's back with an album of star-studded collaborations (Kylie Minogue, Britney Spears, Kelis and Mikky Ekko, among others, gamely attempt to Donna Summer their way into pop immortality here). And it's difficult in the extreme to criticise *Déjà Vu* for its rather one-paced, identikit arrangements and tempos – after all, pop music sounds the way

it currently does in large part thanks to Moroder. And while there's precious little in the way of variation here, it's a slick, glossily produced and eminently danceable collection that means no harm whatsoever.

Specifications

Duration 38m 48s

Standout track 74 Is The New 24

All together now: "ooh, it's so good it's so good it's so good..."

Listen to it this way



Streamer

Cambridge CXN £700 ★★★★★

Cambridge has the nail/head interface absolutely spot on with the CXN



Stereo amplifier

Arcam FMJ A19 £650 ★★★★★

Not the first time we've eulogised the A19 and undoubtedly not the last



Stereo speakers

Bowers & Wilkins 685 S2 £500 ★★★★★

Latest in a long and venerable line of high-performance, affordable B&W standmounters



playlist top picks

What with the tremendous showing Tidal puts up in our streaming services test on p52, not to mention the year's-worth of free Tidal music that 10 readers can win on p86's competition, this seems an ideal opportunity to point you in the direction of our new Tidal playlist ([whf.cm/playlist15](https://www.whf.cm/playlist15)).

Thanks to the humungous number of songs and albums available to stream losslessly (for those who pony up the £20 per month or who are lucky enough to win a subscription), CD-quality audio can be yours without the attendant hardware-related faffing. And because we've been so judicious in the songs we've picked (and will continue to be so for as long as our winners are enjoying their prize), a world of effortlessly delivered musical delight is just a click away.



Nina Simone
Sings The Blues



Talk Talk
Spirit Of Eden



The Notwist
Neon Golden



Royal Blood
Royal Blood



D'Angelo & The Vanguard
Black Messiah



Richard Evans
Dealing With Hard Times



Movie shorts

The Gambler

Mark Wahlberg is an English professor/gambler who owes money. Decent, but John Goodman's gangster is the film's true ace-in-the-hole.

Kingsman: The Secret Service

Colin Firth trains up a young tearaway as a superspy in this slick (but rather soulless) James Bond pastiche. *Men In Black*, but minus the aliens.

Whiplash

Miles Teller really likes drumming. JK Simmons likes good drumming, and shouting. An intense if repetitive tale of sadistic, masochistic ambition.

A Most Violent Year

A misleading title, this. There's not much violence, and it's wrapped up in a month – in which business-owning Oscar Isaac tries not to be violent.

On-screen

System tester



Ex Machina

Blu-ray

Out now

★★★★★

A small hit on its UK release, *Ex Machina* marks Alex Garland's directorial debut – and it's a fine film to make a debut with.

Set in an unspecified future, Oscar Isaac's Nathan – a reclusive CEO of a Google-type company – creates the world's first artificial intelligence in Alicia Vikander's Ava. He invites Domhall Gleeson's coder Caleb to conduct a series of Turing tests to see

if Ava can convincingly embody human thought and expression.

What follows is a tight and tense three-hander, as each character attempts to exploit or assert themselves over each other. Garland examines speculative themes with a brio and tact that's (sadly) uncommon, a script that shifts audience loyalties and three committed lead performances from Gleeson, Isaac and Vikander.

Though it stumbles with its ecstatic ending, *Ex Machina* is nevertheless quietly compelling. An intelligent film that merits a bigger audience.



These four will supply stacks of great-looking - and -sounding - entertainment



Watch it this way

Blu-ray player
Sony BDP-S5500 £110 ★★★★★
Everything a budget player should be

Television
Samsung UE48H6400 £550 ★★★★★
Still available, still a huge bargain

Soundbase
Cambridge Audio TV5 £250 ★★★★★
A discreet, affordable, hefty sound boost

Set-top box
Sky+ HD2TB ★★★★★
Because everyone likes lots to watch

Games

Carmageddon: Reincarnation

PC, Out now

★★★★☆



Eighteen years after it first shocked *The Sun*, *Carmageddon* is back in this sequel/remake. The pedestrian-splattering, car-smashing gameplay is all present and incorrect, but the sluggishness and heaviness of the handling and game engine, plus the lack of opponent intelligence, is tiresome.

Project Cars

PC, PS4, Xbox One, Out now

★★★★★



Console gamers who find *Forza* too arcadey and *Gran Turismo* too tardy will be delighted with *Project Cars* – a new, super-serious racing sim. There are issues around the complexity of menus, online matchmaking and buggy penalty system, but the racing is so exciting and beautiful, you'll love it anyway.

The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt

PC, PS4, Xbox One, Out now

★★★★★



Combining the grown-up themes and cinematic story-telling of the previous *Witcher* games with a setting that dwarfs even *Skyrim* has spawned a new benchmark for fantasy RPGs. This is a genuinely incredible game that is as much of a pleasure when idly exploring as when pursuing the main, epic quest.

Wolfenstein: The Old Blood

PC, PS4, Xbox One, Out now

★★★★★



There was a surprising amount of charm and humanity around the twin-shotgun Nazi-obliviation of *Wolfenstein: The New Order*, and while some of that is missing in this prequel, the quality of the action and generosity of content makes *The Old Blood* well worth the £15 asking price.

What we are waiting for...

Movies (Blu-ray) *Blackhat* (22 June) Chris Hemsworth takes time out from swinging hammers to deal with an international network of hackers. Michael Mann directs.

Movies (cinema) *Terminator Genesys* (3 July) He said he'd be back, and now he is. Old Arnie fights Young Naked Arnie. You really shouldn't mess with time-travel.

Music (Download, CD, vinyl) *The Chemical Brothers - Born In The Echoes* (17 July) The ongoing Return of Veteran Dancefloor Leviathans Club gets its latest members.

Music (Download, CD, vinyl) *Sarah Cracknell - Red Kite* (15 June) Despite her constant refusal to marry any one of us, we're still agog at the prospect of a new Cracknell album.

June in Hi-Def

The best on the box



A gorgeous adaptation set in an alternate 19th century England, where magic has re-emerged

Dark Matter

Syfy HD - 15th June, 8pm

The six-person crew of a derelict spaceship wake up with their memories wiped. Who are they, why are they floating in the farthest reaches of space, and why is the cargo bay full of weapons?

As they discover the ship is heading towards a remote mining colony on the brink of war, the six strangers must piece together their lives and decide whose side they are on.

The show is headed by a cast of little-known Canadian faces, but recurring guests in the form of *Star Trek*'s Wil Wheaton and David Hewlett (Dr McKay from *Stargate*) give some gravitas to the fledgling show. Syfy has a history of commissioning shows with interesting premises but small payoffs. Nevertheless, *Stargate* producers and writers are behind this one. It's anyone's guess where this sci-fi adventure will end up.

Hannibal

Sky Living HD - 8th June, 10pm

Ready for your third course? It's back, and this year we're getting to the events of *Red Dragon*, the book in which Will Graham seeks the help of an incarcerated Hannibal Lecter to tackle the case of a new, disturbing series of murders.

Taking on the mantle of the serial killer Tooth Fairy is Richard Armitage (you'll know him better as Thorin Oakenshield from *The Hobbit* trilogy) in an inspired piece of casting. Also returning is Gillian Anderson's Bedelia Du Maurier, now updated to cast regular, and we can't wait to see what she and the good doctor have been getting up to as fugitives. But more imminently: who survived the bloodbath of the series-two finale?

Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell
BBC One HD - Sundays, 9pm

"We wish to know why is there no more magic done in England."

This is a gorgeous seven-part adaptation of Susanna Clarke's critically acclaimed novel set in an alternate 19th century England, where magic has re-emerged after lying dormant for centuries.

Two men - a cantankerous old scholar, Mr Norrell (Eddie Marsan), and a young gentlemen, Jonathan Strange (Bertie Carvel), are the only ones capable of using magic, and their companionship turns to rivalry as their powers increase. Factor in a bet with a mysterious, chaotic entity known only as the Gentleman With The Thistle-Down Hair, the backdrop of the Napoleonic Wars, social and political warring, and you have the kind of storytelling that invokes Tolkien, Dickens and Martin.

Part costume drama, part fantasy, part history - it's a meld of genres that is brought to life by stunning special effects, sumptuous costumes and scenery, and intricately fleshed out characters.

Sense8

Netflix - 5th June

The Wachowskis. Love them for *The Matrix*, deride them for anything else since. Their big-screen efforts (*Cloud Atlas*, *Jupiter Ascending*) may not have garnered universal acclaim, but we can't help but get excited about their new sci-fi show for Netflix.

Eight people around the globe find out that they're telepathically and emotionally connected, and must fight to survive being hunted by those that think their evolution is an affront to the world order.

A look at the diverse cast list will send another tingle down your spine: Anupam Kher, Daryl Hannah, Naveen Andrews (Sayid from *Lost*), Freema Agyeman and more - a truly multicultural cast through which the Wachowskis explore the politics, gender, sexuality, identity, and religion of today's world. It looks ambitious, intelligent, bonkers and stylish.

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- C) 15 million

Terms & conditions: 1 Open to UK residents aged 18 or over.

2 Competition closes 11.45pm, June 31st 2015. 3 Prizes as stated.

4 Prizes are non-transferable. 5 Only one entry per person.

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7 Promoter Haymarket Media Group, Teddington, Middx TW11 9BE.

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NEW

To get the best from your **AV amplifier** you need to set it up properly – so we give you the low-down on speaker calibration

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Welcome to the **UK's best guide** to TVs, hi-fi, home cinema and mobile, with star ratings for more than **1500 products**. Where other magazines rely on isolated

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Within this guide you'll find all our favourite **four- and five-star** products – including **Award-winners** – to help you pick the best kit for your budget.



Kobina Monney, Buyer's Guide Editor

Exciting new additions...



Onkyo TX-NR3030, p98

"With a class-leading sound and a great list of features, it offers plenty for your money."



Samsung Galaxy S6 Edge, p133

"Innovative and desirable, this is the phone we've been waiting for from Samsung."

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★★★★★
£250

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PIONEER BDP-LX58
★★★★★
£600

A beautifully crisp, punchy picture and dynamically capable sound make this a stellar Blu-ray player

RECEIVERS



YAMAHA RX-V377
★★★★★
£260

This is the perfect entry-level option for those upgrading to five-channel sound on a budget. It's a brilliant buy.



SONY STR-DN1050
★★★★★
£500

Incredible value, this home-cinema powerhouse has pretty much all the features and ability you want.



PIONEER SC-LX58
★★★★★
£1400

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SPEAKERS



Q ACOUSTICS 2000i 5.1 PACK
★★★★★
£625

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DALI ZENSOR 15.1
★★★★★
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★★★★★
£2850

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DISPLAYS



SONY KDL-40W605
★★★★★
£450

If you're after a great all-rounder in both picture quality and smart features, this TV is it. Splendid.



SAMSUNG UE48H64800
★★★★★
£700

A whole lot of screen for your money - and this is a superb performer as well. A bargain.



SONY VPL-HW55ES
★★★★★
£2800

Superb in 2D, this projector also excels at 3D. Edges are sharp, pictures have depth and stability.

CD PLAYERS



MARANTZ CD6005
★★★★★
£350

This incredibly musical player offers detail in spades, not to mention a great way with dynamics.



CYRUS Cdi
★★★★★
£1050

A player that puts detail resolution, agility and dynamic expression above all else. Which is why we love it.



ROKSAN CASPIAN M2 CD PLAYER
★★★★★
£1900

Combines bite, refinement and rhythm better than anything else we've heard at this price.

AMPLIFIERS



MARANTZ PM6005
★★★★★
£300

A return to form by Marantz in this market, and a fine match for its CD-player sibling.



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Supra USB 2.0 £30

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OR LESS



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Combines Naim's expertise in streaming, amplification and loudspeaker technology. Mu-so is the stage your music deserves, bringing you closer to the songs that inspire your life.



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OR LESS

RUARK AUDIO • R2 MK3 WIRELESS SPEAKER SYSTEM WITH DAB/FM TUNER

Play your music and discover new music in a variety of convenient ways. Spotify Connect lets you select R2 as your player and then control playback using the controls on R2 itself.

NEW

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OR LESS

SAVE
£100



MARANTZ • NA6005 • MUSIC STREAMER

If you prefer direct wireless access to your digital media then look no further. With in-built WiFi, Bluetooth and USB-A capabilities, this player also connects to everything: to your computer, external hard disc, smartphone, and tablet.

NEW

£499
OR LESS



PIONEER • N-50A • MUSIC STREAMER

Developed for the digital age, the N-50A Network Audio Player connects to many different sources and features Internet Radio and Music Streaming from compatible devices, a high quality DAC and Airplay and DLNA compatibility.

£399
OR LESS

BLACK OR
WHITE



HIGH RES AUDIO



BLUESOUND • NODE • HI-RES MUSIC STREAMER

Connect your existing stereo system to the world of streaming HiFidelity audio, and access cloud music services and internet radio. Control your music in every room with your Android™ device, iPhone®, iPod touch® or iPad™.

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£500

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for only £399



NAD • C390DD • DIRECT DIGITAL AMPLIFIER / DAC

The combination of sound quality and features make the NAD C390DD a highly capable and versatile amplifier. Featuring NAD's MDC, the C390DD comes with 8 inputs which can be expanded to 14 with the optional MDC modules.

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OR LESS



NAD • D 3020 AMPLIFIER / DAC

Features digital and analogue inputs plus the convenience of wireless streaming with its Bluetooth capability.



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NAD • D 7050 •

Combines NAD's Digital technology create the ultimate



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Issue 1

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WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
BEST TURNTABLE

£209
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PRO-JECT • ESSENTIAL II • TURNTABLE

Entry-level "plug'n'play" two speed turntable with single piece aluminium tonearm and pre-fitted Ortofon OM5e cartridge.



£329
OR LESS

FLEXSON • VINYLPLAY • DIGITAL TURNTABLE

Gives the best-of-both-worlds: an excellent record player that's easy to use and can be simply integrated into a streaming system.



£249
OR LESS

NAD • C 556 • TURNTABLE

Time to enjoy vinyl collections with extraordinary quality! With a minimalist design, the C 556 turntable offers accurate reproduction by using performance-focused parts and components that put music first.



NEW
£575
OR LESS

PRO-JECT • 1 XPRESSION CARBON UKX • TURNTABLE

With its Carbon armtube and supplied Ortofon 2m Silver cartridge, the 1 Xpression Carbon UKX sets new standards in its price range.



£425
OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
BEST DAC

ARCAM • irDAC • DAC

Designed to be the heart of a digital system. Includes asynchronous USB and a direct iPod input to optimise sound quality. All inputs can be controlled through an IR remote that will also control iPods, iPhones, PC and Mac computers.



£899
OR LESS

SAVE
£600

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2012
BEST DAC

NAD • M51 • DAC / PREAMP - SILVER FINISH

This award-winning DAC / pre-amp features optical, coaxial, USB and HDMI inputs, all of which can handle files up to 24-bit/192kHz. The M51 will truly transform any system.



NEW
£799
OR LESS

NEW
£1595
OR LESS

ARCAM • FMJ CDS27 / FMJ A39 • CD / AMPLIFIER

Introducing Arcam's audiophile Class G integrated amplifier and SACD/CD player with Network streaming up to 192/24 for class leading sound quality.



£249
OR LESS

£249
OR LESS

NAD • C 516BEE / C 316BEE • CD / AMPLIFIER

Received an outstanding product award from Hi-Fi News magazine who described the C 316BEE is an "absolute barn-stormer of an amplifier". The C 516BEE is the perfect partner.



£1080

£990

NAIM • CD5si / NAIT 5si • CD PLAYER / AMPLIFIER

Enjoy outstanding performance from your CDs with this highly acclaimed Naim CD/Amplifier combination.

Available from selected stores. Visit www.ssav.com for details



£1099
OR LESS

SAVE
£721

LIMITED STOCK

ROKSAN • KANDY K2 BT TWIN PACK • CD / AMPLIFIER

The K2 BT integrated amplifier features aptX Bluetooth, a phono input plus five line inputs for other sources. The K2 CD player is the perfect match. Available in Black or Silver.



£1899
OR LESS

£1899
OR LESS

ROKSAN • CASPIAN M2 • CD / AMPLIFIER

The M2 amp boasts 85wpc and five line inputs while the matching CD features a 24-bit DAC plus dedicated power supplies for the outputs.



£599
OR LESS

£499
OR LESS

ROTEL • RA-12 / RCD-12 • AMPLIFIER / DAC / CD

Amplifier with DAC that supports iPod USB and Bluetooth audio streaming. Includes four analogue line-level inputs and a phono input. The RCD-12 CD player is an ideal partner.



£299
OR LESS

SAVE
£100

DENON • CEOL RCD N-9 • CD/STREAMING SYSTEM

Stream high definition music from NAS, computers, mobile devices and the internet, via Wi-Fi, Ethernet, Bluetooth and USB. Features Spotify Connect, Internet radio, CD and FM/AM radio.



NEW
£3050

NAIM • UNITI 2 WITH BLUETOOTH

ALL-IN-ONE NETWORK SYSTEM

Combines an integrated amplifier, CD player, DAB/FM tuner, internet radio, iPod dock, digital-to-analogue converter and high-resolution 24bit/192kHz capable network stream player.



Spotify

£699
OR LESS

SONY • MAP-S1 • MULTI AUDIO PLAYER SYSTEM

It's all right here - a powerful 2x50W amplifier, tuner and CD player integrated in an elegant compact unit. Just add speakers and you are ready for an incredible Hi-Resolution Audio experience.



NEW
£329
OR LESS

PIONEER • XC-HM82 • CD/NETWORK SYSTEM

The XC-HM82 is an absolute power house, equipped with a Class D amplifier to boost your sound. Its compact size and stylish aluminium design make it suitable for any interior style.



£249
OR LESS

B&W • P5 S2 HEADPHONES



NEW
£499
OR LESS

AUDIOQUEST • NIGHTHAWK HEADPHONES



£229
OR LESS

NAD • VISO HP50 HEADPHONES



NEW
£379.95
OR LESS

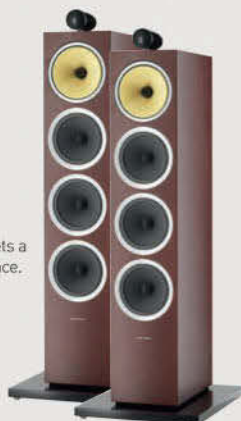
SENNHEISER MOMENTUM 2.0 WIRELESS HEADPHONES



BOWERS & WILKINS • 685 S2
At home on a stand, wall or bookshelf, the versatile 685 S2 is ideal for stereo and home theatre uses in most rooms. And performance is enhanced with the addition of a Decoupled Double Dome tweeter.

£499
OR LESS

Price excludes stands



BOWERS & WILKINS CM10 S2

The flagship floorstanding speaker of the CM Series sets a new standard for performance. It combines technologies taken from across B&W's ranges. The result simply sounds and looks beautiful.

NEW
£2999
OR LESS



KEF • LS50

An innovative concept derived from the legendary LS3/5a. Rarely the case in such a compact design, the LS50 monitor delivers a rich, multi-dimensional 'soundstage experience' that is out of all proportion to its size.

£799
OR LESS



PMC • TWENTY-22

An astonishingly natural balance and high dynamic capability are the hallmarks of this speaker. It creates a precise sound stage and profound bass performance from its compact cabinet.

£1970
OR LESS

Price excludes stands

MONITOR AUDIO GOLD 200

Amazing scale and impressive dynamic control are available from this slender three-way design, comprising ribbon tweeters, twin 5.5" bass drivers and a 4" mid-range driver, which is housed in a dedicated enclosure.

NEW
£2299
OR LESS



MONITOR AUDIO BRONZE 2

The Bronze 2 builds on the strength of its predecessor's audiophile credibility with a neutral tonal balance and high detail resolution combined with high overall efficiency and power handling.

NEW
£279
OR LESS



Q ACOUSTICS • 3050

The flagship 3050 is the perfect speaker for larger rooms, boasting ultra-low levels of distortion, typically found of speakers costing three or four times its price.

NEW
£499
OR LESS

Standard finishes
Premium finishes
£649

PSB IMAGINE X1T

A deceptively slim and discreet floorstanding design, the Imagine X1T has wide bandwidth and high SPL output capabilities that defy its modest size. Features identical 5 1/4" woofers plus a one-inch pure titanium dome tweeter.

NEW
£749
OR LESS



WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 220

The award-winning Wharfedale Diamond 220 is a 2-way, bass reflex bookshelf speaker offering everything you need from an advanced speaker design that doesn't cost the earth.

£199
OR LESS

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WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

Multi-room systems
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SONOS

THE WIRELESS Hi-Fi SYSTEM

The Sonos Wireless HiFi System delivers all the music on earth, in every room, with deep, richly textured sound. **PRICES FROM £149**

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HiFi for a wireless generation

HIGH RES AUDIO

"There's a new leader in the wireless multi-room music market - Bluesound combines high-res audio and ease of use in one impressive system."

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

Stream your digital music collection, internet radio and cloud music services. Bluesound is simple to setup and easily expandable and supports 24-bit/192kHz studio master recordings in lossless FLAC format for crystal clear audiophile-grade sound to any room in your home. **PRICES FROM £399**



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

Multi-room systems
Best value system up to £1000

NEW

£449
OR LESS



GLOSS
RED
GLOSS
BLACK
GLOSS
WHITE

PODSPEAKERS • MIINIPOD MK3 • SPEAKERS

Ideal for large areas or where volume is required to make an impact, the MiniPod can be placed on a desk or shelf using the supplied spikes or wall mounted with the optional bracket.

NEW

£199
OR LESS



GLOSS
RED
GLOSS
BLACK
GLOSS
WHITE

Bluetooth

PODSPEAKERS • MICROPOD BLUETOOTH SPEAKERS

Introducing the MicroPod Bluetooth. These stylish speakers are ideal for tablets and smartphones are are simple to connect without the need for unsightly wires.

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Real Stores

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision have 26 stores nationwide with plans to open more during 2015. Each carries the best in home cinema and Hi-Fi equipment on display, ready for you to watch, listen to and compare in our dedicated demonstration rooms.

Real Products

A wide selection of products from the world's leading manufacturers is in stock and available for you to take home. We also offer a delivery and installation service as well as a convenient on-line click and reserve option for many of our products.

Real People

Our staff are friendly, knowledgeable and passionate about music and film and the equipment needed to get the most out of your collection. They will be delighted to assist you in making the right selection to ensure you enjoy your system for years to come.

Real Value

Fantastic value for money is our aim. Although we remain independent, you will be pleasantly surprised just how competitive we can be - with the added benefit of seeing, hearing and touching the product before you buy, and someone to help if things go wrong.

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ARCAM • FMJ AVR450 • AV RECEIVER

7.1-channel AV receiver combines 4K "Ultra HD" upscaling and 3D video capability with Arcam's legendary sound quality. Also Available: ARCAM FMJ AVR380 & AVR750



£999
OR LESS

NAD • T 758 • AV RECEIVER

AV receiver featuring NAD's Modular Design Construction for future upgrades along with exceptional sound quality. Also Available: NAD T 748V2 & T 787



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.COM



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

PIONEER • SC-LX58 • AV RECEIVER

New 9.2-channel Network receiver with with Class D Amplification, Wi-Fi, AirPlay, DLNA, Bluetooth and Dolby Atmos® upgradability. Also Available: PIONEER SC-LX88



£399
OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

SONY • STR-DN1050 • AV RECEIVER

7.1-channel AV receiver with Bluetooth and NFC compatibility, for instant wireless playback from any compatible device. Also Available: SONY STR-DN1060



ESSAV
.COM



DENON • AVR-X4100W • AV RECEIVER

Enjoy Dolby Atmos for immaculate audio, Spotify Connect support, Bluetooth and DSD streaming. Also Available: DENON AVR-X5200W



ESSAV
.COM

YAMAHA • RX-V677 • AV RECEIVER

Highly capable and versatile 7.2-channel Network AV receiver with AirPlay and Spotify Connect. Also Available: YAMAHA RX-A1040 & RX-A3040

ARCAM • SOLO BAR • SOUNDBAR
Not only an ideal solution to improve on the mediocre sound quality of modern TVs, Arcam's superb engineering means it can also be used as a high quality stereo system all over the house. Optional subwoofer also available.



NEW £799
OR LESS



CANTON • DM 50 • SOUNDBASE
The Canton DM 50 sets a new standard for TV sound. Intended to be positioned under a TV's pedestal stand, the DM 50 creates a convincing, room filling sound.



NEW £399
OR LESS

NEW BLACK GLASS FINISH



PSB • VS21 • SOUNDBASE
PSB has been creating award-winning home theatre speaker systems for decades, and the VS21 brings this extraordinary experience to the sound bar category.



NEW £499
OR LESS

Q ACOUSTICS • MEDIA 4 • SOUNDBAR
The new Q Acoustics Media 4 is a high performance Soundbar designed to deliver high fidelity reproduction of music, and high quality audio from a TV or set top box, tablets and smartphones.



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014



£399
OR LESS

SAMSUNG • HW-J7500 • CURVED SOUNDBAR/SUB
Create cinema-style sound in your living room enjoying a more immersive experience thanks to built-in side speakers and an impressive eight-speaker-design.



NEW

£749
OR LESS

multi room



YAMAHA • YSP-2500 DIGITAL SOUND PROJECTOR
Reproduces overwhelmingly real presence and impact-filled bass sound. Two-unit YSP with ultra-refined design and high-grade aluminium chassis. Bluetooth® equipped, capable of wireless music play and App control.



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.COM

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014



£899
OR LESS

KEF • E305 • SPEAKER PACKAGE

The E Series packs uniquely advanced technologies in highly distinctive satellite speakers and a powered subwoofer.



£149
OR LESS

SAVE £180

POLK • TL1600 • SPEAKER PACKAGE

The TL1600 is everything you need to get started, and it packs the accumulated wallop of Polk's 30 years of speaker know-how.



NEW

£699
OR LESS

Deluxe Finishes £899

Q ACOUSTICS • 3000 SERIES 5.1 CINEMA PACK

Perfect for every occasion, the new 3000 Series 5.1 Cinema Pack will unleash the full potential of your home cinema electronics.



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

£1939
OR LESS

B&W • MT-60D • SPEAKER PACKAGE

Speaker package combining M-1 speakers with the stunning power and control of a PVI-D subwoofer. Available in a matt black or white.



REL • S2 SUBWOOFER

Fast, tuneful, fun and exceptionally dynamic, the REL S2 permits those with limited space or compact speakers to enjoy the benefits of Serie S performance.

£999
OR LESS



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

£2799
OR LESS

SONY • VPL-HW55ES • SXRD PROJECTOR

A fantastic option for movie lovers who want an incredible cinematic experience at home, far beyond the reach of TV.



SAMSUNG
SUHD TV 4K

JS9000 SERIES • CURVED 4K UHD TV

Welcome to a new world of picture quality. The revolutionary S9000 SUHD TV doesn't just raise the bar; it changes the game. This is a new benchmark for design with stunning looks from whatever angle you look at it and picture quality previously only seen in professional editing suites. It's a new world of colour, brightness and contrast, immersed in a sleek and elegant package.

Prices from £2599

NEW

48 55 65

FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY

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SONY

X93C SERIES • 4K UHD TV

Prices from £2599

The new X93C 4K 3D TV includes Sony's powerful 4K processor X1 chip designed for optimal playback of 4K material and upscaling of lower resolution content to near 4K resolution, along with Triluminos colour technology, Motionflow XR1200Hz and edge-lit LED backlighting. This Android TV lets you connect and enjoy any content, from apps to movies, between different Android devices – the simplest and easiest way ever.

The 'wedge' design accommodates the all-important speakers which are the compatible with the new Hi-resolution audio specifications, with the ability to upscale audio to better than CD quality.

FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY

4K

55 65

SONY 4K

X85C SERIES • 4K UHD TV

Experience 4K by Sony and there's no looking back. Bring all your favourite TV entertainment to life with fine detail and exquisite colour. Effortlessly explore apps, games and the fast-growing choice of broadcast and internet 4K content that's coming your way.

Prices from £1799

55 65 75

FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY

Also Available X83C Series 43 & 49 • 4K UHD TV



NEW

NEW

Prices from £459



SONY • W70C SERIES • FULL HD TV

32 40 48

FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY

NEW

Prices from £1099



PANASONIC • CX802 SERIES • 4K UHD TV

40 50 55 65

FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY

NEW

Prices from £1249



SAMSUNG • JU7000 SERIES • 4K UHD TV

40 48 55 65 75 85

FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY



£1199 OR LESS

ARCAM • FMJ UDP411 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

With more than ten years of digital video experience, not to mention global recognition of its efforts, Arcam is proud to announce the arrival of its newest disc player, the UDP411.

Also Available: MARANTZ UD7007



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PIONEER • BDP-LX58 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

Enter the world of superior sound and 4K ultra HD pictures. The BDP-LX58 provides just that and more. Experience your Blu-ray films on a whole new level.

Also Available: PIONEER BDP-LX88



ESSAV.COM

SONY • BDP-S7200 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

The new Sony BDP-S7200 3D Blu-ray Player with 4K upscaling and powerful smart features - it will be the centre piece of your home entertainment system.

Also Available: SONY BDP-S5500 & BDP-S6200

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LCD, LED & OLED TVs

LCD	Once only in smaller screens; now the most common type of panel
LED	This refers to the kind of backlighting used on an LCD panel
OLED	An ultra-thin screen that's commonly used in curved TVs

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Sony KDL-32W706B

Awards 2014: Best 32in TV

"With an attentive, punchy picture, decently detailed sound and a smattering of features, the KDL-32W706B is the full works with all the trimmings of a well-designed telly."



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Samsung UE48H6400

Awards 2014: Best 47-52in TV

"Sharp, clear and full of subtle detail that's impressive at this mid-range price, the Samsung '6400's picture hooked us in from the minute we turned it on."



AWARD WINNER

Samsung UE55HU7500

Awards 2014: Best 52-60in TV

"We're very impressed by the UE55HU7500. It looks great across all resolutions and it has plenty of good features. If you're looking to get a 4K TV right now, look no further."

Also consider

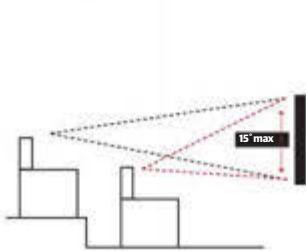
Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	Active 3D	Passive 3D	Freeview	FreeSat	HDMI	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500													
Finlux 32H8075-T	200	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Decent picture and smart features – cracking value for the price	LED	32	1366x768	●	●	●	●	3	43x73x6
Linsar X24-DVD	300	04.15/FT	★★★★★	A TV with a built-in soundbar that's a credible option for a second room	LED	24	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	2	39x56x11
Panasonic TX-42AS500B	450	10.14/ST	★★★★★	A user-friendly TV that's a little lacking in black levels but is worth a look	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	2	57x96x7
Panasonic TX-32AS500B	300	11.14/ST	★★★★★	A multi-talented set but its picture could do with some more subtlety	LED	32	1366x768	●	●	●	●	2	47x73x7
Panasonic TX-L32E6B	380	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Quite simply one of the best 32in TVs we've tested	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	43x72x5
Philips 32PHT4509/12	280	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Insightful, refined and available at a good price. Worth a look	LED	32	1366x768	●	●	●	●	2	42x72x6
Polaroid 3-32-LED-14	200	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Another tempting package from Polaroid	LED	32	1366x768	●	●	●	●	3	44x74x10
Polaroid 5-42-LED-14	370	10.14/ST	★★★★★	A surprising performer that stands up to more established brands	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	56x96x6
Samsung UE32H6400	460	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Near flawless. Pricey, but comes with a bundle of features	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	43x73x6
Samsung UE40F6400	480	03.14/GT	★★★★★	A stunning, feature-laden TV from Samsung. Recommended	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	54x93x5
Sony KDL-26EX553	400	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Capable enough for a kitchen or child's bedroom	LED	26	1366x768	●	●	●	●	2	41x64x6
Sony KDL-32W653A	430	09.13/ST	★★★★★	Its picture lacks subtlety but this Sony is still a worthwhile option	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	2	44x73x7
Sony KDL-32W706B	350	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Best 32in TV, Awards 2014	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	43x73x6
Sony KDL-40W605B	450	10.14/ST	★★★★★	Best 40-46in TV, Awards 2014	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	55x93x9
Toshiba 40L6353	400	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Clunky interface aside, this is a decent TV with a great HD picture	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	54x92x27
Toshiba 40L6453DB	430	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Rivals are slicker, but this Toshiba has an attractive picture	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	57x96x9
£500-£2000													
Finlux 42FME2425-T	500	10.14/ST	★★★★★	Sharp picture, decent detail and smart features. Finlux is back on form	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	2	56x96x6
LG 42LB700V	550	10.14/ST	★★★★★	A fine set, with WebOS being the main attraction here	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	56x95x6
LG 47LB730V	1000	08.14/ST	★★★★★	Solid sound, premium build and a good picture. A fine effort from LG	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	62x106x55
Panasonic TX-L42FT60B	1100	08.13/ST	★★★★★	Likeable TV with a fine picture and great features	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	56x96x4
Panasonic TX-L47AS650B	800	08.14/ST	★★★★★	A talented set, but other TVs have the edge in terms of value	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	63x107x5
Panasonic TX-L50ET60B	1300	05.13/FT	★★★★★	Solid telly but could perform better	LCD	50	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	66x112x4
Panasonic TX-L50E6B	850	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Fine picture quality but there are TVs that give more for less	LCD	50	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	71x112x27
Philips 46PFL8007	1700	12.12/FT	★★★★★	A strong start for Philips' new range	LED	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	5	67x104x21
Philips 47PFL6008	1200	06.13/GT	★★★★★	A few niggles but forgivable thanks to its brilliant picture quality	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	63x106x3
Philips 55PFS6609	1200	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Dazzling with HD content, but rivals offer better overall performance	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	72x123x4
Philips 48PFS7093	750	08.14/ST	★★★★★	Excels in many areas but its SD performance is an area of concern	LED	48	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	62x108x6
Samsung UE40ES6800	950	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Good spec and looks, but the backlight isn't great	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	67x92x33
Samsung UE40F6500	900	08.13/ST	★★★★★	Not a class leader but offers a lot for your money	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	91x60x27
Samsung UE40H6400	550	10.14/GT	★★★★★	An engrossing TV with plenty of smarts and a cracking picture	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	54x92x5
Samsung UE48H6400	700	08.14/ST	★★★★★	Best 47-52in TV, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	LED	48	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	63x109x5
Samsung UE48HU7500	1600	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Some minor flaws aside, this is a great smaller-sized 4K set	LED	48	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	62x107x36
Sony KDL-46HX753	1150	08.12/ST	★★★★★	A must-see TV: superb performer for the price	LED	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	65x108x5
Sony KDL-42W705B	530	08.14/FT	★★★★★	A promising start for Sony's Full HD range. A consistent performer	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	56x96x6

TELEVISIONS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	Active 3D	Passive 3D	Freeview	HDMI	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Sony KDL-42W805A	1000	08.13/ST	★★★★★	A great-looking TV with many strengths	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	58x97x6
Sony KDL-46W905	1550	09.13/FT	★★★★★	A very capable TV with stunning detail but the picture lacks vibrancy	LCD	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	65x105x30
Sony KDL-48W605B	700	08.14/ST	★★★★★	A competitive performer with good picture quality	LCD	48	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	68x108x9
Sony KDL-50W829B	900	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Loses a star but this TV is still worth an audition	LED	50	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	66x112x6
Sony KDL-55W955B	1600	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A good TV but we expect more from a flagship set	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	79x124x9
£2000 and above													
Bang & Olufsen BeoVision 11	5250	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A truly luxurious TV that delivers a great performance too	LCD	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	6	89x96x6
B&O BeoVision Avant 55	5995	01.15/FT	★★★★★	This is one of the classiest TVs money can buy	LCD	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	6	71x129x10
LG 55LA860W	2300	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Close but no cigar. A good TV but the competition is strong	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	72x123x4
LG 55EA980W	8000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	A great first OLED effort from LG	OLED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	80x123x19
LG 55EC930V	2000	02.15/FT	★★★★★	OLED enters the realms of affordability, and it's a thing of beauty	OLED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	75x123x20
LG 55EG960V	3800	05.15/FT	★★★★★	The price is steep but this 4K OLED is truly stunning	OLED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	3	72x123x5
LG 55UB950V	2300	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Not without its flaws, but this TV is good to look at, great to use	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	123x78x24
LG 65LA970W	5500	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Fantastic to look at, but lacks the detail of depth of rivals	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	3	84x143x41
LG 65UF850V	2500	06.15/GT	★★★★★	A solid 4K performer that's well worth consideration	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	3	90x145x28
Panasonic TX-L47WT50B	2000	08.12/ST	★★★★★	Stylish, with real areas of expertise	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	63x107x3
Panasonic TX-58AX802B	2499	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A 4K TV worth investigating	LED	58	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	80x130x29
Panasonic TX-65AX902B	5000	01.15/FT	★★★★★	A gorgeous screen but that price is a sticking point	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	86x146x6
Panasonic TX-P65WT600	5500	12.13/GT	★★★★★	A capable set that handles 4K footage very well	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	86x147x6
Philips 55PFL8008	2500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A great TV from Philips	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	72x124x3
Philips 65PFL9708	4500	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Smart features aren't as good we'd like but this is still a strong 4K set	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	5	84x146x4
Samsung KE55S9C	7000	01.14/GT	★★★★★	An excellent first step for large screen OLED TVs	OLED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	78x142x14
Samsung UE55HU7500	2300	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Best 52-60in TV, Awards 2014	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	75x123x27
Samsung UE65F9000	5000	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented set with few weaknesses to speak of	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	84x146x4
Samsung UE65H8000	3300	07.14/FT	★★★★★	A fine set, but high price and lack of 4K knock it down a star	LED	65	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	89x145x31

Home cinema speaker set-up

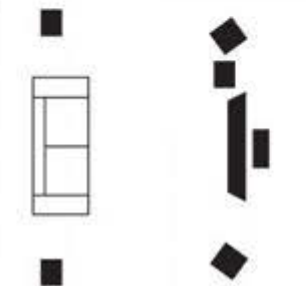
Plonking kit around the room and hoping for the best isn't the greatest of ideas...



Finding that sweet spot will ensure you see all the detail in the picture

Screen size and position

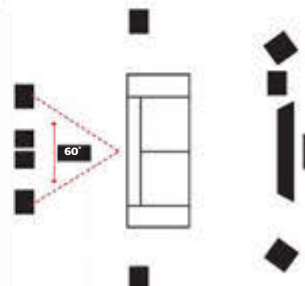
To find the best size screen for your room, work out how far away you'll be sitting from the display. We would recommend sitting 1.3m away for a 32in screen, 1.6m for a 40in, 1.8m for 50in and around 2.1m for a 60in+ TV. Those distances might seem huge for a small space, but don't forget – you will want the display to fill your field of vision for the most immersive experience and after a while you'll get use to the screen's size. Don't place it too high, either – you shouldn't have to look up more than 15 degrees, unless you want to strain your neck.



Play around with the sub's placement to find the most effective position

Using a 5.1 system?

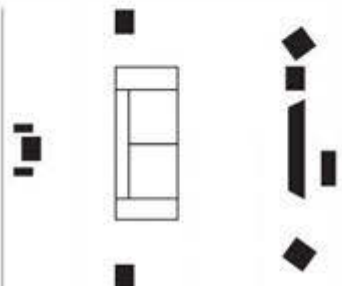
Place the two front speakers at ear height, at a 45-degree angle to the listening position. The centre channel should go either directly above or below the TV, and be angled so it's pointing directly at the listener. The surround left and right speakers should go at 90-110 degrees to each side, and be placed a minimum of two feet above ear height if you can. It's the angle that's more crucial here, though. Strictly speaking, the sub should go in the middle – but we know that isn't always practical, so we've put it at the side here, between the centre and left channels.



Convert a 7.1 set-up into Atmos with in-ceiling or upward-firing speakers

Using a 7.1 system?

Set up the first five speakers (see left). If you don't have a THX-certified amp or speakers, place the two back channels slightly apart behind you, firing straight ahead. This will give you the most even spread of sound. If your kit is THX-certified, however, place the back speakers next to each other on the rear wall. This lets the Advanced Speaker Array tech do its job – it's a processing mode that uses one speaker configuration to disperse sound in different ways depending on what you're watching or listening to.



Place a sound isolation plinth under a sub if you're worried about vibrations

Adding an extra sub?

Using more than one subwoofer might seem excessive. But don't worry, it needn't cause ructions between you and the neighbours – deploying multiple subs isn't meant to make the bass louder. Instead, it evens out the spread of bass around the room, making it harder to localise – and therefore more immersive. If you're using two subs, place them in the middle at the front and back of the room. Pulling out all the stops and using four? Put them at twelve, three, six and nine on an imaginary clock-face.

TELEVISIONS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	Active 3D	Passive 3D	Freeview	FreeSat	HDMI	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
£2000 and above													
Samsung UE65HU7500	3500	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Best 60in+ TV, Awards 2014				LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	4 88x145x30
Samsung UE65HU8500	3800	01.15/GT	★★★★★	A feature-laden TV, this is an impressive, attractive and entertaining TV				LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	4 85x145x11
Samsung UE65JU8000	2750	06.15/GT	★★★★★	Impressive. Samsung's 2015 4K range is off to a flying start				LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	4 90x146x30
Sony KD-55X8505B	2100	09.14/GT	★★★★★	An attractive TV with a good set of features				LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	4 79x123x29
Sony KDL-55W905A	2400	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A great-looking TV but a few issues knock it down a star				LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	4 72x124x6
Sony KD-65S9005B	3900	01.15/GT	★★★★★	Thoughtful design married with seriously good picture quality				LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	4 155x90x33
Sony KD-65X9005A	5000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Good looks and great sound but needs 4K material to shine				LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	4 90x168x10
Sony KD-65X9005B	3600	07.14/FT	★★★★★	This Sony set has issues with upscaled content but it looks great with 4K				LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	4 88x172x10



Blu-ray players

Smart ability Extends the viewing choice beyond discs with apps like BBC iPlayer
Multichannel out Analogue outputs that feed high quality sound to a non-HDMI receiver
Twinn HDMI outputs These are used if you have two displays, say a projector and a TV

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
Sony BDP-S5200

Awards 2014: Best Blu-ray player up to £150



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Sony BDP-S7200

Awards 2014: Best Blu-ray player £150-£300



AWARD WINNER
Panasonic DMP-BDT700

Awards 2014: Best Blu-ray player £300+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	HDMI out	Optical out	Co-axial out	Multichannel out	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500								
LG BP645	85	02.15/GT	★★★★★	1	1	0	No	5x43x21
LG BP740	200	08.14/GT	★★★★★	1	1	0	No	4x43x21
Panasonic DMP-BDT260	80	02.15/GT	★★★★★	1	0	0	No	4x31x18
Panasonic DMP-BDT330	200	09.13/GT	★★★★★	2	1	0	No	4x43x18
Panasonic DMP-BDT460	190	08.14/GT	★★★★★	2	1	0	No	4x42x18
Panasonic DMP-BWT740	455	11.14/FT	★★★★★	2	1	1	No	6x43x24
Philips BDP3380	80	01.14/GT	★★★★★	1	0	1	No	4x41x21
Pioneer BDP-160	120	01.14/GT	★★★★★	2	0	1	No	6x44x25
Pioneer BDP-450	225	01.12/FT	★★★★★	1	0	1	No	9x44x25
Samsung BD-H6500	100	02.15/GT	★★★★★	1	1	0	No	4x36x20
Sony BDP-S4100	80	01.14/GT	★★★★★	1	0	1	No	4x36x20
Sony BDP-S5100	140	07.13/GT	★★★★★	1	0	1	No	4x36x20
Sony BDP-S5200	85	02.15/GT	★★★★★	1	0	1	No	4x27x20
Sony BDP-S6200	180	08.14/GT	★★★★★	1	0	1	No	4x36x20
Sony BDP-S7200	230	09.14/FT	★★★★★	1	0	1	No	5x43x21
Sony PlayStation 3 (2012)	250	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	1	1	0	No	6x29x23
Sony PlayStation 4	349	02.14/FT	★★★★★	1	1	0	No	19x3x3
Xbox One	430	01.14/FT	★★★★★	1	1	0	No	8x33x27
£500 and above								
Cambridge Audio Azur 752BD	800	04.13/FT	★★★★★	2	1	1	8ch	9x43x31
Marantz UD7007	500	12.12/FT	★★★★★	1	1	1	No	11x44x31
Oppo BDP-105D	1100	03.15/GT	★★★★★	2	1	1	8ch	12x43x31
Onkyo BD-SP809	500	04.12/GT	★★★★★	2	1	1	No	10x43x31
Panasonic DMP-BDT700	500	10.14/FT	★★★★★	2	1	1	7ch	7x45x26

"Sony's BDP-S5100 has all the hallmarks of a class-leading machine"

June 2013

BLU-RAY PLAYERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		HDMI out	Optical out	Co-axial out	Multichannel out	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Pioneer BDP-LX58	600	04.15/FT	★★★★★	You won't find many 'smarts' here but in terms of performance, this is a fine player	2	0	1	No	12x43x39
Pioneer BDP-LX88	1300	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Great with movies, lacks the same quality in its stereo performance	2	1	1	No	13x44x34



Projectors

Screens Buy one of these. A painted white wall is simply not good enough
Noise Fan noise can be a major issue if you sit close to your projector
Lamp life Projector bulbs have limited lifespans and need to be changed regularly

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Type	Throw Ratio	Resolution	Rated Brightness (Lumens)	HDMI in	DVI in	PC in	Component in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Weight (kg)
Up to £1000														
BenQ W1070+	650	11.14/GT	★★★★★	For a first home cinema, this would be a great projector	DLP	1.15-1.5	1920x1080	2200	2	0	1	1	10x31x24	2.75
BenQ W1080ST	850	12.13/GT	★★★★★	A good fit for small-scale home cinema entertainment	DLP	0.69-0.83	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	1	10x31x24	2.85
Epson EH-TW5200	700	11.14/GT	★★★★★	For £700 it's an impressive projector with a few niggles	DLP	1.22-1.47:1	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	0	10.5x30x25	3
InFocus IN3118HD	990	05.13/GT	★★★★★	A few niggles but a bright and capable projector	DLP	1.6-1.92	1920x1080	3600	2	0	1	0	10x34x25	3.7
InFocus IN8606HD	650	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Good detail and punch, but rivals have the edge over it	DLP	1.22-1.47:1	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	1	26x28.5x12	3
Optoma HD25	800	05.13/GT	★★★★★	Plenty of features for a budget level projector	DLP	1.5-1.8	1920x1080	2000	2	0	2	2	12x38x31	4.5
£1000-£3000														
BenQ W1080ST+	1000	05.15/GT	★★★★★	An easy-to-use projector that's excellent value for money	DLP	0.69-0.83	1920x1080	2200	2	0	1	1	10x31x24	3
BenQ W1400	1000	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best projector up to £1500, Awards 2014	DLP	1.07-1.71	1920x1080	2200	2	0	1	1	12x34x28	4
BenQ W1500	1400	04.15/GT	★★★★★	A well-equipped projector that boasts a decent performance	DLP	1.07-1.71	1920x1080	2200	2	0	1	1	12x34x28	3.9
Epson EH-TW6100W	1600	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best projector £1000-£2000, Awards 2013	LCD	1.32-2.15:1	1920x1080	2300	2	0	1	1	14x42x37	6
Epson EH-TW6600	1400	04.15/GT	★★★★★	Lacks wireless connectivity but this Epson is a great performer	LCD	1.32-2.15	1920x1080	2500	2	0	1	1	16x41x30	6.7
Epson EH-TW7200	1900	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best projector £1500-£2000, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	LCD	1.34-2.87:1	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	1	16x47x40	8
Optoma HD50	1000	05.15/GT	★★★★★	Not perfect but the HD50's rich, colourful approach is appealing	DLP	1.39-2.09:1	1920x1080	2200	2	0	1	1	12x29x27	4
Philips Screeneo HDP1590TV	1500	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A great idea but the lack of Full HD is an obstacle	DLP	0.321	1280x800	500	3	0	1	0	15x34x29	5
Sony VPL-HW55ES	2800	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Best projector £2000+, Awards 2014	SKRD	n/a	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1	18x41x46	9.6
£3000 and above														
Epson EH-TW9200W	3000	04.14/GT	★★★★★	A fine projector, but not the showstopper we expected	LCD	1.34-2.87:1	1920x1080	2400	6	0	0	1	14x47x40	9
JVC DLA-X35BE	3000	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Good but not great, this JVC appeals if you like bright pictures	D-ILA	n/a	1920x1080	1300	2	0	1	1	18x46x47	15
Panasonic PT-AT6000E	3000	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Best projector £2000+, Awards 2013	LCD	1.18-2.36	1920x1080	2400	3	0	1	1	15x47x36	8.7
SIM2 C3X Lumis 3D-S	30000	11.11/FT	★★★★★	The best 3D projector we've ever seen	DLP	1.82-2.48:1	1920x1080	3000	2	0	0	1	46x21x46	11
Sony VPL-HW50ES	3000	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Shows why home cinema can't be beaten	SKRD	1.64-2.37	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1	18x41x46	9.6
Sony VPL-VW500ES	8500	04.14/FT	★★★★★	Stunningly good with 4K content but pricey nonetheless	SKRD	1.64-2.37	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1	18x41x46	9.6
Sony VPL-VW95ES	5000	01.12/FT	★★★★★	By class standards, it's one of the best projectors around	SKRD	1.38-2.83	4096x2160	1700	2	0	0	0	20x50x46	14

System killers

When monsters ruled the world (and space)



Alien (1979)

Ridley Scott's seminal sci-fi film takes the horror/stalker genre and transplants it to space. Sigourney Weaver's Ripley is one of many highlights, as is Scott's peerless ability to imagine a world that feels lived in. The HD transfer is utterly stunning for a film that's approaching its 40th anniversary.



Godzilla (2014)

Unlike the Spielberg films it wants to emulate, Gareth Edwards's *Godzilla* features several dull characters. But, we're here for the epic monster fights - and it delivers. *Godzilla* is the type of film that ought to be seen on the biggest screen possible with the volume turned up to the max.



Jurassic Park (1993)

CGI came into its own with *Jurassic Park*, but the impact of seeing photo-realistic dinosaurs is matched by the care paid to the film's characters. It looks great but the DTS-HD Master Audio 7.1 track deserves plaudits, giving suspense scenes like the introduction of the T-Rex a real tension.



Jaws (1975)

Without a doubt one of the classics to emerge from '70s Hollywood, Spielberg showed an appreciation for suspense over outright horror with *Jaws*. John Williams' two-note motif for the deadly shark exudes menace, and the sheer fright and terror Spielberg conjured up has rarely been surpassed.



King Kong (2005)

The *King Kong* Peter Jackson and Andy Serkis created is a thrillingly realised one despite the film being weighed down by a bloated running time. Still, the look is sumptuous, with James Newton Howard's soaring music full of emotion and adventure.



AV receivers & amplifiers

Up to £500	Well-equipped and delivers convincing surround sound
£500-£1000	There are gains in features, build quality and sonic performance
£1000+	Real powerhouses that pack loads of features and cinema-style sound

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Yamaha RX-V377

Awards 2014: Best home cinema amp up to £350



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Sony STR-DN1050

Awards 2014: Best home cinema amp £350-£700



AWARD WINNER

Pioneer SC-LX58

Awards 2014: Best home cinema amp £700-£1500

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Channels (power (w))	HDMI in	HDMI out	Networking	3D passthrough	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £300									
Pioneer VSX-528	285	02.14/GT	★★★★★	A well-equipped budget amp with good surround sound capabilities	5x130	6	1	●	17x44x33
Yamaha RX-V375	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier up to £350, Awards 2013	5x100	4	1	●	15x44x32
Yamaha RX-V377	250	07.14/FT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier up to £350, Awards 2014	5x70	4	1	●	15x44x32
£300-£500									
Sony STR-DN840	350	02.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented, energetic amp that delivers plenty of precision and attack	7x150	6	1	●	16x43x33
Sony STR-DN850	400	08.14/FT	★★★★★	An impressive all-rounder at a great price	7x150	5	1	●	16x43x33
£500-£1000									
Denon AVR-X2000	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Marks a fine return to form for Denon	7x150	7	1	●	17x43x33
Denon AVR-X2100W	500	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A strong contender but competition at this price is fierce	7x150	8	2	●	17x43x33
Denon AVR-X4000	900	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Decent if you're looking for a sub-£1000 AV receiver	7x125	7	3	●	17x43x38
Onkyo TX-NR626	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Well-featured but not as compelling or as immersive as rival products	7x160	6	2	●	17x44x33
Pioneer VSX-924	500	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Another good effort but rivals offer more excitement	7x150	7	2	●	17x44x36
Sony STR-DN1040	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £350-£700, Awards 2013.	7x100	8	2	●	16x43x32
Sony STR-DN1050	500	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £350-£700, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	7x165	6	3	●	17x43x33
Yamaha RX-S600	500	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A small, excellent amp that delivers great sound and good features	5x90	5	1	●	17x43x33
Yamaha RX-V677	560	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A fun receiver that's not the most balanced, but is endlessly entertaining	7x150	6	1	●	17x43x36
£1000-£2000									
Anthem MRX-510	1700	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Rarely have we seen a multi-channel amp so accomplished with music	7x75	7	2	●	16x44x37
Denon AVR-4520	1970	03.13/ST	★★★★★	An enjoyable, easygoing sound, pipped only in terms of absolute excitement	9x150	7	2	●	20x43x42
Onkyo TX-NR838	1000	10.14/FT	★★★★★	A commendable amplifier with a huge number of features	7x180	7	1	●	34x58x51
Pioneer SC-LX58	1400	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £700-£1500, Awards 2014	9x190	8	3	●	19x44x44
Yamaha RX-A1020	1000	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Delivering excitement, detail and precision, this is a brilliantly capable all-rounder	7x110	8	2	●	18x43x43
Yamaha RX-A1040	1000	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Well-featured and full of power, but lacks in the thrill department	7x110	8	2	●	18x44x43
£2000 and above									
Anthem MRX 700	2100	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Fantastic-sounding and worthy of a serious audition	7x90	4	1	●	17x44x39
Arcam FMJ AVR450	2200	03.14/GT	★★★★★	There's plenty to like with this receiver, but its rivals better it	7x110	7	2	●	17x43x42
Arcam AVR750	4000	12.13/FT	★★★★★	It's not flawless, but this AV receiver is very good	7x100	7	2	●	17x43x43
Pioneer SC-LX87	2000	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Pioneer strikes gold again with this feature-laden powerhouse	9x220	9	3	●	19x44x44
Pioneer SC-LX88	2200	01.15/GT	★★★★★	A staggeringly powerful amp with a captivating sound	9x250	8	3	●	19x44x44
Onkyo TX-NR1010	2000	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Power-packed heavyweight needs a touch more precision	7x200	9	2	●	20x44x59
Onkyo TX-NR3010	2000	03.13/ST	★★★★★	A solid performance but lacks the subtlety to cut it as a complete all-rounder	9x160	9	2	●	20x44x60
Onkyo TX-NR3030	2500	06.15/FT	★★★★★	Astonishingly good receiver that offers plenty for the asking price	11x185	8	3	●	34x60x59
Yamaha RX-A3030	2000	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £1500+, Awards 2013	9x150	8	1	●	19x44x47
Yamaha RX-A3040	2000	01.15/GT	★★★★★	A smooth and powerful amp, that's well worth auditioning	9x230	8	2	●	19x44x47

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Subwoofers

Sealed cabinet	Tends to produce the tightest bass but limits outright quantity
Reflex port	A more common design that tends to deliver more bass
Room equalisation	Evens out the subwoofer's response to produce a more balanced sound

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Power (w)	Driver (cm)	Passive radiator	Sealed	Ported	Drive unit orientation	Line inputs	Speaker ins	Line outputs	Speaker outs	Phase invert	Remote control	EQ	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500																		
B&W ASW610	450	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Best subwoofer up to £700, Awards 2011	200	25	●		Forward	1	1			●	●	●	4	31x31x38
Monitor Audio Vector VW-8	225	04.10/GT	★★★★★	Capable little sub for an entry-level system	100	20	●		Forward	2	0			●			2	32x28x28
REL Acoustics T-Zero	350	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Small and discreet, but limited by size	100	16.5	●		Downward	2	1			●			2	24x22x26
Tannoy TS2.10	430	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Small, but packs a ferocious punch	300	25	●		Forward	1	0		●	●			3	39x38x33
Velodyne EQ-Max 8	495	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Small, but punches well above its weight	180	20	●		Forward	2	2		●	●	●	●	1	37x33x38
Velodyne Impact-12	365	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Fine sub, more of a movie than a music classic	165	30	●		Forward	2	1		●	●			1	39x66x45
Velodyne Impact-Mini	435	10.09/FT	★★★★★	Amazingly small sub with fine movie performance	180	16.5	●		Forward	2	2		●	●			1	25x25x30
W'fedale Powercube SPC-10	300	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Nearly a terrific subwoofer - but there are issues	215	25	●		Downward	1	1		●	●			8	38x35x31
£500-£1000																		
B&W ASW610XP	700	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for big bass from a small box	500	25	●		Forward	2	1			●	●	●	4	32x32x37
Monitor Audio Apex AW-12	950	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Beautiful to look at, and punchy too	500	30.5	●		Forward	1	0		●	●	●		2	34x34x41
REL Acoustics T-7	650	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A compact sub with authority	200	20	●		Downward	2	1			●			2	30x35x33
Sonos Sub	600	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Sounds great. Makes sense with Sonos Play speakers	n/a	n/a	●		Inward	0	0			●	●	●	1	40x38x16
Tannoy TS2.12	549	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Attractively priced with decent sonics too	500	30.5	●		Forward	1	0		●	●			2	44x43x38
Velodyne EQ-Max 12	825	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Powerful and agile and supremely enjoyable	225	30.5	●		Forward	1	2		●	●	●	●	1	45x42x46
£1000 and above																		
B&W PV1D	1200	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Delivers precision and agility in spades	400	20	●		Forward	1	0			●	●	●	2	34x27x36
Jamo D600	1300	05.12/GT	★★★★★	A brilliant sub that's worth the price	400	38	●		Forward	n/a	0			●			1	56x59x50
Velodyne SPL-1000 Ultra	1400	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Best subwoofer £700+, Awards 2011	1200	25	●		Forward	1	1		●	●	●	●	3	34x33x34



Surround speakers

Full size	Traditional cabinet design that's big but can deliver a great sound
Style	Compact speakers that make a lot of sense in smaller living spaces
Bipole/Dipole	Surround speaker designs that give a more cohesive soundfield

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER Q Acoustics 2000i 5.1

Awards 2014: Best Traditional Pack up to £700
"We simply can't find a rival (trust us, we've looked) that even comes close to the Q Acoustics' performance-per-pound offering."



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR Dali Zensor 15.1

Awards 2014: Best Traditional Pack £700-£1500
"Whether it's with music or movies, the Zensor 1 5.1 produces a stunning sound. That's £1000 well spent, we say."



AWARD WINNER Monitor Audio Radius R90HT1

Awards 2014: Best Style package £1400-£1800
"You have a package that blends nicely. With price, performance and practicality on its side, the Radius ticks all the boxes."

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Front speaker (hwd, cm)	Center speaker (hwd, cm)	Rear speaker (hwd, cm)	Subwoofer (hwd, cm)	Finishes
Up to £500								
Boston Ac. Soundware XS SE	220	12.11/FT	★★★★★	Just as good as its predecessor: a must-hear	11x11x9	11x11x9	11x11x9	31x28x40 2
Canton Movie 130	450	05.12/FT	★★★★★	Likeable and listenable	12x9x10	9x19x10	12x9x10	41x24x42 3
Jamo S426 HCS3	350	01.12/FT	★★★★★	A worthy home cinema solution	91x18x24	12x34x12	21x12x12	n/a 3
Tannoy HTS-101	400	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Best style package up to £700, Awards 2014	16x11x14	11x25x17	16x11x14	42x28x37 1
Wharfedale DX-1HCP	400	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Gets a lot right for this kind of money	19x12x12	12x29x12	19x12x12	34x29x32 2

SURROUND SPEAKERS continued

SURROUND SPEAKERS continued				Front speaker (hwd, cm)	Center speaker (hwd, cm)	Rear speaker (hwd, cm)	Subwoofer (hwd, cm)	Finishes
Product	£	Tested	Verdict					
£500-£1000								
Dali Zensor 1 5.1	980	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £700-£1500, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	27x16x22	16x44x29	27x16x22	31x29x31 3
Jamo A 200 HCS 5	640	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A gutsy and entertaining sound at this price	22x9x5	22x9x5	22x9x5	31x28x31 7
KEF E305	900	11.13/ST	★★★★★	A room-filling system but there are more dynamic packages out there	26x14x16	16x22x15	26x14x16	32x43x27 2
Mission M³	700	01.15/FT	★★★★★	Petite, likable and convenient, just lacks the thrills of rival packages	9x9x9	9x9x9	9x9x9	28x27x27 1
Mission MX15.1	600	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for a medium sized room	28x17x26	15x42x19	28x17x26	30x30x33 4
Monitor Audio MASS	800	11.13/ST	★★★★★	Still an excellent system, it narrowly falls short of the best	22x13x13	13x22x13	22x13x13	42x38x38 1
QAcoustics 2000i 5.1	625	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package up to £700, Awards 2014	23x15x20	23x16x12	23x15x20	23x16x12 2
QAcoustics Q7000i	900	11.13/ST	★★★★★	Best style package £700-£1000, Awards 2014	24x10x16	12x20x16	24x10x16	32x46x20 2
Wharfedale 100-HCP	950	11.13/FT	★★★★★	A very good package, but could do with a better centre speaker	32x17x26	17x47x27	32x17x26	39x35x31 7
£1000-£2000								
B&W MT-50	1100	11.13/ST	★★★★★	Best style package £1000-£1400, Awards 2014	25x11x16	25x11x16	25x11x16	26x26x33 2
B&W MT-60D	1950	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Best style package £1800+, Awards 2014	25x11x16	25x11x16	25x11x16	34x27x36 2
Cabasse Eole 3	1000	11.13/ST	★★★★★	A likable, big-sounding system that lacks a little authority	13x13x13	13x13x13	13x13x13	33x33x35 2
Cambridge Audio Aero 5.1	1650	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £1500-£2500, Awards 2014	98x24x34	15x43x21	18x46x15	34x33x36 2
Dali Fazon 1	1500	07.10/GT	★★★★★	Preferable in many ways to its pricier big brother	26x14x13	26x14x13	26x14x13	28x26x27 2
Dali Fazon 3 5.1	1699	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Best style package £1200-£2000, Awards 2011	26x14x14	14x26x14	26x14x14	23x16x12 2
Dali Zensor 5 5.1	1499	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £700-£1500, Awards 2012	84x16x27	16x44x28	97x16x23	34x37x38 2
Elipson Planet M 5.1	1300	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Enjoyable looks and sound, just lacking a smidge of detail	15x15x15	15x15x15	15x15x15	39x32x32 3
Focal Dome 5.1	1000	11.13/ST	★★★★★	It's not perfect but this Focal charms nonetheless	17x14x14	17x14x14	17x14x14	40x28x28 3
KEF Q300 5.1	1880	10.11/GT	★★★★★	An admirable package for the purists	36x21x30	21x63x30	36x21x30	33x34x33 3
Monitor Audio Bronze BX2 5.1	1050	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Thrillingly fit for purpose	35x19x26	17x46x17	29x28x11	33x32x33 4
Monitor Audio Bronze BX5 5.1	1215	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Does a good job of filling a big room	85x17x25	17x46x17	29x28x11	33x32x33 2
Monitor Audio Radius R90HT1	1500	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Best style package £1400-£1800, Awards 2014	20x13x14	17x46x17	20x13x14	33x32x33 3
Quad L-lite Plus 5.1 package	1200	12.13/FT	★★★★★	A fine package that's up against some formidable rivals at this price	25x14x18	15x38x17	25x14x18	31x24x24 3
£2000 and above								
Acoustic Energy 3-Series 5.1	2425	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Build, looks and performance combine for an attractive speaker package	90x19x30	19x45x26	30x19x25	36x36x36 2
B&W 683 Theatre	2750	11.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented and entertaining speaker package that doesn't quite captivate	99x19x36	22x59x30	31.5x16x23	33x33x38 2
Dali Ikon 5 MK2	2500	06.14/GT	★★★★★	An exciting speaker package that will thrill film and music fans	81x15x28	15x57x26	38x27x15	45x41x46 2
KEF R100 5.1	2850	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £2500-£3500, Awards 2014	28x18x29	17x53x31	28x18x29	37x33x35 4
M&K 950-Series	5445	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Exceptional system with thrilling sound	41x18x22	41x18x22	26x18x22	60x39x51 2
Monitor Audio Apex	2400	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Best style speaker package £2000+, Awards 2011	25x14x14	14x61x10	25x14x14	34x34x41 2
Monitor Audio PL200AV	11400	08.10/FT	★★★★★	Exceptional in every sense	100x25x28	22x58x29	37x34x36	45x48x47 3
Monitor Audio PL300 AV	13500	10.09/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest 5.1 speaker packages on the market	111x41x47	22x58x29	37x22x28	45x48x47 2
Monitor Audio Silver 6 AV12	2875	06.14/GT	★★★★★	A hugely capable surround package. Worthy of serious consideration	94x35x20	19x50x24	25x31x12	23x16x14 6
Paradigm MilleniaOne	2500	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Smooth and detailed, but slightly lacking in attack	20x12x15	20x12x15	20x12x15	34x30x32 2
Tannoy Revolution SEAV	2400	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Despite a few issues with the centre and sub, this is an exciting package	95x20x25	15x31x16	37x20x25	44x43x37 1

Calibrating your AV receiver

A poorly set up receiver, with speakers at the wrong levels and EQ settings, is awful. Here's how to do it right

Do it manually

If you have a sound-pressure level meter, this is the time to free it from its current life of measuring car exhausts and burps.

In your AV receiver's settings menu, switch the test tone on, then cycle through the speakers. Switch the SPL meter to 'C' weighting and slow response mode, and then set the level of each speaker to around 75dB on the meter's display as you hold it head-height.

If you're using a phone or tablet with an SPL app, you should be fine setting the surround sound speakers, but many internal mics are pretty bad at registering bass – so you'll have to dial in the sub by ear. Now would be a good time to check the overall balance, too.

Use the included microphone

The easiest way to do it is to plug in the calibration microphone that came with your receiver. Follow the on-screen instructions, moving it between the listening positions you usually sit in at the appropriate point (if your amp supports this).

Put it at ear-level (on a stand if possible), and stay absolutely silent while it works.

Check your work

Make sure the speakers are to the correct size in the amp's menus, and trust your ears. If it sounds wrong, it probably is – you can always tweak.

SPL apps are now available to help you calibrate an AV receiver's performance



Don't throw away the mic, it may end up proving useful



CD players

Integrated _____ Has both a CD mechanism and digital-to-analogue conversion tech
Transport _____ Needs an outboard DAC but can deliver a higher standard of sound

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
Marantz CD6005

Awards 2014: Best CD Player up to £500



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Cyrus CDi

Awards 2014: Best CD Player £500-£1500



AWARD WINNER
Roksan Caspian M2 CD

Awards 2014: Best CD Player £1500+

Also consider

Also consider					Integrated Transport	Co-axial out	Optical out	XLR out	RCA out	Headphone out	Co-axial in	Optical in	AES/EBU in	USB in	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict													
Up to £500																
Cambridge Audio Azur 351C	300	11.12/FT	★★★★★	A worthy rival to the Award-winning Marantz CD6004	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	9x43x31
Cambridge Audio Azur 651C	450	03.12/FT	★★★★★	A spacious sounding disc spinner	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x31
Marantz CD6005	350	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Best CD player up to £500, Awards 2014	●	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x44x34
Onkyo C-N7050	350	04.15/FT	★★★★★	Is it a CD player or a high-res streamer? Regardless, it's hugely appealing	●	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	10x44x30
Teac CD-P800NT	350	06.15/FT	★★★★★	A versatile one-box solution that offers impressive sound and features	●	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	1	10x43x30
£500-£1000																
Audiolab 8200CD	800	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1000, Awards 2012	●	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	0	1	1	8x44x30
Audiolab 8200CDQ	950	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Improves on the sky-high performance of the 8200CD	●	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	0	1	2	8x44x30
NAD C 546BEE	500	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Talented but struggles against the more enjoyable budget Marantz	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	9x44x31
Cyrus CD Transport	750	01.12/ST	★★★★★	An impressive and affordable CD transport	●	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36
Cyrus CD6 SE2	700	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Subtly upgraded, with worthwhile results	●	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	8x22x36
Naim CD5si	995	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1500, Awards 2013	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	7x43x30
Pioneer PD-50	500	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Worth considering but this SACD player doesn't quite engage	●	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	13x44x33
Rega Apollo-R	550	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Admirable, but lacks some cohesion	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	9x22x32
Roksan Kandy K2	900	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Big and powerful, with an entertaining sound	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	10x43x38
£1000 and above																
Audio Research CD6	8050	08.14/FT	★★★★★	In the market for a top-class CD player? This could be the one	●	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	1	1	2	13x48x31
Burmester 069	35840	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Quite possibly the best CD player money can buy		2	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	16x45x34
Cambridge Audio Azur 851C	1200	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Impressive sonic presentation but a touch too clinical for our tastes	●	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	1	1	2	12x43x34
Copland CDA 825	4298	05.13/FT	★★★★★	A hugely capable player with stunning sound quality	●	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	10x43x39
Cyrus CD 8 SE2	1200	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Best CD player £1000-£1500, Awards 2012	●	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36
Cyrus CDi	1050	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1500, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	7x22x36
Cyrus CD Xt Signature	1750	05.15/FT	★★★★★	Partner the Xt with a suitable DAC and you have a top-class transport	●	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	7x22x36
Esoteric K-05	7495	01.14/FT	★★★★★	A great place to start... if you're looking for your final disc-player	●	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	13x45x36
Leema Antila IIS Eco	2995	09.11/FT	★★★★★	The already good Antila goes up another level in performance	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	11x44x31
Musical Fidelity M6CD	2100	08.13/FT	★★★★★	Its powerful, yet refined sound will appeal to many, a fine performer	●	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	13x44x39
Naim CD5 XS	1950	Aw.09/FT	★★★★★	It's an excellent CD player, but faces stiff competition	●	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	7x43x30
Naim CD555/555PS	18345	10.09/FT	★★★★★	The CD555/555PS has a hefty price tag, but a classy performance	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	11x43x31
Naim CDX2	3640	02.10/FT	★★★★★	The tweaked CDX2 remains a fine proposition	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x31
Parasound Halo CD1	5000	07.13/FT	★★★★★	Not cheap but it's a fine CD player with an idiosyncratic design	●	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x44x35
Primare CD32	2200	04.11/FT	★★★★★	It's massively detailed, but not as engaging as we'd like	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	11x43x38
Roksan Caspian M2 CD	1695	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Best CD player £1500+ Awards 2014	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x43x33
T+A MP 3000 HV	7900	12.13/FT	★★★★★	A classy multi-source player that delivers high-quality sound	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	11x43x35
Yamaha CD-S3000	3500	10.14/GT	★★★★★	An understated player that lets the music take centre stage	●	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	14x44x44

"We're impressed with the Parasound CD1's sound quality no matter which analogue output is used"

July 2013

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★★★★★
£199

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5 YEAR GUARANTEE INCLUDED



TANNOY MERCURY V4 FLOORSTANDING SPEAKERS (PAIR)
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TSP £299.95

WHAT HI-FI? STAND AWARDS 2011
BEST FLOORSTANDING SPEAKER
BEST FLOORSTANDING SPEAKER
BEST FLOORSTANDING SPEAKER

REGULAR PRICE **£219.95**
VIP CLUB PRICE £199.95

LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED



PROJECT DEBUT CARBON TURNTABLE
"The latest version of the long-running Debut remains a winner. Recommended." – What Hi-Fi.
5 year Supercare only £32.50
Available in a range of colours.

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★

HALF PRICE
Cambridge Audio 651P phone pre-amp with this turntable

£325

SAVE £190
5 YEAR SPEAKER GUARANTEE INCLUDED



MARANTZ PM6005, CD6005 & WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 220 AMPLIFIER, CD PLAYER & BLACK SPEAKERS (PAIR)
"Superb sound quality on a budget for your analogue and digital music," commented What Hi-Fi of the PM6005, while they said of the CD6005, "A fantastic player and immense value for money."
TSP £837.95 | 5 year Supercare only 10% of Marantz purchase prices
Wharfedale Diamond 220 also available in walnut or white.
Amp and CD player also available in silver.
Call for individual unit prices.

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Best Amplifier
Best CD Player
Best Speaker

£649.95

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DENON DM39 & Q ACOUSTICS 3020 MINI SYSTEM & GRAPHITE SPEAKERS (PAIR)

The Denon DM39 comes from a long line of award-winning mini systems, and what better way to make the most of its punchy and dynamic sound than with the 5-star Q3020s.

"Back, and better than ever," said What Hi-Fi of the Denon DM39 mini system, and of the Q Acoustics "A quality of sound that's well beyond the typical expectations of a sub-£300 speaker."

TSP £389 | 5 year Supercare only 10% of DM39 price
DM39 also available in black | Q3020 available in other colours.
Call for individual unit prices.



£299.95



MARANTZ MCR610 MELODY MEDIA & MONITOR AUDIO BX2 STREAMING MINI SYSTEM & BLACK SPEAKERS (PAIR)

"This is an excellent all-in-one system" said What Hi-Fi of the MCR610, while of the BX2s they said, "Quite an achievement and some of the most engaging speakers you can buy at this money."

TSP £699 | 5 year Supercare only 10% of Marantz purchase price
MCR610 also available in white.
Call for individual unit prices.



£449.95



CAMBRIDGE AUDIO CXA60 AMPLIFIER

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Also available in silver.

£499.95



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Also available in white.
Call for individual unit prices.

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TANNOY REVOLUTION XT 6F SATIN WALNUT SPEAKERS (PAIR)

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A small selection from our headphone range

<p>LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED</p> <p>SONY MDR-EX650 HEADPHONES</p> <p>"From sound to fit, the EX650s are everything a pair of in-ears should be." - What Hi-Fi.</p> <p>CALL OR SEE WEB</p>	<p>WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014 Best in-ear headphones Best music player</p>	<p>LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED</p> <p>AKG Y50 HEADPHONES</p> <p>"Excelling in sound and style, the Y50s are a cracking introduction to AKG's latest range." - What Hi-Fi.</p> <p>CALL OR SEE WEB</p>	<p>WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014 Best over-ear headphones Best music player</p>	<p>LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED</p> <p>SENNHEISER MOMENTUM M2 HEADPHONES</p> <p>"Easily one of the best pairs of buds we've heard this year." - What Hi-Fi.</p> <p>CALL OR SEE WEB</p>	<p>WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014 Best over-ear headphones Best music player</p>	<p>LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED</p> <p>SENNHEISER MOMENTUM WIRELESS M2 AEBT HEADPHONES</p> <p>Noise cancelling and award-winning Sennheiser sound.</p> <p>£379</p>	<p>WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014 Best wireless headphones Best music player</p> <p>Bluetooth</p>
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SONY STR-DN1050
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"Sony raises the bar once again: this is a seriously good mid-range amp that balances muscle and subtlety with stacks of features at a good price." – What Hi-Fi.
TSP £449 | 5 year Supercare only £39.90
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ONKYO TXNR636 & TANNOY HTS101
HOME CINEMA AMPLIFIER & 5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE

"A dynamic, spacious and above all effortless listen." – What Hi-Fi on the HTS101.
Consistently ahead of the game, the Onkyo TXNR636 is true to the company's ethos in offering future tech at top-value prices.
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– What Hi-Fi.

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PANASONIC DMPBDT700 SMART 4K 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

"A premium Blu-ray player for a premium home cinema system."

– What Hi-Fi.

TSP £449 | 5 year Supercare only £39.90

£399



WHARFEDALE DX1 HCP 5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE

"A neat blend of trad design and stylishly compact dimensions, for the money these stylish speakers get an awful lot right."

– What Hi-Fi.

TSP £349.95

5 year Supercare only £29.95

Also available in white.

£299.95



CANTON DM 50 SOUND BASE

"The Canton DM 50 is a lesson in what a sound base should sound and look like."

– What Hi-Fi.

TSP £349 | 5 year Supercare only £29.90

Also available in silver.

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Q ACOUSTICS M4 SOUNDBAR

"Sensibly priced and sounds fantastic."

– What Hi-Fi.

5 year Supercare only £39.90

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Q ACOUSTICS Q7000i 5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE

"The Q7000i is a stunning package at this price."

– What Hi-Fi.

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Middlesbrough
0333 900 0096

Milton Keynes
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DACs

Digital-to-analogue converters take a digital data stream from their source (such as a computer or CD transport) and turns it into an analogue signal that your amplifier can work with. These devices have become more popular in recent years due to the emergence of computer-based audio

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		USB in	Optical in	Co-axial in	AES EBU in	HDMI in	Wireless	Headphone out	RCA out	Balanced XLR out	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500														
Arcam airDAC	400	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Not as good as the irDAC but delivers good sound on a budget	0	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	4x19x12
Arcam irDAC	400	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Best DAC £300-£500, Awards 2014	0	2	2	0	0	●	0	1	0	4x12x19
Arcam irDAC Wireless	380	09.12/GT	★★★★★	No longer the default choice at the money, still very much a contender	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	4x16x11
Arcam miniBlink	90	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Best Bluetooth receiver, Awards 2014. Accessories Product of the Year	0	0	0	10	0	●	0	1	0	2.5x3x4
Arcam rPAC	150	04.13/ST	★★★★★	More desirable alternatives, but the rPAC still has plenty of merit	1	0	0	0	0	●	1	1	0	3x10x6
Audioengine D1	150	05.12/FT	★★★★★	A DAC and headphone amp with a fine sound	1	1	0	0	1	●	1	1	0	3x9x10
Audioquest DragonFly	215	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC up to £300, Awards 2012	1	0	0	0	0	●	1	0	0	6x2x1
Audioquest DragonFly v1.2	130	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC up to £300, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	1	0	0	0	0	●	1	0	0	6x2x1
Belkin Song Stream BT HD	50	05.14/GT	★★★★★	A solid performer for the price	0	0	0	0	0	●	0	1	0	n/a
Camb. Audio DacMagic 100	200	06.12/FT	★★★★★	An affordable, fine looking and listenable DAC	1	2	2	0	0	●	0	1	0	5x11x13
Camb. Audio DacMagic Plus	350	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Better sound and features than the original - but pricey	1	2	2	0	0	●	1	1	0	5x22x19
Camb. Audio DacMagic XS	100	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Drops down a star but still a delightful little device	0	0	0	0	0	●	1	0	0	5x3x1
Crystal Acoustics BluDAC	60	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Doesn't quite have the finesse of others but this is still a real entertainer	0	0	0	0	0	●	0	1	0	6.5x7.5x2
Denon DA-300USB	330	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Soft bass detracts from what is otherwise a great first DAC from Denon	1	2	1	0	0	●	1	1	0	6x17x18
Furutech ADL GT 40	400	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Cables & Accessories, Awards 2011	1	0	0	0	0	●	1	1	0	6x15x11
Focal Universal Wireless Receiv.	85	05.14/GT	★★★★★	A very talented performer that comes with a few quirks	0	0	0	0	0	●	0	1	0	n/a
HRT microStreamer	180	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC up to £300, Awards 2013	1	0	0	0	0	●	1	0	0	1x3x6
LH Labs Geek Out	200	09.14/FT	★★★★★	A clever little device that's a solid performer	0	0	0	0	0	●	2	0	0	1.3x3.5x6.7
Meridian Director	450	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Packs a sonic punch but lacks the swagger found in others	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	3x14x8
Meridian Explorer DAC	250	07.13/GT	★★★★★	The Explorer's design and assured sonic performance makes it a top contender	1	0	0	0	0	●	1	0	0	2x3x10
Micromega MyDAC	260	04.13/ST	★★★★★	If you like your music to have an attacking edge, then this DAC's for you	1	0	0	0	0	●	1	0	0	2x3x10
Musical Fidelity V-90 DAC	200	12.13/FT	★★★★★	A well-featured DAC that's a little too relaxed in its sound	1	2	1	0	0	●	0	0	0	5x17x10
NAD D 1050	400	06.14/GT	★★★★★	For those looking for a desktop DAC, the NAD D 1050 is a brilliant box of tricks	1	2	2	0	0	●	1	1	1	19x6x21
Pro-Ject DAC Box DS	299	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A solid performer but doesn't excel in any area	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	7x10x14
£500-£1000														
Audiolab M-DAC	600	06.15/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £500-£700, Awards 2014	1	2	2	0	0	●	0	1	1	6x25x25
Cambridge Audio Azur 851D	1000	07.14/GT	★★★★★	A fine DAC, even if it can't scale the heights of the class leaders	1	4	3	1	0	●	1	0	1	12x43x36
Chord Chordette QuteHD	990	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £700-£1000, Awards 2013	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	7x16x4
Chord Electronics Qute Ex	990	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best DAC £700-£1000, Awards 2014	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	7x16x4
Rega DAC	500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Beefy build; natural, unforced, dynamic and detailed sound	1	2	2	0	0	●	0	1	0	8x22x27
Musical Fidelity M1 SDAC	800	08.13/FT	★★★★★	An impressive spec list but performance is trumped by cheaper rivals	1	1	2	0	0	●	1	1	0	10x22x31
Parasound Zdac	500	11.13/GT	★★★★★	The Zdac produces a lively, likable sound	1	1	1	0	0	●	1	1	1	5x22x26
Pathos Convento	675	06.15/GT	★★★★★	Offers an engaging performance. Could do with a little more drive	1	1	2	0	0	●	1	1	1	6x20x23
Pioneer U-05	700	06.15/GT	★★★★★	The kind of DAC that gets your toes tapping	1	2	2	1	0	●	3	1	1	10x30x27
Rotel RDD-1580	600	05.14/FT	★★★★★	Plenty to be impressed with, but the poor quality of its USB input holds it back	1	2	2	0	0	●	0	1	1	5.5x43x32
Sony PHA-3AC	720	06.15/GT	★★★★★	A fine performer with plenty of strengths but more than a few weaknesses	2	1	0	0	0	●	2	1	0	7x8x14
Sony UDA-1	500	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Not the most musically exciting DAC, but an excellent choice for desktop users	2	1	0	0	0	●	2	1	0	3x18x14
£1000 and above														
Aesthetix Romulus	6500	06.14/GT	★★★★★	A fine performer that draws in the listener with a smooth and elegant sound	1	1	1	1	0	●	0	1	1	11x46x45
Antelope Zodiac Gold/Voltikus	3100	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Unique and appealing, it just misses out on a fifth star	1	2	2	0	0	●	2	1	1	11x17x19
Antelope Zodiac Platinum	8595	06.15/FT	★★★★★	Excellent features and a rhythmic sound make for a likeable effort	1	2	2	1	0	●	2	1	1	11x17x19
Audio Research DAC 8	4698	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Pricey, but as organic-sounding as you can get	1	1	1	0	0	●	1	1	1	13x48x25
Arcam FMJ D33	2000	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A well-equipped DAC, but not the best in class	3	2	2	1	0	●	0	1	2	11x43x37
Benchmark DAC HGC	1750	11.14/FT	★★★★★	A hugely capable DAC but there are cheaper contenders out there	1	2	2	0	0	●	1	2	1	5x20x21
Bricasti Design M1 DAC	7000	03.14/FT	★★★★★	An understated but deeply talented performer. Thoroughly impressive	1	1	2	1	1	●	0	1	1	6x43x30
Burmester 113	2300	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Small and unassuming but packs a seriously exciting sound	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	1	6x20x17
Chord QBD76 HDSD	4995	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A top-class, visually appealing DAC that delivers brilliant sound	2	2	2	2	0	●	0	1	1	6x34x15
Chord Hugo	1400	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £1000+, Awards 2014	2	1	1	0	0	●	3	1	0	2x13x10
Cyrus DACXP Signature	3000	11.13/FT	★★★★★	With the Signature upgrade, the DACXP remains a fine product	0	2	4	0	0	●	0	2	2	8x22x37
dCS Debussy	7930	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Worth every penny of its asking price	1	0	2	2	0	●	0	1	1	7x45x39
McIntosh D100	3000	06.13/GT	★★★★★	A solid and entertainer performer. Well featured, too	1	2	2	0	0	●	1	0	0	10x45x41

DACs continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	USB in	Optical in	Co-axial in	AES EBU in	HDMI in	Wireless	Headphone out	RCA out	Balanced XLR out	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
£1000 and above													
Musical Fidelity M6 DAC	2000	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A mighty performer but its price and competition rob it of a fifth star	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	13x44x39
NAD M51	1500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £1200+, Awards 2012	1	1	1	1	2	0	1	0	8x44x30
Naim DAC	2150	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Flexible, fine sounding and future-proof. The Naim is some DAC	2	3	3	0	0	0	1	0	7x43x30
Naim DAC-V1	1250	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £1000+, Awards 2013	1	2	3	0	0	1	1	1	9x21x32
Oppo HA-1	1200	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Worth an audition but needs to deliver more energy to compete with the best	2	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	8x25x33
TAD DA1000	11995	05.15/FT	★★★★★	An exceptional DAC	1	1	4	1	0	1	1	1	9x27x27
T+A DAC 8	1250	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Beautifully engineered with a great sound to boot	1	1	4	1	0	1	1	1	9x27x27



Turntables

Turntable The main part of the player that actually spins the record
Tonearm The component that carries the cartridge across the record surface
Cartridge Turns the information in the record groove into sound

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	33.33	45	78	Elec. speed change	Manual operation	Phono amp	Tonearm inc.	Cartridges inc.	USB port	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £1000														
Audio Technica AT-LP1240USB	500	10.14/GT	★★★★★	A competent turntable than could do with more subtlety sound-wise	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	16x45x35
Pro-ject Elemental	150	04.14/FT	★★★★★	A top-class budget deck from Pro-ject	●	●			●	●	●		3	9x43x30
Pro-ject Essential II	210	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable up to £400, Awards 2014	●	●			●	●	●		3	14x46x36
Pro-ject 1 Xpression Carbon UKX	575	01.15/FT	★★★★★	A terrific package for the price and worth serious consideration	●	●			●	●	●		1	13x42x34
Pro-ject 2 Xperience 2-Pack	900	12.14/GT	★★★★★	An eye-catching turntable with a robust sound. A very fine effort	●	●			●	●	●		1	13x46x36
Pro-ject 2 Xperience Basic+	600	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Fuss-free package with a strikingly clear sound	●	●			●	●	●		1	14x46x36
Pro-ject Debut Carbon	300	10.14/GT	★★★★★	It's been a few years but the Carbon is still a tempting proposition	●	●	●		●	●	●		7	12x42x32
Rega RP1	225	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable up to £400, Awards 2011	●	●			●	●	●		3	12x45x36
Rega RP1 Performance Pack	300	10.14/GT	★★★★★	A blindingly good turntable for the price	●	●			●	●	●		4	12x45x36
Rega RP3/Elys2	550	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best turntable £400-£800, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	●			●	●	●		3	10x45x36
£1000 and above														
Clearaudio Concept	1000	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable £800+, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	14x42x35
Clearaudio Ovation/Tali. V2 Gold	5995	04.14/FT	★★★★★	Beautifully made and a pleasure to use. A fantastic performer	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		4	14x42x35
Clearaudio Performance SE	2660	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Quality engineering and top-class sound	●	●			●	●	●		2	13x42x33
Kronos Turntable	30000	07.14/FT	★★★★★	Not perfect, but an incredibly tempting piece of kit nonetheless	●	●			●				1	28x56x36
Kuzma Stabi S/Stogi S	2940	04.10/FT	★★★★★	A worthy alternative to the Michell Orbe	●	●			●	●			1	14x40x30
Linn Majik LP12	2350	03.09/FT	★★★★★	The LP12 offers great value for money with no compromise	●	●			●	●	●		5	14x45x36
Pro-ject 2 Xperience X-Pack	1000	08.10/GT	★★★★★	Precision and integration to keep it among the top players	●	●			●	●	●		1	14x46x39
P'ject Xten./Ortof. RS-309D	4000	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Proves Pro-ject can compete at all price levels	●	●	●	●	●	●			4	25x55x45
Rega RP8/Apheta	2200	12.14/FT	★★★★★	A spectacular turntable from Rega	●	●			●	●	●		1	12x45x36
Rega RP6/Exact	1000	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Deceptively simple looking, this Rega is one of the very best at this price	●	●			●	●	●		8	12x45x36
Roksan Radius 5.2	1375	Aw.09/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable £1200+, Awards 2010. Superb performance	●	●			●	●			8	15x45x37
Thorens TD309	1250	06.10/FT	★★★★★	The TD309 is a good deck, but it's no TD160HD on the cheap	●	●			●	●	●		2	13x47x43



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Radios

DAB Digital radio signal that now offers coverage across most of the UK
Internet Allows you to listen to thousands of radio stations from around the world

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	DAB	FM	MW	Internet	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £100									
Aves Air	50	09.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●			●	10x6x2
Pure Digital Move 2500	90	11.11/FT	★★★★★	●	●			●	10x6x1.5
Pure Digital Move 400D	90	11.12/GT	★★★★★	●	●			●	8.5x15x2.7
Pure Evoke D2	85	09.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●			●	15x21x7
Q2 Internet radio	90	03.11/FT	★★★★★	●	●		●		10x10x10
Roberts Duologic	75	01.10/GT	★★★★★	●	●			●	15x25x83
£100 and above									
Geneva World Radio DAB+	270	09.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●			●	17x30x7
Philips Original Radio Mini	110	09.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●				25x12x12
Pure Evoke D4 with Bluetooth	150	08.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●			●	18x22x12
Pure Digital Evoke Flow	150	05.10/GT	★★★★★	●	●		●	●	18x21x11
Pure Evoke F4	180	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	●	●		●	●	18x21x11
Pure Digital One Flow	100	11.12/GT	★★★★★	●	●		●		15x21x8
Pure Pop Maxi	100	06.15/FT	★★★★★	●	●			●	17x19x10
Revo AXIS XS	200	11.12/GT	★★★★★	●	●		●		12.5x22x15
Revo AXIS X3	200	01.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●		●		12.5x22x15
Revo Pixis	100	09.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●				13x16x16
Revo SuperConnect	250	09.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●		●	●	18x27x12
Roberts Revival iStream 2	200	12.14/GT	★★★★★	●	●		●	●	16x26x13
Roberts Stream 93i	150	11.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●		●	●	21x24x13
Ruark Audio R1 Mk3	200	04.15/FT	★★★★★	●	●		●	●	17x13x13.5
Tivoli Albergo+	200	02.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●			●	11x19x11
Tivoli Model 10+	160	09.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●				20x12x12
View Quest Christie	100	05.15/FT	★★★★★	●	●			●	14x22x13
View Quest Retro 1	100	12.11/GT	★★★★★	●	●			●	16x28x9



Hi-fi speakers

Standmounters Usually smaller speakers that need to be put on a stand, not bookshelves
Floorstanders Larger speakers that tend to go louder and deeper than standmounters
Powered Have built-in amplifiers and need mains power to work

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
Wharfedale Diamond 220

Awards 2014: Best Stereo Speaker up to £200



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
B&W 685 S2

Awards 2014: Best Standmounter £400-£800



AWARD WINNER
ATC SCM 11

Awards 2014: Best Standmounter up to £1200+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount	Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £200								
Acoustic Energy Compact 1	150	10.11/FT	★★★★★	●			2	22x15x20
Audioengine P4	183	02.10/FT	★★★★★	●			3	23x14x17
Cambridge Audio Aero 2	150	03.15/ST	★★★★★	●			2	37x20x31

SPEAKERS continued

SPEAKERS continued					Standmount	Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict						
Up to £200									
Cambridge Audio SX-50	130	04.14/ST	★★★★★	Full of zip and gusto, the SX-50s are excellent value for money	●			2	23x16x24
Mission MX1	150	06.11/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers up to £150, Awards 2010. A real return to form from Mission	●			4	28x17x26
Monitor Audio MR2	160	03.15/ST	★★★★★	A very good attempt at a budget hi-fi speaker	●			2	35x19x25
Polk Audio TSx110B	100	03.15/FT	★★★★★	They're not perfect but these budget speakers are a pleasant surprise	●			2	28x18x23
Q Acoustics 2010i	120	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Set the standard at this price and size level	●			4	23x20x15
Q Acoustics 2020i	150	03.15/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers up to £200, Awards 2013	●			4	26x17x28
Q Acoustics 3020	190	05.15/ST	★★★★★	For a budget speaker this is beyond expectations. These are fabulous value	●			5	26x17x23
Roth Oli RA1	100	12.14/FT	★★★★★	If space is at a premium and your budget is low, then these are an excellent fit	●			2	23x15x15
SoundScience QSB	85	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Compact, clever and with a big detailed sound	●			1	85x85x85
£200-£500									
Acoustic Energy Neo One V2	210	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Real ability in most areas but they don't quite gel	●			2	36x18x23
Acoustic Energy 301	425	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Very good speakers for the money, definitely worthy of consideration	●			2	30x19x25
Audioengine A5+	290	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Bigger, better and more flexible than the originals	●			3	27x18x20
Audio Pro Addon T8	250	06.14/ST	★★★★★	Punchy and energetic, these beautifully built speakers aren't perfect but they are enjoyable	●	●		2	16x10x14
Bose Companion 20	200	05.13/GT	★★★★★	Solid, reliable speakers for buyers on a tight budget		●		1	22x9x12
Bose Computer MusicMonitor	250	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Enjoyable sound for a speaker this small	●			2	12x7x12
B&W 685	400	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Great Award-winning speakers from B&W. Just edged out by newer rivals	●			4	34x20x33
B&W MM-1	399	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Still good, but there's better available		●		1	17x10x10
Cambridge Audio Aeromax 2	450	12.14/FT	★★★★★	A fine pair of stand-mounters, however a little honing wouldn't go amiss	●			2	37x20x3
Cambridge Audio Aero 6	400	06.15/GT	★★★★★	Superb floorstanders; you'll struggle to find better at this price point		●		2	98x24x34
Cambridge Audio SX-60	200	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Impressive speakers but they could do with more refinement	●			2	34x20x27
Dali Lektor 2	299	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Seriously entertaining speakers and simply stunning at this money	●			2	31x18x22
Dali Zensor 1	200	03.15/ST	★★★★★	These Dali's are still entertaining all-rounders, but they've finally been outclassed	●			2	27x16x22
Dali Zensor 3	300	10.14/GT	★★★★★	If it's entertainment you crave, then these standmounters deliver in spades	●			3	35x21x29
Epos K1	400	04.15/ST	★★★★★	For £400 the K1s put in a decent performance. Rivals have the edge in terms of excitement, though	●			2	31x19x25
Focal Chorus 706V	390	03.11/FT	★★★★★	Thoroughly enjoyable but they may not cut it with dance music	●			3	39x22x29
Focal XS Book	300	07.12/GT	★★★★★	A potent-sounding speaker that brings hi-fi listening to your desktop		●		1	28x11x20
Focal XS Book Wireless	300	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Stacks of detail but not quite the measure of their rivals		●		1	28x11x20
JBL Arena 170	400	06.15/GT	★★★★★	These JBLs are talented, lively speakers		●		2	96x22x28
KEF Q300	450	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Not quite at the top anymore, but still fine, engaging standmounters	●			3	36x21x30
Monitor Audio Bronze BX 1	200	05.11/FT	★★★★★	Stylish as you like, but not the complete article		●		4	26x17x18
Monitor Audio Bronze BX2	250	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers £200-£350, Awards 2012	●			4	35x19x26
Monitor Audio Silver RX1	425	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Well-made and refined speakers, just lacking the flexibility of its rivals	●			6	31x19x24
Mission MX2	200	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Dynamic enough but maybe too exciting	●			4	34x21x31
Mission MX3	350	11.11/GT	★★★★★	Peppy and communicative floorstanders		●		4	82x17x34
Pioneer S-CN301-LR	200	04.14/ST	★★★★★	Polished, insightful and appealing	●			1	23x14x22
Q Acoustics 3050	500	06.15/GT	★★★★★	Staggeringly good. They would give £1000 speakers a run for their money		●		5	100x20x30
Q Acoustics 2050i	460	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander up to £600, Awards 2014		●		4	100x32x27
Q Acoustics Concept 20	350	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers £200-£400, Awards 2014	●			2	26x17x28
Q Acoustics Q-BT3	350	06.14/ST	★★★★★	There are few products as versatile and as easy to like as the Q-BT3s at this price	●			4	31x19x24
Quad 11L Classic	330	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Impressive standmounters but lack a touch of sparkle	●			4	31x19x24
Ruark Audio MR1	300	06.14/ST	★★★★★	Best desktop speakers, Awards 2014	●			3	17x13x14



Sendor D7 Simply the Best

"Among the finest speakers I've heard at any price"
Sam Tellig, *Stereophile* Nov 2014

"However it's been achieved, we can't help but marvel at the sound from the D7's. Sendor D7's set the standard for speakers at this price"
What Hi-Fi Oct 2013

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AWARDS 2014

Stereo speakers
Best Floorstander £1000+
Sendor D7

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SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
£200-£500							
Tannoy Mercury V1i	150	04.14/ST	★★★★★	A stylish, self-assured pair of speakers that are well worth auditioning	●	2	30x17x26
Tannoy Mercury V4	380	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £350-£700, Awards 2011	●	2	97x20x28
Tannoy Mercury V4i	400	01.14/FT	★★★★★	An exciting and punchy listen, but it comes with compromises	●	1	100x20x28
Tannoy Revolution DC4	380	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Well worth considering if your listening room isn't too big	●	2	27x15x16
Tannoy Revolution DC6	400	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Best standmounter £350-£700, Awards 2012	●	1	36.5x20x25
Wharfedale Diamond 121	230	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Fabulous sound. For insight and entertainment, the 121s needn't fear any rival	●	7	32x17x23
Wharfedale Diamond 220	200	03.15/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers up to £200, Awards 2014	●	4	50x32x41
Wharfedale Diamond 230	500	06.15/GT	★★★★★	Loses a star but still offers plenty of value	●	4	94x20x33
£500-£1500							
Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic	1000	07.11/GT	★★★★★	A classic yes, but not the best around	●	2	30x18x26
Audio Pro LV2e	700	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Wireless desktop speakers with a hi-fi flourish	●	3	98x14x24
Audiovector Ki3 Standard	1200	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Packed with resolution and speed	●	5	98x14x24
ATC SCM11 (2013)	1200	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best standmounter up to £1200, Awards 2014	●	2	38x21x25
AVI ADM9.1	1125	07.12/GT	★★★★★	A simple way to make the most of your music	●	5	30x20x26
B&W 683 S2	1150	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £600-£1200, Awards 2014	●	2	99x19x36
B&W 684 S2	800	05.15/ST	★★★★★	A floorstander that's capable in many areas but, as a whole, is less than the sum of its parts	●	2	92x16x23
B&W 685 S2	500	04.15/ST	★★★★★	Best standmounter £400-£800, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	2	35x19x32
Cabasse MT32 Antigua	500	04.15/ST	★★★★★	Wonderfully easy on the ears, the MT32s are a smooth listen	●	2	41x22x30
Cambridge Audio Aeromax 6	900	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Lots of potential with these speakers, however they struggle in a few areas	●	2	98x24x34
Dali Ikon 1 MK2	530	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Huge sound and good timing, these Dalis are heartily recommended	●	3	33x15x26
Dali Ikon 6 MK2	1200	09.10/FT	★★★★★	Cleaner, clearer and more insightful than its forerunner	●	3	100x19x36
Dali Mentor Menuet	900	07.12/ST	★★★★★	These Menuets are something of a gem	●	2	25x15x23
Dali Zensor 5	549	11.11/GT	★★★★★	Compact and affordable floorstanders	●	2	84x16x27
Dali Zensor 7	729	06.12/FT	★★★★★	Not flawless, but musical and enjoyable performers	●	3	98x21x31
Dynaudio DM 2/6	535	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers £300-£600, Awards 2010. Just the right amount of sparkle at the top end	●	2	29x17x24
Dynaudio DM3/7	1300	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Plenty of positives in this mid-range floorstander	●	2	96x20x27
Dynaudio Excite X14	945	12.13/ST	★★★★★	A crisp and clean sound is shortchanged by a lack of versatility	●		29x17x26
Dynaudio Xeo 3	1365	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Versatile wireless speakers	●	2	28x17x26
Eclipse TD508 Mk3	960	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Not an all-rounder, but still a rather special speaker	●	3	29x18x27
Elac BS243	1050	07.11/GT	★★★★★	These standmounters crave excitement	●	5	29x17x22
Elac BS 142	600	05.14/GT	★★★★★	An organic sounding and entertaining pair of speakers that are fun to listen to	●	1	26x16x26
Elac FS 147	1100	07.14/AT	★★★★★	A fun set of speakers if you're after entertainment over analysis	●	1	95x22x30
Elipson Planet L	600	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Charming in many ways, with good transparency	●	3	40x42x43
Eclipse Planet LW Bridge System	1400	01.15/FT	★★★★★	A commendable effort; decent sound and stylish looks to go with it	●	3	29 diameter
Epos K2	1000	05.15/ST	★★★★★	Small floorstanders with a big sound. We like the minimalist look, too	●	2	86x19x25
Epoz AktiMate Blue	600	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Position them well and you'll be rewarded with a lovely, engaging sound	●	3	32x21x31
Guru Junior	800	12.13/ST	★★★★★	A rather mundane appearance is excused by some very expressive sound	●	3	28x18x24
Focal Aria 905	600	04.15/ST	★★★★★	A hugely accomplished pair of standmounters, although the finish could be better	●	2	31x19x25
Focal Aria 906	760	12.13/ST	★★★★★	For scale, power and refinement, you won't find many better	●	3	33x21x25
JBL Studio 530	650	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Odd looking - but fun sounding and refined	●	1	47x21x22
KEF LS50	800	12.13/ST	★★★★★	Best standmounter £400-£800, Awards 2013	●	1	30x20x28
KEF R100	600	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Still great but now surpassed by newer rivals	●	4	28x18x29
KEF X300A	600	09.13/FT	★★★★★	A smooth, relaxed sound that lacks punch and dynamics	●	1	28x18x24
Martin Logan Motion 15	795	12.13/ST	★★★★★	Needs a bit more authority but let loose in a smaller room they can really sing	●	2	29x13x24
Mission SX2	700	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Dependable and capable, the SX2s product an authoritative sound at a fine price	●	5	38x23x37
Monitor Audio Bronze BX5	500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Fine, refined speakers but outclassed by stronger newcomers	●	4	85x17x25
Monitor Audio Gold GX50	950	12.13/ST	★★★★★	Still good and still great looking, but loses out to rivals in terms of musical engagement	●	5	30x17x26
Monitor Audio Silver 1	500	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A bit fussy when it comes to positioning, the Silver 1s still ooze quality	●	6	31x19x26
Monitor Audio Silver 6	1000	12.13/FT	★★★★★	The Silver 6s reveal plenty of detail, but there are better all-rounders out there	●	6	89x19x24
Monitor Audio Silver RX6	800	12.09/GT	★★★★★	A sensational product from Monitor Audio - detailed, dynamic and very attractive, too	●	6	91x28x31
Monitor Audio SoundFrame 1	900	02.12/GT	★★★★★	An impressive alternative to conventional speakers	●	2	54x39x9
Mission MX-5	600	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Physically and sonically impressive	●	4	100x25x39
Mission SX1	700	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Almost mission accomplished. Hugely capable but not as entertaining as the class leaders	●	5	31x19x29
Neat Iota	695	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Attractive but with a hefty sound too	●	5	13x20x17
Neat Motive 2	945	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Cohesive, authoritative and downright exciting	●	4	77x16x20
Neat Motive SX2	1395	07.14/ST	★★★★★	Great little speakers with only a few small imperfections	●	4	77x16x20
PMC Twenty 21	1485	10.13/GT	★★★★★	If you're looking for a top-class pair of standmounters, these are well worth a listen	●	4	33x15x28
PSB Imagine Mini	600	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Tiny speakers with a surprising amount of heft. Good for a smaller room	●	5	23x14x21
PSB Imagine X1T	750	05.15/ST	★★★★★	Big on fun and energy, these could do with more subtlety and refinement. Highly commended, though	●	5	23x14x21

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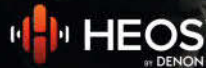
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SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
£500-£1500							
Opera Mezza	850	04.13/GT	★★★★★	●		3	32x20x33
Q Acoustics Concept 40	1000	05.15/ST	★★★★★		●	2	97x17x29
Quad 9AS	600	07.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●	3	30x15x21.5
Quad 12L Classic	500	11.11/FT	★★★★★	●		4	34x21x28
Rega RS3	780	07.12/GT	★★★★★		●	3	80x22x25
Tannoy Precision 6.1	900	04.13/GT	★★★★★	●		2	33x22x26
Tannoy Revolution DC6 SE	700	12.13/FT	★★★★★	●		1	37x20x24
Tannoy Revolution DC6T	799	07.12/GT	★★★★★		●	1	95x26x29
Tannoy Revolution DC6T SE	1000	07.14/ST	★★★★★		●	1	100x31x28
Tannoy Rev. Sig. DC4	600	07.12/GT	★★★★★	●		2	27x17x18
Tannoy Revolution XT 6	600	04.15/ST	★★★★★	●		2	40x22x30
Tannoy Revolution XT6F	1000	05.15/ST	★★★★★		●	2	100x27x32
Triangle Antal 902	900	05.15/ST	★★★★★		●	1	110x26x31
Triangle Color 123	600	08.12/FT	★★★★★			3	14x14x14
Triangle Esprit Titus EZ	600	04.15/ST	★★★★★	●		3	31x17x27
Wharfedale Denton	500	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	●		1	32x20x31
Wharfedale Diamond 155	500	07.13/GT	★★★★★		●	7	94x20x31
£1500 and above							
Acoustic Energy Reference 1	1500	07.12/GT	★★★★★	●		1	31x19x28
Analysis Audio Omega	14500	08.11/FT	★★★★★		●	1	168x61x6
ATC SCM19	2000	06.15/FT	★★★★★	●		2	44x27x30
ATC SCM 100A	11615	04.11/FT	★★★★★		●	4	107x40x56
ATC SCM40A	6280	04.14/FT	★★★★★		●	2	98x37x34
B&O BeoLab5	11000	10.08/FT	★★★★★		●	1	97x49x49
B&W 800 Diamond	18000	10.13/GT	★★★★★		●	3	118x45x65
B&W 805 Diamond	3750	01.11/FT	★★★★★	●		3	42x24x35
B&W CM6 S2	1500	11.14/GT	★★★★★	●		3	40x20x30
B&W PM1	1995	03.12/GT	★★★★★	●		1	33x19x30
Burmester B10	3220	10.13/GT	★★★★★	●		3	39x22x28
Dali Epicon 2	3750	01.13/FT	★★★★★	●		3	39x21x37
Dali Epicon 8	11500	08.13/FT	★★★★★		●	3	126x35x50
Dali Fazon F5	2700	12.11/FT	★★★★★		●	3	92x28x32
Dali Rubicon 2	1600	11.14/GT	★★★★★	●		4	35x20x34
Dali Rubicon 5	2400	03.15/FT	★★★★★		●	4	89x20x34
Dynaudio Focus 160	1800	03.12/GT	★★★★★	●		6	35x20x29
Dynaudio Xeo 4	1775	11.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●	2	28x17x25
Diapason Astera	6050	02.11/FT	★★★★★	●		1	38x26x44
Eclipse TD 510Z Mk2	3840	08.12/FT	★★★★★		●	3	98x38x39
Eclipse TD 712z Mk2	6500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	●		4	99x35x43
Focal Diablo Utopia	7686	12.12/FT	★★★★★	●		Any	43x26x43
Focal SM9	4580	10.13/GT	★★★★★	●		1	32x49x39
Focal Easys	1800	11.13/FT	★★★★★	●		2	90x17x24
GamuT M'inenT M3	5140	03.14/FT	★★★★★	●		10	40x23x46
Image Audio IA8	2000	02.12/GT	★★★★★			1	59x48x10
Linn Akubarik	15600	01.14/FT	★★★★★		●	200+	105x35x45
Monitor Audio Gold GX200	2300	03.12/FT	★★★★★	●		2	90x17x30
Mon. Audio Platinum PL300	6000	03.08/FT	★★★★★	●		3	111x41x47
Naim Ovator S-400	3650	10.13/GT	★★★★★		●	5	106x33x35
Neat Ultimatum XLS	4500	09.12/FT	★★★★★	●		9	38x22x37
PMC Fact 3	4100	08.11/FT	★★★★★	●		4	54x16x30
PMC Fact 8	4700	04.10/FT	★★★★★		●	4	103x15x38
PMC Twenty 22	1970	11.14/GT	★★★★★	●		4	41x18x37
PMC Twenty 23	2300	02.14/GT	★★★★★	●		4	92x15x33
PMC Twenty 26	5750	11.14/FT	★★★★★	●		4	109x19x44
PMC Wafer 2	2295	02.12/GT	★★★★★			2	57x35x10
ProAc Response D18	2145	10.13/GT	★★★★★	●		6	93x19x27
ProAc Response D30R	4750	09.14/FT	★★★★★	●		6	104x22x31
ProAc Response D40/R	6125	10.13/GT	★★★★★	●		6	120x21x34
ProAc Studio 140 Mk2	1650	12.10/FT	★★★★★	●		4	104x19x28

SPEAKERS continued

SPEAKERScontinued					Standmount	Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict						
Quad ESL-2812	6500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Won't be to everyone's tastes but these electrostatic speakers truly excel	●		1	107x69x38	
Quad ESL 2905	6000	01.07/FT	★★★★★	A truly world-class speaker	●		1	143x70x39	
Roksan Darius S1	5000	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Excellent pair of performers and one of the most enjoyable stand-mounters we've heard	●		2	38x20x38	
SPAcoustics SP1 Signature	14950	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Able to challenge the very best at this exalted level	●		Any	106x35x46	
Spendor A5	1695	03.11/GT	★★★★★	The most accomplished speakers for this money	●		4	79x17x25	
Spendor A6R	2500	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £1200+, Awards 2014	●		5	87.5x19x28	
Spendor D7	3500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	The finest Spendors in years	●		6	95x20x32	
Tannoy Precision 6.2	1700	10.13/GT	★★★★★	A beautifully balanced and hugely listenable pair of standmounters	●		3	100x31x28	
Tannoy Precision 6.4	2200	02.14/GT	★★★★★	If bass is important to you, then these speakers are worth an audition	●		3	105x31x35	
Tannoy Definition DC8	2500	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Capable of seriously controlled sound	●		3	47x27x26	
Tannoy Definition DC10T	5250	10.13/GT	★★★★★	While the DC10Ts aren't the most refined speakers out there, they're easy to love	●		3	113x34x32	
Totem Element Ember	3995	05.14/FT	★★★★★	If you're looking for entertainment, we can't think of a better alternative	●		2	36x11x25	
Triangle Signature Delta	4900	07.14/FT	★★★★★	If you value excitement and entertainment, put these speakers at the top of your shortlist	●		3	123x37x39	
Wharfedale Jade-5	1650	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Floorstanders that pack immense power and poise	●		3	106x25x40	
Wilson Audio Duette II	19000	02.15/FT	★★★★★	It needs a capable amp and source but when Duette II gets going it sounds breathtaking	●		16	47x27x31	
Wilson Audio Sophia 3	16500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Expensive, but they deliver a stunning sound full of detail, dynamics and drive	●		7	105x35x48	



Stereo amplifiers

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Theshortlist



AWARD WINNER

Marantz PM6005

Awards 2014: Best Stereo amp up to £300
"It's that wonderfully lively and detailed sound quality that makes the PM6005 such a fantastic budget stereo amplifier."



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Arcam FMJ A19

Awards 2014: Best Stereo amp £500-£800
"The A19 is quietly confident of its ability to deliver a transparent and faithful sound – and its staggeringly open sound is wonderful to hear at this price."



AWARD WINNER

Rega Elex-R

Awards 2014: Best Stereo amp £800-£1500
"You know you've got a good amp on your hands when all you can think of to fault is the remote."

Also consider

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Power (w)	DAC	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	USB in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Speaker outputs	Tone controls	Headphone out	Remote control	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £1000																		
Audiolab 8200A	750	05.13/ST	★★★★★	Capable, but lacks some subtlety	60		6	0	0		3	●	1		●	●	2	7.5x45x34
Arcam FMJ A19	650	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best Stereo amp £500-£800, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	50		6	1	0		1	●	2		●	●	1	9x43x28
Cambridge Audio Azur 350A	250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A budget amp with a decent grasp of timing	45	●	6	0	0		1	2	●	●	●	2		9x43x34
Cambridge Audio Azur 351A	300	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Worth considering if you prefer an energetic approach	45	●	5	0	0	●	1	2	●	●	●	2		9x43x34
Cambridge Audio Azur 651A	450	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Meaty and powerful, but not the most refined	75	●	5	0	0		1	●	2	●	●	●	1	12x43x35
Cambridge Audio Topaz SR10	230	06.10/FT	★★★★★	This affordable stereo receiver has plenty to offer	85		5	1	0		1	2	●	●	●	1		11x43x34
Creek Audio Evolution 50A	800	01.15/GT	★★★★★	An entertaining amp that holds its own against established rivals	55		5	0	0		0	1		●	●	2		6x4x8
Cyrus 6a	800	01.15/GT	★★★★★	Still precise and insightful but now lacks rivals' energy	40		6	0	0		0	●	2		●	●	2	7x22x36
Denon PMA-720AE	350	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Entertaining and capable, but sonically stubborn	50		4	1	0		1	●	1	●	●	●	2	12x43x31
Marantz PM6005	300	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp up to £500, Awards 2014	45		5	1	0		1	2	●	●	●	2		11x44x37
Micromega MyAmp	480	12.14/GT	★★★★★	An amp with attack and verve, although the finish could be better	30	●	3	0	0	●	0	1		●	●	2		7.5x14x14
Monitor Audio Airstream A100	400	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Insightful and composed, this is a worthy rival to the NAD D 3020	50	●	1	0	0		0	●	1			●	2	5x37x21
NAD C316BEE	260	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A decent listen that's overshadowed by rivals	40		5	0	0		1	1	●	●	●	2		8x44x29
NAD C326BEE	300	07.10/GT	★★★★★	A really musical amplifier to grace any budget system	50		7	0	0		2	●	1	●	●	●	1	10x44x29
NAD C356BEE	600	10.10/FT	★★★★★	A party animal of an amplifier	80		7	0	0		2	●	2	●	●	●	1	13x44x34
NAD C356BEE DAC	695	01.12/FT	★★★★★	A good amplifier with a great DAC	80	●	8	0	0	●	2	●	2	●	●	●	1	13x44x34
NAD D 3020	400	12.14/GT	★★★★★	A punchy and lively sound that's great fun to listen to	30		2	0	0	●	0	1		●	●	1		19x6x22
NAD D 7050	800	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Admirable, but not quite the measure of its cheaper rivals	50	●	0	0	0	●	0	●	1		●	●	1	24x7x27
Naim Nait 5i	875	05.13/ST	★★★★★	A strong all-round performer	50		4	0	0		1	1			●	1		7x44x31

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To hear the exclusive new CX Series pop in today. All Richer Sounds stores feature comfortable, home-styled demonstration rooms.



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£749.95



CAMBRIDGE AUDIO CXR200 HOME CINEMA AMPLIFIER

Cambridge Audio's flagship home cinema amplifier, the CXR200 reimagines how you can enjoy your home entertainment. It features the same network streaming option as the impressive CXN music player, combined with hi-fi grade audio quality that is capable of an immersive and powerful home cinema experience.

5 year Supercare only £199.95
Also available CXR120 £1499.95.

£1999.95

The new Cambridge CX has arrived...

...and we're really excited. Having had the new range in our store for a few weeks we're certain you will love it.

The new CXA amplifiers excel with all types of music we play through them, giving excellent soundstage, detail and control. The full colour display on the CXN streamer is a joy to use, while the CXR home cinema amplifiers give an authoritative, room-filling sound.

With a great fresh look, a complete set of features that are exactly what our customers are asking for and sound that's going to make you fall in love with your music all over again, take a seat in our home-styled demo room to hear and experience what the entire CX Series has to offer!

All Richer Sounds stores feature demonstration rooms

VIP Club members can book appointments from 8am – 8pm Mon – Fri.

Richer Sounds' VIP Club is completely FREE for ALL customers. Sign up in-store or online in seconds with just an email address.

Joel, Manager, City store
14th year of service



or call 0333 900 0095 (local rate)

AMPLIFIERS continued

AMPLIFIERS continued					Power (w)	DAC	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	USB in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Speaker outs	Tone controls	Headphone out	Remote control	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict															
Up to £1000																		
Naim Nait 5si	925	01.15/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £800-£1500, Awards 2013	60		3	0	0		1	1	●	●	●	1		7x43x31
Onix A-25	775	05.13/ST	★★★★★	A good choice for those who value finesse over muscle	30		3	0	0		0	●	1			●	1	9x21x36
Onkyo A-9010	200	06.15/FT	★★★★★	A musically satisfying stereo amp for a bargain price	44		5	1	0		1	1	●	●	●	1		13x44x33
Onkyo A-9030	300	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Proof that Onkyo knows how to build good stereo gear	65		4	1	0		1	2		●	●	2		14x44x33
Onkyo A-9050	350	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Lean presentation, but there's plenty to like	75		5	1	0		1	●	1	●	●	2		14x44x33
Pro-Ject Stereo Box S	200	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A small amp that's worth investigation	40		2	0	0		0	1				●	2	4x10x10
Pioneer A-70	800	05.13/ST	★★★★★	Excels in many areas, falls short of class-leading	90		3	1	1	●	1	●	2	●	●	●	2	14x44x36
Quad Vena	600	01.15/FT	★★★★★	An interesting proposition but it's left wanting in terms of finesse	46	●	2	0	0	●	0	●	1		●	●	4	10x31x30
Rega Brio-R	480	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £400-£600, Awards 2012	50		4	1	0		1	1				●	2	8x22x31
Rega Elex-R	900	01.15/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £800-£1500, Awards 2014	72		4	1	0		1	●	1			●	1	8x43x32
Roksan Kandy K2	795	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £700-£1000, Awards 2011	125		5	1	0		1	●	1		●	●	3	10x43x38
Roksan Kandy K2 BT	895	05.14/FT	★★★★★	Full of power and punch but some heart and soul is missing	140		5	1	0		1	●	1		●	●	2	11x43x38
Rotel RA-10	350	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Sounds good, but rivals offer more insight and better digital features	40		4	1	0		1	●	2	●	●		2	7x43x34
Rotel RA-12	600	05.13/ST	★★★★★	Well priced, appealing amp, just lacks a little expression	60	●	4	1	0	●	1	●	1	●	●	●	2	14x44x36
TEAC AI-301DA	400	12.14/GT	★★★★★	An amp with an unadventurous, but pleasant presentation	30	●	2	0	0	●	0	1			●	●	2	6x21.5x25
Wadia 151 PowerDAC Mini	999	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A compact digital amp with plenty of appeal	25	●	0	0	0	●	0	1			●	1	7x20x20	
Yamaha A-S501	360	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	A capable amplifier that's packed with features	60		6	1	0		1	1	●	●	●		2	15x44x39
£1000 and above																		
Arcam FMJ A39	1500	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Powerful and authoritative, but it needs better timing and detail	120		6	1	0	●	1	●	2		●	●	1	10x43x43
Audio Ana. Fortissimo AirTech	1750	05.15/FT	★★★★★	A feature-packed and capable performer that's worth an audition	100	●	5	1	1	●	0	●	1		●	●	2	12x45x39
Burmester 032	12380	06.15/FT	★★★★★	It's big, pricey and it sounds fabulously good	105		6	0	0		1	●	1	●	●	●	1	19x48x48
Cambridge Audio Azur 851A	1200	12.12/GT	★★★★★	For scale, power, build and style, this is hard to beat	120		8	0	0		1	●	2	●	●	●	2	12x43x39
Cyrus 6XPD	1250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A sturdy DAC-toting amp that's a cracker	40	●	6	0	0	●	1	●	2		●	●	2	7x22x36
Cyrus 8a	1350	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Everything we've come to expect and love about Cyrus	70		6	0	0		1	●	2		●	●	2	7x22x36
Cyrus 8 DAC	1400	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Meticulous and engaging amp and DAC combo	70	●	6	0	0	●	0		2		●	●	2	7x22x36
Cyrus DACXP Signature	3000	11.13/FT	★★★★★	With the Signature upgrade, the DACXP remains a fine product	70		2	0	0		1	●	1		●	●	2	7x22x36
Devialet 110	4490	02.14/FT	★★★★★	An exceptional all-rounder	110	●	1	1	0	●	0		1			●	1	4x38x38
Devialet D-Premier	11450	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A fresh look at amp design	240		2	1	1		1	●	1	●		●	3	4x40x40
EAR Yoshino V12	7000	07.13/FT	★★★★★	This terrific integrated amp needn't fear any rival at this price	50		5	0	0		1		1				1	14x42x14
Heed Audio Obelisk si	1300	06.12/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £1000-£1500, Awards 2012	35		5	1	0		0	●	1			●	2	9x22x36
Karan Acoustics KA1180Mk2	5995	09.13/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest amps we've heard	180		4	0	0		1	1				●	2	9x50x34
Lavardin IS Reference	2950	01.10/FT	★★★★★	Amazing: its rivals sound mechanical in comparison	30		4	0	0		1	1					1	8.5x43x35
Leema Tucana Mk II	3595	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier £2000+, Awards 2010.	148		7	0	0		1	●	1		●	●	2	10x43x36
Leema Elements	1395	12.12/GT	★★★★★	Solid choice, wide connection range and optional DAC	56	●	3	0	0	●	0	●	1		●	●	2	9x22x28
NAD C390DD	2250	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Novel thinking delivers an alternative to the favourites	150		1	0	0	●	0	●	2	●	●	●	1	13x43x39
Naim Nait XS	1500	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Still a top class premium amplifier	60		3	0	0		2	●	1			●	1	7x43x30
Naim Nait XS 2	1595	10.13/GT	★★★★★	An improvement on the Nait XS, even if it sacrifices a little detail	70		5	1	0		1	●	1		●	●	1	7x43x30
Naim Supernait 2	2750	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Even at this price, the Supernait 2 is a fantastic buy	80		5	0	0		1	●	1		●	●	1	9x43x31
Pathos ClassicRemix HiDAC	2850	05.15/FT	★★★★★	Another intriguing offering from Pathos that offers top-notch sound	70	●	5	0	0	●	0	●	1		●	●	5	17x37x28
Pathos Ethos	3800	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Mixes style and substance better than any rival	100		7	0	0	●	0	●	1			●	1	15x43x49
Pathos InpolRemix	3800	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Not cheap or powerful - just brilliant	10		1	0	0		0	●	1			●	2	18x33x29
Pathos Logos Mk II	3950	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Mixes fine aesthetics with a great sound for a terrific amp	110	●	5	0	0	●	1	●	1			●	1	17x42x43
Quad II Classic Integrated	4500	04.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine integrated amplifier with a hefty price tag	25		3	1	1		1		1				1	20x31x38
Rega Osiris	5998	06.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine amp that makes sense partnering its Isis sibling	162		6	0	0		1		1			●	1	12x44x35
Rega Elicit-R	1600	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier £1500+, Awards 2014	105		5	1	0		1	●	1			●	1	8x43x34
Roksan Caspian M2	1695	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier £1500+, Awards 2013	85		5	0	0		1	●	1		●		2	8x43x33
Roksan K3	1250	02.15/GT	★★★★★	An excellent all-rounder at a reasonable price	150		5	1	0		1	●	1		●		3	10x43x38
Sony TA-A1ES	2000	04.14/FT	★★★★★	Not quite a flawless effort but talented enough in key areas	80		5	1	1		0		1		●	●	1	13x43x42
T+A PA 3000 HV	9900	11.13/FT	★★★★★	A truly impressive piece of kit despite its polite disposition	300		6	0	0		0	1			●	●	1	17x46x46
Unison Research Preludio	2295	02.10/GT	★★★★★	Rubs shoulders with the very best at this price	14		4	0	0		1	1					1	20x40x38
Unison Research S9	6995	02.10/FT	★★★★★	We can't help but love this quirky valve amplifier	35		4	0	0		0	1				●	1	25x41x57
Unison Research Simply Italy	1495	09.12/FT	★★★★★	A well-engineered valve amplifier at a sensible price	12		5	0	0		1		1			●	2	26x19x35
Unison Research Triode 25	2350	08.14/FT	★★★★★	An absolutely superb amplifier from Unison Research	45		5	0	0	Opt	1		1			●	1	20x30x45

"It would be doing the Ear Yoshino V12 a disservice to describe it as simply an excellent example of the valve design. It's a great amplifier. Period"

June 2013



Preamps

Preamps are also known as control units. On a most basic level, they perform two functions: source selection and volume control. Most powered preamps also amplify the signal slightly in order to make matching to a power amplifier easier. Some include phono stages.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Balanced out	Headphone out	Tone controls	Remote control	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £5000													
Cyrus DACXP+	2550	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Massive ability in a small box	2	0	0	1	●	●		●	7x22x36
Heed Audio Obelisk pre/px	2230	04.13/FT	★★★★★	A superb-sounding preamp, but Heed needs to make it feel more luxurious	5	0	0	1	●			●	9x22x33
Lavardin C62	3471	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Belongs near the top of any shortlist	6	0	0	1	●				9x43x31
Linn Akurate Kontrol	4200	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Part of the Linn Akurate system - and truly awesome	4	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	9x38x38
NAD C165BEE	650	08.10/FT	★★★★★	A brute of a preamp	4	1	1	0		●	●	●	8x44x29
Naim NAC 152 XS	975	02.10/GT	★★★★★	It's good, but could do better with dynamics	5	0	0	0	●			●	7x43x30
Quad QC-twenty four	1000	06.13/FT	★★★★★	Pleasant listen but works best with Quad's valve power amps	5	0	0	2	●				9x30x22
Townshend Allegri	1895	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Basic features, but terrific sound	6	0	0	0	●				5x13x31
£5000 and above													
Aesthetix Janus Signature	10000	04.15/FT	★★★★★	You won't find many high-end preamps better than this one	5	1	1	1	●	●		●	11x45x46
Audio Research LS27	6500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	A fine preamp but struggles to shine in comparison to the Reference 75	6	0	0	1	●	●		●	13x48x34
Aesthetix Calypso Signature	6400	03.11/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest preamps on the market today	5	0	0	1	●	●		●	11x46x45
Bryston BP26DA	5050	08.06/FT	★★★★★	A must-hear preamp. Lacks style but built to last	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	6x49x28
Burmester 808 MK5	22242	02.13/FT	★★★★★	A beautifully constructed, highly versatile preamp for serious devotees	Opt	Opt	Opt	Opt	●	●		●	95x48x33
Chord Electronics CPA 8000	25500	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A magnificent preamp, but not quite the masterpiece its price demands	8	0	0	2	●	●	●	●	31x42x36
GamuTD3i	5500	01.15/FT	★★★★★	If you want an insightful and honest pre-amp, this is a fine place to start	4	0	0	1	●	●		●	11x43x42
Krell Phantom II	12000	11.12/FT	★★★★★	A hugely capable preamp that is able to dig deeply into any recording	8	0	0	1	●	●		●	10x44x46
McIntosh C2500	7495	01.14/FT	★★★★★	A refined and entertaining preamp that needs a little care in partnering	8	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	19x44x46
Naim NAC252/Supercap	9070	11.08/FT	★★★★★	Makes a magical combination with the NAP250 power amp	6	0	0	0	●			●	9x43x31



Power amps

These are effectively the powerhouse of the system. They deliver the high currents necessary to make a loudspeaker work. They can be configured as a stereo unit, or monoblocs, where the circuitry for each channel is housed separately. Don't judge a power amp by its output level.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Type	Power (w)	Phono in	XLR in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Weight (kg)
Up to £5000										
Audiolab 8200MB	1900	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Hefty, but a bit of a blunt instrument	Mono	250	1	1	15x22x38	9
ATC P1	1566	12.09/FT	★★★★★	A matchless power amp when paired with the CA-2 preamp	Stereo	150	1	1	14x44x35	26
Bryston 2B SST	2925	08.06/FT	★★★★★	Big, strong and very powerful	Stereo	100	1	0	49x13x41	14
Chord Electronics Maxx	990	05.11/FT	★★★★★	This could be a sign of hi-fi to come	Stereo	20	1	0	7x16x4	0.4
Chord Electronics SPM 1050	3990	10.07/FT	★★★★★	Very fast and punchy, exciting and stable sound	Stereo	200	2	2	13x42x36	15
Cyrus Mono X300 Signature	2750	10.13/FT	★★★★★	A deceptively compact monobloc that surpasses the Mono X300	Mono	225	1	1	8x22x37	6.5
Heed Audio Obelisk ps	1350	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Engaging and a pleasure to listen to, even if it's not the classiest in terms of finish	Stereo	50	1	0	9x22x33	6
NAD C275BEE	820	08.10/FT	★★★★★	A great power amp, best matched with the C165BEE preamp	Stereo	150	1	0	13x44x35	15
Naim NAP 155 XS	1115	02.10/GT	★★★★★	It's a good performer, but not the last word in dynamics	Stereo	60	0	0	7x43x30	7.5
Naim NAP 250	3050	11.08/FT	★★★★★	Paired with the NAC252 preamp it's magical	Stereo	80	0	0	9x43x32	16
Quad QSP	1200	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Needs to be auditioned - a confident listen	Stereo	140	2	0	15x33x27	14
£5000 and above										
Atlas Stereo Signature	10000	04.15/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest power amps we've heard. An absolute beast	Stereo	200	2	2	22x46x48	32
Audio Research Reference 75	8495	03.13/FT	★★★★★	A fabulous power amp, match it with care and you'll have sonic magic	Stereo	75	0	1	22x48x50	21
Burmester 911 Mk3	32800	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Awesome price, awesome bit of kit	Stereo	535	0	1	22x48x48	31
Chord SPM 14000 MkII	24480	01.13/FT	★★★★★	An awe-inspiring monobloc, yet not quite as sonically rounded as we'd like	Mono	700	1	1	31x48x69	75
GamuT D200i	9300	01.15/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest power amplifiers we've heard	Stereo	220	1	1	16x43x47	34
Krell Evolution 402e	18500	11.12/FT	★★★★★	The Evolution 402e is world-class. It isn't cheap, but quality such as this never is	Stereo	400	1	1	25x44x56	61
Lavardin AP150	7686	12.10/FT	★★★★★	For sound quality and musical enjoyment, the C62 with the AP150 is hard to beat	Stereo	50	1	0	14x43x31	12
Quad II eighty	6000	06.13/FT	★★★★★	A capable monobloc amp that should be considered	Mono	80	1	0	21x43x18	57



iPod docks

Docks with power _____ These are ready-made systems for your iPod and usually include speakers
Docks without power _____ These integrate an iPod into an existing system as a line level source

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	Docktype	Aux	Power (w)	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500									
B&W Z2	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	18x32x10
Epoz Aktimate Micro	260	09.13/GT	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	24x15x20
Epoz AktiMate Mini	350	07.12/GT	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	30x19x21
Epoz AktiMate Mini+	360	08.13/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	40	30x19x21
Gear4 AirZone Series 1	200	04.12/ST	★★★★★	●		iOS	●	n/a	18x33x19
JBL OnBeat Venue LT	200	03.13/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	30	13x42x14
Klipsch iGroove HG WWI	110	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	30	14x40x16
KitSound Boom Dock	100	12.10/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	15x42x28
Logitech S715i	80	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	20	6x39x13
Logitech UE Air Speaker	300	06.12/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	n/a	17x53x15
Orbitsound T12v3	299	12.11/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	180	10x61x11
Philips Fidelio Primo DS9	300	09.11/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	50	18x51x21
Pure Digital Contour 100Di	100	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	20	18x31x15
Pure Digital Contour 200i Air	200	09.12/FT	★★★★★	●		iOS	●	36	23x37x18
Revo K2	300	02.12/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	33x11x11
Ruark Audio R2i	280	09.09/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	20	12x34x18.5
£500 and above									
B&W Zeppelin Air	500	12.11/ST	★★★★★	●		iOS	●	150	17x54x21
Geneva Lab Model M	550	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	50	20x37x25
Loewe AirSpeaker	500	01.13/FT	★★★★★	●		iOS	●	4x20	13x24x24
Marantz Consolette	700	05.13/FT	★★★★★	●		iOS	●	150	26x54x21
Philips Fidelio SS DS9800	700	05.12/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	100	22x27x9



Wireless speakers

Bluetooth _____ Universal wireless system that's incorporated into most sources
AirPlay _____ Apple's accepted wireless system; works over your home network

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Monitor Audio Airstream S200

Awards 2014: Best Wireless speaker £150-£300



AWARD WINNER

Dali Kubik Free

Awards 2014: Best Wireless speaker £500-£750



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Naim Mu-so

Awards 2014: Best Wireless speaker £750+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	Aux	Charging	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £300									
Bayan Audio SoundBook	150	01.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	9x16x4
Bose SoundLink Mini	170	01.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	5x18x6
Cambridge Audio Bluetone 100	200	10.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●			118x35x12
Cambridge Audio Minx Air 100	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★	●	●	●			18x35x12
Cambridge Audio Go	120	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	24x12x6
Cambridge Audio Minx Go	100	08.13/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	23x24x6

WIRELESS SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		AirPlay	Bluetooth	Aux	Charging	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Denon Envaya DSB200	170	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Overcooked bass aside, this is one of most powerful sounding portable speakers we've heard			●	●	●	14x26x5
Harman/Kardon Go+Play	280	05.13/FT	★★★★★	These wireless active speakers deliver good sound	●	●	●	●	●	24x50x23
Jawbone Big Jambox	260	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Great for bass and sound, lacks a little finesse though	●	●	●	●	●	9x26x8
iLuv MobiOut	70	05.13/GT	★★★★★	A small unit that boasts a likable sound	●	●	●	●	●	0x0x0
JBL Charge	120	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A punchy and energetic sound is let down by some coarse and harsh treble	●	●	●	●	●	18x7x7
JBL Flip	100	05.13/GT	★★★★★	A great value bluetooth speaker	●	●	●	●	●	0x0x0
JBL Flip 2	100	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Good performer for the money, but has issues with volume and battery life	●	●	●	●	●	6.5x16x16
JBL OnBeat Rumble	230	10.14/GT	★★★★★	A chunky, fun unit that's starting to sound a little unrefined against more recent competition	●	●	●	●	●	17x45x22
Loewe Speaker 2go	200	02.15/ST	★★★★★	Lots of power to go with its enthusiasm, but gives up a little clarity and insight to its rivals	●	●	●	●	●	11x24x5
Logitech UE Mobile Boombox	75	05.13/GT	★★★★★	Limited functionality but a good choice for portable users	●	●	●	●	●	6x7x11
Monitor Audio Airstream S200	200	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £150-£300, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●	●	27x12x14
Monitor Audio Airstream S300	250	10.14/GT	★★★★★	It only supports iOS devices but this speaker sounds fantastic	●	●	●	●	●	15x47x15
Monitor Audio Airstream WS100	250	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Cracking speakers. A desktop force to be reckoned with			●			13x12x12
Panasonic SC-NA10	130	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A speaker that oozes class and subtlety. Watch out for the cabinet vibrations, though	●	●	●	●	●	10x20x3
Philips BT3500B	70	03.15/GT	★★★★★	An affordable wireless speaker with excellent sound quality	●	●	●	●	●	10x20x4
Pure Jongo S3	170	06.13/FT	★★★★★	Great sound and easy portability make this a real gem	●	●	●	●	●	13x13x14
Pure Voca	65	03.15/GT	★★★★★	An attractive design is marred by some uncontrolled bass	●	●	●	●	●	7x19x5.5
Roberts Travel Pad	80	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Fine sound and a well-designed package make this a good travel companion	●	●	●	●	●	8x19x2.5
Roth Oli POWA-5	250	06.14/ST	★★★★★	Updated and better than before but rivals still have in edge in terms of sound	●	●	●	●	●	27x18x21
Samsung M5	230	10.14/FT	★★★★★	A talented speaker with a clean, open and fun sound	●	●	●	●	●	14x34x17
Sonos Play:1	170	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Another strong addition to the Award-winning Sonos multi-room family	●	●	●	●	●	16x12x12
Sony RDP-XA700	285	03.13/GT	★★★★★	With a bit more definition and a bit less bass this could have been the speaker for us	●	●	●	●	●	18x40x16
Sony SRS-X3	130	07.14/GT	★★★★★	A hugely confident performer but its tonal balance won't be for everyone	●	●	●	●	●	7x19x7
Sony SRS-BTM8	85	05.13/GT	★★★★★	Classy, cleverly designed speaker that can handle large volumes.	●	●	●	●	●	19x25x9
Ultimate Ears Boom	170	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Loads of fun to listen to, the Boom is exciting, attractive and packed with features to boot	●	●	●	●	●	16x6.5x6.5
Ultimate Ears Megaboom	250	04.15/FT	★★★★★	Full of energy and a polished entertainer, the Megaboom shake (shakes) the room	●	●	●	●	●	n/a
£300 and above										
Audio Pro Allroom Air One	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £400+, Awards 2013	●	●	●	●	●	20x31x19
Bang & Olufsen BeoPlay A2	300	02.15/ST	★★★★★	Not perfect, but its spacious sound, battery life and stylish design are worthy of a look	●	●	●	●	●	14x26x4
Bluesound multi-room system	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Best multi-room system £500+, Awards 2014. Product of the Year			●		●	n/a
B&WA5	400	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Not the loudest but delivers a potent, punchy sound	●	●	●	●	●	18x30x20
B&WA7	700	12.12/FT	★★★★★	If you use AirPlay, the A7 demands your attention	●	●	●	●	●	22x36x16
B&WT7	300	02.15/ST	★★★★★	B&W's first Bluetooth speaker is a resounding success	●	●	●	●	●	11x21x5
Bose SoundLink Air	300	12.12/GT	★★★★★	Not the last word in power or dynamics, but a tidy little package	●	●	●	●	●	17x31x10
Cabasse Stream 1	500	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Mediocre software lets this very enjoyable speaker down	●	●	●	●	●	14x46x33
Cambridge Audio Minx Air 200	430	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Majors in excitement, detail and power – a real entertainer	●	●	●	●	●	45x22x17
Dali Kubik Free	645	03.14/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £500-£750, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●	●	31x15x15
Eclipse TD-M1	1000	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Great stereo imaging, but we'd like more refinement to go with it	●	●	●	●	●	24x16x22
Geneva Model M Wireless	500	08.14/GT	★★★★★	If you're after Bluetooth and radio features, then this would be a good choice	●	●	●	●	●	22x30x18
Geneva Model S Wireless DAB+	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £300-£500, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●	●	15x14x18
Libratone Zipp	370	10.13/ST	★★★★★	Stylish, portable and fully-featured. Libratone hits the jackpot with the Zipp	●	●	●	●	●	26x12x12
Libratone Zipp BT	300	02.15/ST	★★★★★	A wireless speaker that's lovely to listen to	●	●	●	●	●	26x12x12
Libratone Loop	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★	An enjoyable-sounding speaker with some unique looks	●	●	●	●	●	33x33x8
Loewe AirSpeaker	500	03.13/GT	★★★★★	Fussy set up issues aside, this is one incredibly capable speaker	●	●	●	●	●	24x13x24
Naim Mu-so	895	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £750+, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	●	●	●	●	12x63x26
NAD Viso 1 AP	500	08.14/GT	★★★★★	A strong, rounded package that thoroughly deserves your attention	●	●	●	●	●	26x48x30
Nocs NS2 v2	300	02.15/FT	★★★★★	Versatile and fun desktop speakers	●	●	●	●	●	16x11x14
Philips Fidelio E2	300	06.14/ST	★★★★★	Classy, versatile speakers but you'll need some room to accommodate them	●	●	●	●	●	30.5x16x16
Pioneer XW-SMA4	350	12.12/GT	★★★★★	Bags of features, solid build and smart design – just watch that bass	●	●	●	●	●	21x36x17
Pure Jongo S3 (pair)	340	06.14/ST	★★★★★	A tad disappointing as a pair; rivals offer a more insightful performance	●	●	●	●	●	13x13x14
Pure Jongo System	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Not the ultimate word in sound quality, but it wins us over with its peppy character	●	●	●	●	●	n/a
Samsung M7	330	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Overly fussy in terms of setting up, the M7 is a comfortable performer nonetheless	●	●	●	●	●	14x40x19
Samsung Shape Audio System	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Lacks a consistent sound across the range but a good first effort nonetheless	●	●	●	●	●	n/a
Simple Audio Roomplayer+	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	A worthy contender but there are cheaper, more impressive options out there	●	●	●	●	●	n/a
Sonos System	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Best multi-room system £500+, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●	●	n/a
Sony SRS-X9	600	06.14/FT	★★★★★	A do-it-all speaker with superb sound quality	●	●	●	●	●	13x43x13
Tangent Classic	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★	A speaker with a big sound and plenty of bass	●	●	●	●	●	23x60x32

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Headphones

Ear tips _____ Most in-ears come with these. Experiment with size to get the best fit
In-line remote _____ Mostly for Apple devices, but Android-friendly units are increasing. Handy...

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
SoundMagic E10S

Awards 2014: Best in-ears up to £50
 "The SoundMagic E10Ses punch well above their weight in terms of sound quality."



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Sony MDR-EX650AP

Awards 2014: Best in-ears £50-£100
 "They'll happily turn their hand to just about anything, effortlessly finding that balance between the details and the overall flow."



AWARD WINNER
Shure SE425

Awards 2014: Best in-ears £150-£300
 "The SE425s sound fun, absorbing, classy, polished and captivating."

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight (g)
Up to £70									
AKG K323XSi	50	08.14/FT	★★★★★	As good as you can reasonably expect at this price range	●	Closed			n/a
AKG K451	50	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears up to £100, Awards 2013	●	Closed			120
Audio Technica ATH-CKS55i	45	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Big on bass, these cans are no shrinking violets	●	Closed			6
Audio Technica ATH-T400	50	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Nicely balanced pair that just lack the wow factor of the class leaders	●	Closed			260
Apple EarPods	25	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A big upgrade of Apple's original earbuds, but there are better rivals	●	Open			10
Beyerdynamic DTX101iE	65	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £40-£80, Awards 2013	●	Closed			11
Beyerdynamic DTX 501 p	60	03.15/GT	★★★★★	A superb performance that's let down by an indifferent build quality	●	Closed			120
Beyerdynamic DTX71iE	54	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Detailed and with supreme tone control	●	Closed			11
Etymotic Research MC5	57	01.12/GT	★★★★★	A likeable sound for the money	●	Closed	●		17
Grado iGrado	49	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Fabulous iPod upgrade: these are unbeatable at the price	●	Open			85
Jays a-Jays Four	50	12.11/FT	★★★★★	The Jays combine looks and performance to alluring effect	●	Closed			14
JVC HA-ETR40	35	02.15/GT	★★★★★	An affordable in-ear that nails both comfort and sound	●	Closed			6.6
Ministry of Sound MOS003	30	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Tidy, well balanced and nicely made	●	Closed			15
Mix-Style inner headphones	30	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Punchy, controlled and balanced	●	Closed			13.5
Monster iSport Strive	50	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Stylish, sporty-looking buds with a fine sound	●	Closed			47
Panasonic RP-HTX7	35	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears up to £50, Awards 2012	●	Closed			153
Philips CitiScape Downtown	55	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Fun, stylish and great to use on an everyday basis	●	Closed			174
RHA MA-350	30	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Nicely made from quality materials, with impressive sound to match	●	Closed			48
Sennheiser CX 300-II	30	09.10/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ear headphones up to £50, Awards 2010	●	Closed			4
Sennheiser CX281	35	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Enjoyable enough, but a touch quiet	●	Closed			16
Sennheiser CX495	35	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A brilliant upgrade bargain	●	Closed			4
Sennheiser HD 202	26	02.11/FT	★★★★★	Great sound for the money and a bargain buy	●	Closed			130
Sennheiser HD 218	40	11.09/FT	★★★★★	For closed-back cans, the Sennheisers are very good – but not the best	●	Closed			224
Sennheiser MM 70i	50	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Nice features for the money	●	Closed			12
Sennheiser PMX 685i Sports	45	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Modest looking in-ears but they have it where it counts despite the poor remote	●	Closed			18
Sennheiser PX100-II	40	11.10/FT	★★★★★	An improvement over the previous model, very good open-backed cans	●	Open			80
Slick Distributions SD50	30	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Features and price make it easy to forgive minor sonic flaws	●	Closed	●		71
Sol Republic Relays	60	02.15/GT	★★★★★	A satisfying, fuss-free pair of in-ears	●	Closed			13.4
SoundMagic E10	35	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears up to £40, Awards 2013	●	Closed			11
SoundMagic E10S	40	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears up to £50, Awards 2014	●	Closed			11
SoundMagic PL30	30	01.10/GT	★★★★★	Great headphones that are held back by better value rivals	●	Closed			10
SoundMagic PL50	50	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Comfy and smooth-sounding; great all-rounders	●	Closed			8
Sony MDR-EX650AP	60	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £50-£100, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	Closed			9
Soul Electronics Flex	50	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Performance surpasses expectations at this price, a great buy for fitness bods	●	Closed			18
£70 and above									
AKG K3003i	1000	04.12/FT	★★★★★	The best, and priciest, in-ears we've seen	●	Closed			10
AKG K545	210	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Built to last but lacks refinement and likeability	●	Closed			280
AKG K550	99	02.12/ST	★★★★★	Best home on-ears up to £150, Awards 2014	●	Closed			305

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HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	In-ear On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight (g)
£70 and above								
AKG K551	230	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Smashing all-rounders that really sing	●	Closed		305
AKG K812	1100	10.14/FT	★★★★★	It needs a top-class system to shine but these cans sound heavenly. Highly recommended	●	Open		390
AKG K845BT	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★	If you like your music clear and uncoloured, then these AKGs are definitely worth a listen	●	Closed	●	292
AKG Y845BT	110	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Both portable and comfortable, these cans could do with a bit of subtlety and refinement	●	Closed	●	150
AKG Q701	250	09.14/ST	★★★★★	A great, solid sounding set of cans. Comfy, too	●	Open		235
AKG Q460	140	02.11/GT	★★★★★	More pros than cons, but still not complete	●	Closed		120
AKG Y50	80	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears up to £100, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	Closed		190
Audeze LCD-3	1725	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Very expensive, but there's little to complain about here. Even with that price	●	Open		548
Audio Technica ATH-AD700X	190	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Huge headphones that offer an airy, open sound	●	Open		265
Audio Technica ATH-A900X LTD	390	09.14/ST	★★★★★	Remarkably clear and spacious sounding pair of headphones	●	Open		340
Audio Technica ATH-CKX9iS	75	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Easy on the ears and very comfortable, but they need a bit more refinement to be great	●	Closed		10
Audio Technica ATH-ES88	230	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Appealingly eccentric cans	●	Closed		130
Audio Technica ATH-M50	130	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Immersive and refined: a great effort	●	Closed		284
Audio Technica ATH-M50x	130	12.14/GT	★★★★★	They sound a little warm but these are fine headphones nonetheless	●	Closed		285
Audio Technica ATH-W1000X	650	07.10/FT	★★★★★	Best home on-ear headphones £500-£800, Awards 2010	●	Closed		350
Audio Technica ATH-WS55i	89	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	An excellent pair of on-ears for the bass-loving iPhone-owner	●	Closed		165
Bang & Olufsen BeoPlay H2	170	05.15/JGT	★★★★★	A stylish pair of on-ears that combines impressive build quality with accessible sound	●	Closed		150
Beats Studio 2.0	270	04.15/GT	★★★★★	Eschewing detail for a smooth sound, these Beats are nevertheless exciting to listen to	●	Closed	●	260
Beyerdynamic DTX102iE	75	08.14/FT	★★★★★	There's little to fault with a pair of in-ears that demand to be listened to	●	Closed		11
Beyerdynamic DX160 iE	86	11.14/GT	★★★★★	A strong performer from Beyerdynamic with a smooth, weighty sound	●	Closed		32
Beyerdynamic Custom One Pro	170	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Accomplished and easy to listen to. We like them	●	Closed		290
Beyerdynamic DT880	200	06.09/GT	★★★★★	Comfortable and the sound is impressive	●	Open	●	340
Beyerdynamic DT990 Premium	290	09.14/ST	★★★★★	Impressive, if a little lacking in dynamics	●	Open		290
Beyerdynamic MMX 101iE	95	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £80-£150, Awards 2013	●	Closed	●	11
Beyerdynamic T1	880	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Best home on-ear headphones £800+, Awards 2010	●	Closed		350
Beyerdynamic T50P	230	02.12/ST	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears £200+, Awards 2012	●	Closed		174
Beyerdynamic T51i	245	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears £200-£300, Awards 2014	●	Closed		174
Beyerdynamic T51P	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A fine replacement for the T50ps, superbly entertaining	●	Closed		174
Beyerdynamic T70	456	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Undeniably capable, but don't quite feel worth the money	●	Closed		330
Bose AE2w	200	02.14/GT	★★★★★	No aptX Bluetooth onboard, but still a very listenable pair of cans	●	Closed	●	150
Bose MIE2i	120	09.11/ST	★★★★★	A perfect headphone meets microphone solution	●	Closed		19
Bose QuietComfort 15	280	04.12/GT	★★★★★	Best noise-cancelling headphones, Awards 2013	●	Closed	●	227
Bose QuietComfort 25	270	04.15/GT	★★★★★	Best noise-cancelling headphones, Awards 2014	●	Closed	●	195
Bose Soundlink On-ear	220	01.15/GT	★★★★★	A talented pair of Bluetooth cans with impressive battery life	●	Closed	●	153
B&W P3	170	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Stylish and sonically talented on-ear headphones	●	Closed		130
B&W P5	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	They look fantastic and sound just as good	●	Closed		195
B&W P5 Series 2	250	02.15/FT	★★★★★	Gorgeous looks and a stunning sound, these are a great upgrade on the P5s	●	Closed		195
B&W P7	330	09.14/ST	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears, Awards 2013	●	Closed		290
Denon AH-D600	200	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Open and spacious. A crisper presentation would make this a five-star product	●	Closed		365
Etymotic Research HF2	180	08.09/FT	★★★★★	The same money buys punchier cans, but not ones that fit as well	●	Closed		26
Focal Spirit Classic	250	09.14/ST	★★★★★	Needs more 'oomph' to challenge the best	●	Closed		310
Focal Spirit One	200	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Refined enough, but not the most exciting	●	Closed		225

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HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight (g)
Focal Spirit One S	225	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Need a bit more clarity and sparkle to go with its lovely, balanced sound	●		Closed			180
German Maestro GMP 8.35 D	150	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Virtually indestructible sonic goodness	●		Closed			220
Goldring NS-1000	100	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Sweet, powerful sounding noise-cancellers	●		Closed	●		183
Grado GR8	300	04.10/GT	★★★★★	Precisely detailed and balanced, but they lack a certain richness	●		Open			9
Grado GS1000i	1000	10.09/GT	★★★★★	For sheer, sonic pleasure these cans are stunning	●		Open			312
Grado PS1000	1700	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Undoubtedly one of the finest headphones money can buy	●		Open			500
Grado SR125e	150	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Open, spacious and sturdy. Great performance for the money	●		Open			363
Grado SR325e	300	09.14/ST	★★★★★	Best home on-ears £150-£300, Awards 2014	●		Open			330
Grado SR325is	300	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Best home on-ear headphones £150+ Awards 2011	●		Open			330
Grado SR60i	80	02.10/GT	★★★★★	Hugely accomplished and built to last too	●		Closed			125
Grado SR80i	100	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home on-ear headphones up to £150, Awards 2013	●		Open			200
Grado iGi	90	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Classy and compact buds	●		Closed			12
Harman/Kardon CL	170	09.12/FT	★★★★★	An impressive headphone debut for Harman/Kardon	●		Closed			195
KEF M200	150	10.13/FT	★★★★★	They don't quite set the market alight, but they are worth an audition	●		Closed			12
KEF M500	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A smooth and refined effort from KEF. Needs a touch more excitement	●		Closed			208
Klipsch Image One	140	05.11/GT	★★★★★	Perfect for those who enjoy a lot of bass	●		Closed			138
Klipsch Image X7i	170	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Klipsch has gone for energy and warmth with the X7is, and it's an addictive combo	●		Closed			16
Klipsch Mode M40	290	02.13/FT	★★★★★	Klipsch's first noise-cancelling headphones are excellent performers	●		Closed	●		356
Klipsch X11i	200	11.14/GT	★★★★★	If you are serious about portables then these in-ears need to be on your shortlist	●		Closed			10
Logitech UE 9000	300	03.13/GT	★★★★★	Could be more refined, but make up for this with bundles of energy			Closed	●	●	378
Lindy Premium Headphones	75	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Ideal for those unwilling to break the £100 barrier	●		Closed			225
Martin Logan Mikros 70	150	04.13/GT	★★★★★	If you like your music to be presented with a matter-of-fact approach, these are just the job	●		Closed			13
Monster Beats Pro by Dre	350	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Brilliant at what they do well	●		Closed			299
NAD Viso HP50	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A promising pair of cans from NAD, but the design lets them down	●		Open			453
NAD Viso HP20	130	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Timing could be tighter but these in-ears are an easy listen	●		Closed			n/a
Nocs NS400 Titanium	80	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Still great, but there's better for the money	●		Closed			12
Onkyo ES-HF300	180	10.13/GT	★★★★★	A pleasant listen, laid-back and amiable	●		Closed			240
Oppo PM-1	1100	07.14/FT	★★★★★	Oppo's first pair of headphones are a resounding success	●		Open			395
Panasonic RP-HC101	82	04.12/GT	★★★★★	Nice enough sound but average noise cancelling	●		Closed	●		79
Parrot Zik	300	07.13/FT	★★★★★	High-tech headphones that deliver a good performance	●		Closed	●	●	352
Phonak Audeo PFE 022	80	03.11/GT	★★★★★	Pacey, detailed, insightful and recommended	●		Closed	●		14
Phiaton MS300	150	02.12/ST	★★★★★	These over ears deserve careful consideration	●		Closed			140
Philips Fidelio L1	230	05.12/FT	★★★★★	Easy going and comfortable	●		Closed			272
Philips Fidelio M1	125	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears £100-£200, Awards 2013	●		Closed			166
Philips Fidelio M1MKII	180	05.15/GT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears £100-£200, Awards 2014	●		Closed			166
Philips Fidelio M1BT	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best wireless headphones, Awards 2013	●		Closed	●		500
Philips Fidelio M2BT	185	01.15/GT	★★★★★	Best wireless headphones, Awards 2014	●		Closed	●		190
Philips Fidelio S1	70	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Smart and non-invasive earphones. We quite like them	●		Closed			14
Philips Fidelio X1	200	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Another great set of headphones from Philips	●		Open			430
Polk Ultrafocus 8000	260	04.15/GT	★★★★★	An exciting listen, but one that's a little short on refinement and balance	●		Closed	●		340
PSB M4U1	219	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Better than the M4U2? Close but no cigar	●		Closed			340
PSB M4U2	250	04.15/GT	★★★★★	PSB's first pair of headphones make a superb travel companion. Highly recommended	●		Closed	●		362
Sennheiser CX880i	90	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Great sounding in-ears, although there's a hard edge	●		Closed			11
Sennheiser HD 380 Pro	110	02.10/GT	★★★★★	Still seriously good headphones, but rivals have caught up	●		Closed			220
Sennheiser HD25-1 II Adidas	190	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Stylishly excellent all-rounders	●		Closed			140
Sennheiser HD 558	130	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Other headphones are more skilled but these cans have a silky smooth sound	●		Open			260
Sennheiser HD 598	190	02.12/ST	★★★★★	Too well-mannered for our tastes	●		Open			270
Sennheiser IE 8i	260	03.11/GT	★★★★★	Enjoyable enough, but need a better tonal balance	●		Closed			18
Sennheiser IE 80	270	02.11/FT	★★★★★	Expensive, but a truly quality option	●		Closed			5
Sennheiser IE 800	600	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £300+, Awards 2014	●		Closed			8
Sennheiser MM 400-X	150	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Best wireless headphones, Awards 2012	●		Closed	●		105
Sennheiser MM 70s	70	01.14/GT	★★★★★	An unassuming pair of earphones that are never less than engaging	●		Closed			13
Sennheiser Momentum	260	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears £200-300, Awards 2013	●		Closed			190
Sennheiser Momentum M2 IEi	90	02.15/FT	★★★★★	Easily one of best in-ear buds we've heard this year	●		Closed			16
Sennheiser Momentum On-ears	170	10.13/GT	★★★★★	A comfortable pair of cans, just lacking a little presence in the mid-range	●		Closed			160
Sennheiser Mom. 2.0 Wireless	380	05.15/FT	★★★★★	Whether you're using a wired or wireless connection, these headphones offer great performance	●		Closed	●	●	260
Sennheiser RS 160	115	05.10/GT	★★★★★	An exciting, affordable option but tiring over longer periods	●		Closed	●		226
Sennheiser RS 180	185	05.10/GT	★★★★★	These comfortable, wireless headphones justify their premium price	●		Open	●		204
Sennheiser Urbanite	150	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Stylish but not quite as expressive when it comes to sound	●		Open			260
Sennheiser Urbanite XL	200	05.15/GT	★★★★★	XL in terms of size, their relaxed, unfussy approach to sound makes for a good option	●		Closed			313
Sennheiser X 320	70	10.12/ST	★★★★★	The best Xbox gaming headphones we've heard so far	●		Closed			280

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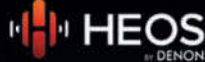
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Headphones/Earphones

Over-ear Stereo Headphones
Sennheiser Momentum M2

WHAT IF IT? ★★★★★

OUR PRICE:
£269.95

WIRELESS VERSION
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Headphones
AKG K451

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OUR PRICE:
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by QED

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- 3m: £74.95



HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	In-ear On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Weight (g)
£70 and above							
Shure SE425	200	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £150-£300, Awards 2014	●	Closed	32
Shure SE846	950	06.14/FT	★★★★★	The most capable in-ears we've heard	●	Closed	36
Shure SRH1540	430	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Best home on-ears £300+, Awards 2014	●	Closed	286
Shure SRH1840	500	06.12/FT	★★★★★	Not cheap, but worth every penny	●	Open	268
Sony MDR-1R	210	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Detailed and airy, but need more kick	●	Closed	240
Sony MDR-1A	170	05.15/GT	★★★★★	A few niggles aside, these stylish and comfy cans bear up to closer inspection	●	Closed	225
Sony XBA-2iP	130	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £120-£200, Awards 2012	●	Closed	6
SoundMagic HP100	150	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Sparkling detail, spacious character	●	Closed	228
Thinksound ts02+mic	90	02.13/FT	★★★★★	Eco-friendly buds provide a clear sound and a clearer conscience	●	Closed	10
Ultrasone HFI-580	125	11.10/GT	★★★★★	Not class-leading, but still worthy of consideration	●	Closed	285
Ultrasone HFI-780	160	02.12/ST	★★★★★	Big and bold, and offer excitement in spades	●	Open	285
V-moda Crossfade M-80	160	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Good-looking and great fun, with lots of bass	●	Closed	200
V-moda Remix Remote	70	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Smooth and enjoyable sounding buds	●	Closed	17



Stereo systems

This category includes a wide range of products including all-in-one packages where the speakers are part of the system, through to micro systems where the electronics are housed separately from the speakers. A streaming option is available on many newer systems.

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
Denon D-M39DAB

Awards 2014: Best music system up to £400



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Cambridge Audio Minx Xi

Awards 2014: Best music system £400-£800



AWARD WINNER
Cyrus Lyric 09

Awards 2014: Best music system £1500+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	CD	Streaming	Internet Radio	DAB	FM	Analogue inputs	Digital inputs	Headphone out
Up to £500											
Denon CEOL Piccolo	260	03.13/FT	★★★★★	No matter what the source, the CEOL Piccolo will play all your music in superb style	●	●			●	●	
Denon CEOL RCD-N8	350	02.14/FT	★★★★★	An attractive option if you're looking for a compact system that does a bit of everything	●	●	●		●	●	●
Denon D-M39DAB	310	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Best music system up to £400, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Onkyo CR-N755	300	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best networked micro system, Awards 2012	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Panasonic SC-PMX9DB	450	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Well-featured but its laid-back sound makes it a solid buy	●	●		●	●	●	●
Pioneer X-HM70	350	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Not flawless, but gets much right	●		●	●	●	●	●
Yamaha MCR-232	300	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Harsh treble docks it a star but it's an impressively compact micro system	●		●	●	●	●	●
Yamaha R-N500	350	03.15/FT	★★★★★	Stacked with features, the R-N500 is good value for money	●		●	●	●	●	●

£500 and above

Cabasse Stream3	850	07.13/FT	★★★★★	Hardware is great but the app needs developing	●	●	●		●	●	
Cambridge Audio Minx Xi	600	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £400-£800, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	●				●	●
Cyrus Lyric 09	3000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £1500+, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
HRT Stage	1200	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Limited inputs and a low-rent feel, but judged on sound alone and it's fantastic						●	
Linn Akurate Exakt/Akudorik	17500	03.15/FT	★★★★★	A highly capable package in which the Akudorik speakers excel		●	●		●	●	●
Linn Majik DSM	2965	02.13/FT	★★★★★	A thoughtfully designed system and a pleasure to use	●	●	●		●	●	●
Marantz M-CR610	435	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £400-£800, Awards 2013	●		●	●	●	●	●
McIntosh MXA70	5995	02.15/FT	★★★★★	An expensive but desirable system					●	●	●
Pioneer P1DAB	550	07.13/FT	★★★★★	Great sound for a sensible price	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Ruark Audio R4i	599	07.11/FT	★★★★★	Best all-in-one music system, Awards 2012	●	●	●	●			●
SonoroSTEREO	500	06.15/FT	★★★★★	A steady, laudable attempt at an all-in-one solution	●	●	●	●			
Sony CMT-G2BNiP	500	04.12/FT	★★★★★	A solid performer in every respect	●	●	●	●	●		●
TEACCR-H700DAB	550	10.11/GT	★★★★★	Great - but not a total all-rounder	●	●	●	●	●		●



Surround systems

This category includes a wide variety of systems. Most include a disc drive and now tend to feature video and music streaming capabilities. The speakers supplied tend to either be small satellite designs, or towers that usually provide greater scale and sonic authority.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Blu-ray	3D Blu-ray	DVD	Streaming	Optical in	HDMI in	Channels
Up to £500										
Panasonic SC-BTT460	350	06.13/FT	★★★★★	No HDMI inputs but still a cracking system	●	●	●	1	0	5.1
Philips HTS5563	400	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A super budget solution	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
Pioneer BCS-SC626	400	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Great features, with tough competition	●	●	●	2	2	2.1
Q Acoustics Q-TV2	150	11.09/FT	★★★★★	A great way of boosting poor sound on your TV				1	0	2.1
Samsung HT-E5530	450	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Plenty of bang for your bucks	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
£500-£1000										
Harman-Kardon BDS-570	750	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Compact and ultimately convenient	●	●	●	2	3	5.1
LG BH8220B	600	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A bit pricey, but a good performer	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
LG BH9520TW	600	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Packed with features but a little pricey	●	●	●	1	2	9.1
Panasonic SC-BTT590	500	08.12/GT	★★★★★	An excellent all-in-one Blu-ray system	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
Sony BDV-N7100W	600	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Best cinema system, Awards 2013	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
Sony BDV-N5200W	500	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best cinema system, Awards 2014	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
£1000 and above										
Harman-Kardon BDS 477	1100	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A jack of all trades that's pretty good	●	●	●	0	3	2.1



Soundbars & Soundbases

One-box speaker systems that include amplification, and are a great alternative to a full-on home cinema package if you don't have much space. Soundbases have emerged as alternatives in the market, a one-box unit that can sit beneath and support your television.

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Philips HTL5140

Awards 2014: Best soundbar up to £300



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Q Acoustics Media 4

Awards 2014: Best soundbar £300 to £600



AWARD WINNER

Yamaha YSP-2500

Awards 2014: Best soundbar £600+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Disc drive	Smart	Ext. subwoofer	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	RCA in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £2000											
Arcam Solo bar	800	03.15/FT	★★★★★	An ambitious soundbar that doesn't quite match the audio performance of its peers			4	1	1		13x100x11
Bose Solo 15 Soundstage	400	06.15/ST	★★★★★	A soundbase with a big, bold sound			0	1	1	●	8x63x36
Bowers & Wilkins Panorama 2	1650	09.13/GT	★★★★★	An improvement on the original	●		3	1	0		13x110x18
Cambridge Audio Minx TV	200	02.14/ST	★★★★★	A soundbase that delivers an exciting sound at a great price			0	1	0		8x43x38
Cambridge Audio TV2	200	06.15/ST	★★★★★	Best soundbase up to £300, Awards 2014			0	1	0	●	12x53x33
Cambridge Audio TV5	250	06.15/ST	★★★★★	A price reduction has made this soundbase an excellent budget buy			0	1	0	●	10x73x34
Canton DM 50	400	09.14/GT	★★★★★	With gorgeous sound and looks, the DM 50 justifies its price			0	1	1		6.5x54.5x30
Canton DM 75	450	06.15/ST	★★★★★	Best soundbase £300+, Awards 2014			0	1	1	●	7x73x32
Canton DM 90.2	1100	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Thunderous sound but needs a bit more refinement	●		0	2	2		15x90x30
Dali Kubik One	800	01.15/FT	★★★★★	Dali's first soundbar is another resounding success			0	2	0	●	15x98x10
Focal Dimension	800	01.15/ST	★★★★★	A bold move that pays off handsomely. Spectacular			1	1	0		12x116x12
Geneva Model Cinema	550	06.15/ST	★★★★★	Class and quality in spades; this is the best soundbase money can buy			0	1	1	●	10x70x35

SOUNDBARS & SOUNDBASES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Disc drive	Smart	Ext. subwoofer	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	RCA in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £2000											
JBL Cinema Base	300	01.15/FT	★★★★★	Delivers a good sound at an appealing price			0	1	0		10x60x40
Klipsch R-20B	700	02.15/FT	★★★★★	A good soundbar with a powerful sound. Rivals edge it out on balance and detail, though	●		0	1	0	●	10x102x7
Sony HT-XT1	230	06.15/ST	★★★★★	Lacks refinement but counters with a punchy sound			3	1	0		7x72x31
JBL Cinema SB200	200	03.14/ST	★★★★★	A very good single-bar solution to boost your TV sound			0	1	0		12x90x10
JBL Cinema SB 350	350	12.14/ST	★★★★★	Stiff competition prevents this immersive sounding soundbar from getting five stars	●		1	1	0		8x100x6
JBL Cinema SB400	450	06.13/ST	★★★★★	A good-looking, capable alternative to TV speakers	●		3	1	0		10x110x6
LG NB3520A	250	01.13/GT	★★★★★	Impressive quality and authority for a soundbar	●		0	2	0		8x100x5
LG NB3530A	190	03.14/ST	★★★★★	An admirable and attractive soundbar from LG, but it's up against fierce competition	●		0	2	0		71x95x50
LG NB4530A	300	06.13/ST	★★★★★	Best soundbar up to £400, Awards 2013	●		1	1	0		8x104x4
Libratone Diva	650	01.15/ST	★★★★★	Connection issues aside, this is a strong one-box system with streaming options aplenty	●		0	1	0		16x99x10
Maxell MXSP-SB3000	220	02.14/ST	★★★★★	An enjoyable performer with some impressive features			3	1	1		8x94x39
Monitor Audio ASB-2	800	01.15/ST	★★★★★	Still great but new competition takes its toll	●		3	1	1	●	101x19x17
Orbitsound M9	300	06.13/ST	★★★★★	Given its size, the M9 is an impressive performer	●		0	1	0		9x30x10
Philips HTL5120	250	03.14/ST	★★★★★	A stonking soundbar for only £250			2	1	0		15x101x8
Philips HTL5140	270	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbar up to £300, Awards 2014	●		1	1	0		5x105x7
Philips HTL9100	600	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbar £400-£800, Awards 2013	●		2	1	1		7x103x16
Pioneer SBX-N700	250	12.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented subwoofer with an exhaustive feature set. And now with a price cut	●	●	0	2	0		9x90x12
Polk Audio N1	200	12.14/GT	★★★★★	A sizeable soundbar with an appealing sound			0	1	1		10x99x11
Q Acoustics Media 4	400	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbar £300-£600, Awards 2014. Product of the Year			0	1	0	●	11x14x100
Samsung HW-H550	310	12.14/ST	★★★★★	A soundbar that combines decent design with good performance	●		1	1	0		6x94x6
Sandström S42SWLH13	150	03.14/ST	★★★★★	A great-looking soundbar with plenty of connections	●		2	1	0		11x90x5
Sonos Playbar	600	01.15/ST	★★★★★	An impressive soundbar that produces fantastic surround sound	●		0	1	0		9x90x14
Tannoy BaseStation One	350	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Tannoy's first soundbase may not be a class-leader, but it has a great sound			1	0		●	12x64x36
Toshiba SB3950M1	190	12.14/ST	★★★★★	Nails the basics of sound quality and user-friendliness	●		2	1	0	●	9x90x6
Yamaha SRT-1000	300	06.15/ST	★★★★★	There's a lot to like but the excitement levels could use a boost			0	2	1	●	8x78x37
Yamaha YAS-201	350	06.13/ST	★★★★★	A very good soundbar but not worthy of being a class-leader	●		3	2	1		14x43x35
Yamaha YSP-1400	400	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Brings big sound to a smaller budget			0	1	1	●	10x100x13
Yamaha YSP-2200	800	10.11/GT	★★★★★	Best soundbar, Awards 2012	●		3	2	1		9x89x12
Yamaha YSP-2500	800	01.15/ST	★★★★★	Best soundbar £600+, Awards 2014	●		1	2	1	●	7x94x14



Media servers

These have hard drives built in. Go for the largest storage possible as that leaves room for future expansion of your music and video library.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Hard drive capacity	HDMI out	Optical out	Coaxial out	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/kHz)	Video
Up to £3000														
Lacie Lacinema Classic HD	190	04.10/GT	★★★★★	As good as Apple TV, this needs to be auditioned	1TB	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	24/92	●
Microsoft Xbox 360 (250GB)	200	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Now an appealing media hub as well	250GB	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	16/48	●



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MEDIA SERVERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Hard drive capacity	HDMI out	Optical out	Coaxial out	HDMI in	Optical in	Coaxial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/kHz)	Video
Netgear EVA9000	190	04.10/GT	★★★★★	Needs better sound and Apple TV-like usability	500GB	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	24/92	●
Olive 4HD	2150	02.10/FT	★★★★★	This is 21st-century hi-fi at its best	2TB	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	24/192	●
Raumfeld 3Raumfeld	1680	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	A fabulous product to make Sonos sweat	160GB	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	24/96	●



Media streamers

These access the music or video files you have stored on your network. Check for file compatibility and decent control apps that improve usability.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	HDMI out	Optical out	Coaxial out	HDMI in	Optical in	Coaxial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/kHz)	Video
Up to £500													
Amazon Fire TV	80	01.15/FT	★★★★★	A great streaming media player... if you're an Amazon customer	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
Amazon Fire TV Stick	35	06.15/FT	★★★★★	Like the Fire TV this is a great streamer. Super speedy, too	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
Apple TV	80	03.15/GT	★★★★★	A limited but likeable streamer from Apple	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
Bluesound Node	400	05.15/GT	★★★★★	Best streamer up to £600, Awards 2014	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	24/192	●
Cabasse Stream Source	300	05.15/GT	★★★★★	A decent streamer at a more-than-fair price, but the competition in this area is fierce	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	24/96	●
Google Chromecast	30	03.15/GT	★★★★★	A neat and effective media streamer that's an absolute bargain	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
Now TV	10	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Still offers great value for money but rivals have the edge over it	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
Pure Jonga T2	130	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Cheaper than Sonos but comes with a few niggles	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
QED uPlay Stream	150	03.14/FT	★★★★★	A handy device that boasts decent sound and good features	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24/196	●
Roku 2 XS	100	06.12/GT	★★★★★	A family friendly streamer	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	16/48	●
Roku 3	100	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Expensive, but good features and speedy operation make this a winner	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	16/48	●
Roku Streaming Stick	40	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Not the smoothest streaming stick around, but Roku's effort is a great try	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
Sonos Play 3	259	12.11/ST	★★★★★	A cracking little performer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/44.1	●
Sonos Play 5	349	12.11/ST	★★★★★	An ideal one-box network player	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/44.1	●
£500-£1000													
Bluesound Powernode	600	10.14/FT	★★★★★	A superb way for hi-fi fans and audiophiles to get their high-res kicks	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24/192	●
Camb. Audio Stream Magic 6	700	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £600-£1000, Awards 2013	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	24/96	●
Camb. Audio Stream Magic 6 V2	700	05.15/GT	★★★★★	Best streamer £600-£1000, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	24/96	●
Pioneer N-50A	500	05.15/GT	★★★★★	The excellent N-50 again, this time better than ever	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	24/192	●
Rotel RT-09	650	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Does a lot but not all of it to the standard we'd like	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	24/192	●
£1000 and above													
Bryston BDP-1	2350	06.11/FT	★★★★★	A true hi-fi media player	0	1	1	0	1	0	3	24/192	●
Cyrus Stream Xa	1250	05.15/GT	★★★★★	Best streamer £1000 - £1500, Awards 2014	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	24/192	●
Cyrus Stream XP	2000	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best streamer £1000-£2500, Awards 2011	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	24/192	●
Cyrus Streamline	1600	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Best streaming system up to £2000, Awards 2011	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	24/192	●
Cyrus Stream XP2-Qx	2010	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best streaming system £1500+, Awards 2014	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	24/192	●
Linn Kiko	2500	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £1500+, Awards 2013	1	0	0	4	1	0	0	24/192	●
Linn Majik DS-I	2500	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Gives a glimpse of the music-streaming future	1	1	1	4	1	1	0	24/192	●
Naim NAC-N 172 XS	1650	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £1000-£2000, Awards 2013	0	2	0	0	2	2	1	24/192	●
Naim NDS XS	1950	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A thrillingly musical music streamer	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	24/192	●
Naim NDS/555PS	12620	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Engaging sound, bags of detail and many features	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	24/192	●
Naim NDX	2995	07.11/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £2500+, Awards 2011	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	24/192	●
Naim Uniti	2670	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best streaming system £2000+, Awards 2011	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	24/192	●
Naim Uniti 2	2795	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Uniti continues to lead the market at this price	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	24/192	●
Naim UnitiLite	1650	12.12/FT	★★★★★	UnitiLite hits the streaming sweet spot	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	24/192	●
Naim UnitiQute 2	1195	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £800-£1500, Awards 2014	0	0	1	0	2	2	1	32/192	●
Pioneer N-70A	1000	05.15/GT	★★★★★	A contender that delivers the goods but still comes up a bit short	0	1	1	0	1	1	3	32/384	●
Pixel Magic Lumin	5000	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A fine player that leads the field in terms of file compatibility	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	24/192	●
Sony HAP-Z1ES	2000	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A smartly designed, superb-sounding piece of hi-fi	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24/192	●

"How does the Naim NDX sound? In a word, excellent"

July 2011



Set-top boxes

Freeview	Large choice of digital TV channels via a rooftop aerial
Freesat	Much like Freeview, but takes signal from a satellite dish
Subscription	Services from Sky and Virgin give a vast array of premium content

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Freeview	Freesat	Sky	Virgin	YouView	Tuners	Hard drive capacity (GB)	HDMI out	Smart
Up to £500												
Humax DTR-T2000	200	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Best Freeview HD recorder, Awards 2014				●		2	500	1
Humax DTR-T1010 (500GB)	230	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best Freeview HD recorder, Awards 2013					●	2	500	1
Humax HD-FOXT2	100	07.10/GT	★★★★★	Best Freeview HD receiver, Awards 2011				●		1	n/a	1
Humax HDR-1000S (500GB)	220	01.13/FT	★★★★★	Best Freesat recorder, Awards 2013					●	2	500	1
Icecrypt T2400 (2TB)	330	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Loads of storage, but could do with more features				●		2	2TB	1
Samsung STB-E7500	270	09.12/FT	★★★★★	One of the best, most flexible, Freeview HD TV recorders				●		2	500	1
Sky+ HD 2TB	250	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best subscription service, Awards 2014. Product of the Year					●	2	1TB	1
Sony SVR-HDT1000	300	12.11/GT	★★★★★	One to appeal to the 'bigger is better' crowd				●		2	1TB	1
Virgin Media TiVo	200	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Best cable recorder, Awards 2011					●	3	1TB	1



Portable music players

A category of products that has been put under increasing pressure by the rise of the ubiquitous smartphone. At the most basic level it will be a standard music player that can be used in the gym. Higher-end machines will add video, internet browsing and apps as well.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Web browsing	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Up to £1000								
Acoustic Research M2	900	06.15/FT	★★★★★	5	720x1280	64		137x71x15
Astell & Kern AK100 MkII	700	04.14/GT	★★★★★	2.5	320x240	32		79x59x15
Apple iPod Nano 16GB (2012)	130	01.13/FT	★★★★★	2.5	240x240	16		77x40x5
Apple iPod Shuffle 2GB	40	12.11/GT	★★★★★	n/a	n/a	2		30x30x10
Apple iPod Touch 64GB (2012)	330	12.12/FT	★★★★★	4	1136x640	64	●	123x59x6
Cowon Z2	200	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	3.7	800x480	16	●	116x63x12
FiiO X5	290	08.14/GT	★★★★★	2.4	400x360	n/a		114x68x16
iBasso DX50	200	08.14/GT	★★★★★	1	96x96	8		60x40x20
SanDisk Sansa Clip+ 8GB	40	12.11/GT	★★★★★	2.4	320x240	8		106x44x17
Sony NWZ-A15	170	12.14/FT	★★★★★	2.2	320x240	16		109x44x9
Sony NWZ-ZX1	550	04.14/GT	★★★★★	4	854x480	128	●	123x61x16



Tablets

Android	Offers great flexibility and innovation
Apple iOS	Fantastic ease of use; massive choice of quality apps
Windows	New kid on the block. Watch this space

Our recommendations

Our recommendations										
Product	£	Tested	Verdict	OS	NFC	3G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (hwd,mm)
Up to £600										
Amazon Kindle Fire HD 16GB	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	A great option for those looking for a user-friendly tablet	Android	●	7	1280x800	16/32	193x137x10
Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 7	200	01.14/FT	★★★★★	An excellent tablet but Android fans might find it a little restrictive	Android	●	7	1920x1200	16/32/64	186x128x9
Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 8.9	330	01.15/GT	★★★★★	A strong performer but the Kindle Fire still feels a little restrictive	Android	●	8.9	2560x1600	16/32/64	231x158x8
Asus VivoTab ME400	400	04.13/GT	★★★★★	A convincing rival to the Microsoft Surface in the Windows 8 space	Windows 8	●	10.1	1366x768	32/64	263x171x10
Apple iPad Mini 64GB Wi-Fi	430	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Apple hits the bullseye. Again	iOS	●	7.9	1024x768	16/32/64	200x135x7
Apple iPad Mini/Retina display	320	01.14/ST	★★★★★	An absolutely superb tablet that shows its rivals how it's done	iOS	●	7.9	2048x1536	16/32/64	200x135x7
Apple iPad mini 3	320	01.15/GT	★★★★★	Little in the way of updates, but it's still the 8in tablet to be reckoned with	iOS	●	7.9	2048x1536	16/64/128	200x135x7
Apple iPad 4 16GB Wi-Fi	400	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Best tablet over 8in, Awards 2013	iOS	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x190x9
Apple iPad Air	400	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Best tablet over 8in, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	iOS	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x170x8

TABLETS continued

Product	Tested	Verdict	OS	NFC	3G	Screen	Reso	Storage	Dimensions (hwd)	
Apple iPad Air 2	400	12.14/FT	★★★★★	An excellent tablet with an unrivalled user experience	iOS	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/64/128	240x170x6
Asus Eee Pad Transformer Prime	500	07.12/FT	★★★★★	A slim and smart tablet that we love	Android	●	10.1	1280x800	16/32	181x263x8
Asus Transformer Pad Infinity	600	04.13/GT	★★★★★	A very capable iPad alternative and one of the best android tablets	Android	●	10.1	1900x1200	32/64	263x181x9
Google Nexus 7	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Best tablet up to £300, Awards 2012	Android	●	7	1280x800	16/32	199x120x11
Google Nexus 7 (2013)	200	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best tablet up to 8in, Awards 2014	Android	●	7	1920x1200	16/32	200x114x9
Google Nexus 10	319	01.13/FT	★★★★★	Great performance and price: a real iPad-botherer	Android	●	10	2560x1060	16/32	264x178x9
LG G Pad	260	01.14/ST	★★★★★	Looks the part but struggles against its price rivals	Android	●	8.3	1920x1200	16	216x127x8
Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1	450	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A great screen that's let down by a cluttered interface	Android	●	10.1	2500x1600	16/32/64	171x243x8
Samsung Galaxy Tab 2 7.0	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Find it for the right price and it's a capable all-rounder	Android	●	7	1024x600	8/16	190x120x10
Samsung Galaxy Tab S 8.4	320	01.15/GT	★★★★★	The best tablet we've tested from Samsung so far	Android	●	8.4	2560x1600	16/32	213x126x7
Sony Xperia Tablet S	330	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Plenty of potential, but there are niggles	Android	●	9.4	1280x800	16/32	240x170x10
Sony Xperia Tablet Z	399	06.13/FT	★★★★★	Sony fans will love it, but there are tablets out there for less money	Android	●	10.1	1920x1200	16/32	172x266x6.9
Sony Xperia Tablet Z2	400	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Another solid effort, but doesn't do quite enough against the iPad	Android	●	10.1	1920x1200	16/32	172x266x6.4
Sony Xperia Z3 Tablet Compact	330	08.14/FT	★★★★★	A superb tablet that's terrific with music and video	Android	●	8	1920x1200	16/32	213x124x6
Tesco Hudl 2	130	01.15/FT	★★★★★	There's little to grumble about at this price, a nifty budget tablet	Android	●	8.3	1920x1200	16	128x224x9



Smartphones

Android	Offers great flexibility and innovation
Apple iOS	Fantastic ease of use; massive choice of quality apps
Windows	New kid on the block. Watch this space

Our recommendations

Product	Tested	Verdict	OS	NFC	4G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Apple iPhone 5S	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best smartphone, Awards 2013	iOS	●	4.0	1136x640	16/32/64	124x59x8
Apple iPhone 6	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best phone up to 5in, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	iOS	●	4.7	1334x750	16/32/128	138x67x7
Apple iPhone 6 Plus	12.14/GT	★★★★★	A big-screen phone from Apple, but the sound disappoints	iOS	●	5.5	1920x1080	16/64/128	158x78x7
Google Nexus 5	07.14/GT	★★★★★	A decent all-rounder but new rivals have bettered it	Android	●	4.95	1920x1080	16/32	138x69x9
Google Nexus 6	03.15/FT	★★★★★	A compelling phone but bigger isn't necessarily better with the Nexus 6	Android	●	5.96	1440x2560	32/64	160x83x10
HTC One	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Sets the bar high for smartphones in 2013	Android	●	4.7	1080x1920	32	137x68x9
HTC One (M8)	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Improves considerably on its predecessor. Does very little wrong	Android	●	5	1920x1080	32	146x71x9
HTC One Max	05.14/ST	★★★★★	A fine performer but could make better use of its bigger screen	Android	●	5.9	1920x1080	16/32	165x82x10
HTC One X+	01.13/ST	★★★★★	Well worth considering: good for music and a joy to use	Android	●	4.7	1280x720	32/64	134x70x9
HTC 8S	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Capable and fun, if feature-light	Windows	●	4.7	800x480	4	121x63x10
LG Optimus L5 II	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Not a thrilling phone but the user experience is good	Android	●	4.0	800x433	4	118x62x9
LG G2	07.14/GT	★★★★★	A little outdated but still a worthy contender	Android	●	5.2	1920x1080	16/32	139x71x9
LG G3	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Still an excellent phone even if newcomers have bettered it	Android	●	5.5	1440x2560	16/32	146x75x9
LG G Flex	05.14/FT	★★★★★	All the pros of the G2, but with a low-res screen	Android	●	6	1280x720	32	161x82x8
Motorola Moto X (2014)	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Little in the way of flashy features but one of the best phones of 2014	Android	●	5.2	1920x1080	16/32	141x72x10
Nokia Lumia 920	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A promising start for Nokia's flagship	Windows	●	4.5	1280x768	32	130x71x11
Nokia Lumia 925	09.13/FT	★★★★★	The best Windows Phone yet	Windows	●	4.5	1280x768	16/32	129x71x9
Nokia Lumia 930	11.14/FT	★★★★★	We'd like more apps but this is (again) the best Windows effort we've seen	Windows	●	5	1920x1080	32	137x71x10
Nokia Lumia 1520	05.14/ST	★★★★★	Apps still disappoint but this is the best Windows Phone yet	Windows	●	6	1920x1080	32	163x85x9
Oppo N1	05.14/ST	★★★★★	Quirky and flexible, this is a great effort from a promising brand	Android	●	5.9	1920x1080	16/32	171x83x9
Samsung Galaxy Note	07.12/ST	★★★★★	A hybrid between a smart phone and a tablet	Android	●	5.29	1280x800	16/32	147x83x10
Samsung Galaxy Note II	01.13/ST	★★★★★	Massive screen, massive battery, very tempting	Android	●	5.55	1280x720	16/32/64	151x81x9
Samsung Galaxy Note III	05.14/ST	★★★★★	The original phablet, updated and still the best	Android	●	5.7	1920x1080	32	151x80x8
Samsung Galaxy Note 4	12.14/GT	★★★★★	The fourth iteration of the Galaxy Note and it's the best one yet	Android	●	5.7	1440x2560	16/32	154x79x9
Samsung Galaxy S III	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Best smartphone, Awards 2012	Android	●	4.8	1280x720	16/32	137x71x9
Samsung Galaxy S4	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Better than its predecessor but not as good as its rivals	Android	●	5.0	1920x1080	16/32/64	137x70x8
Samsung Galaxy S5	07.14/GT	★★★★★	An improvement on the S4, but not radical enough	Android	●	5.1	1920x1080	16/32	142x73x8
Samsung Galaxy S6 Edge	06.15/FT	★★★★★	A few minor complaints can't mar what is a truly excellent handset	Android	●	5.1	2560x1440	32/64	149x76x10
Sony Xperia T	01.13/ST	★★★★★	A strong all-rounder for music and movie lovers	Android	●	4.55	1280x720	16	129x67x9
Sony Xperia Z	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A triumph for Sony – one capable of taking the fight to Google	Android	●	5	1920x1080	16	139x71x8
Sony Xperia Z1	03.14/FT	★★★★★	Sony fans will love it, a speedy, sleek and impressive smartphone	Android	●	5	1920x1080	16	144x74x9
Sony Xperia Z2	07.14/GT	★★★★★	The phone to beat in 2014. Outstanding	Android	●	5.2	1920x1080	16	147x73x8
Sony Xperia Z3	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Best phone 5in+, Awards 2014	Android	●	5.2	1920x1080	16	146x72x7

Recorded music is at a crossroads

The format in which you listen to your music could be undermining the quality of your hi-fi system

For those of us that consider themselves a music lover, albeit to different degrees, we are part of a very fortunate generation. We now have access to an ever-growing wealth of recorded music of extraordinary range and depth, effectively accumulated over the last 60 years. With the introduction of the microgroove LP record in the early 1950's, playback quality took a quantum leap forward and this also coincided with a far higher standard of recording techniques. Although further improvements have been made over the years, this was a watershed time that first introduced hi-fi as a reality.

We now have literally millions of recorded music tracks available to us in all genres and many different formats. One trend over recent years, however, has been to deliberately downgrade the quality in order to offer quantity. The main culprits have been MP3 and AAC formats which were designed as a low cost form of delivery when download speeds were slow and computer chip memory was expensive. Neither now applies and both formats should be consigned to history.

Quality vs quantity

Let us explain. The maximum resolution from MP3 and AAC file formats, which are both highly compressed, is 320 kbps (kilobytes per second) which compares with CD quality of 1411 kbps. This means the resolution quality is less than



a quarter of that provided by a standard CD. However, most MP3 or AAC files are downloaded over the internet and the most used download resolution is 128 kbps, which is around one-eleventh of CD quality. This should ring alarm bells. If you are only playing back these tracks on an iPod or mobile phone with a pair of earbuds, the quality may be irrelevant to you. But if these tracks are your primary source of music, perhaps with an iPod dock into a decent hi-fi system, you are only making a very poor quality sound louder. Information is irretrievably lost and the full dynamic range is lacking. The quality will be very poor in contrast with a full resolution version even if you are completely unaware of the loss you are inflicting upon yourself. This can even affect the type of music listened to

as most classical recordings downloaded as an MP3 or AAC file will have so much information missing, and all the complexities of the music lost, with the end result that the recording is reduced to just the essence of a tune.

There are now positive signs for the future of recorded music. Audiophiles, or hi-fi connoisseurs, have been very important to the music industry as they are generally avid music lovers who aim to maximise their enjoyment by listening to music at its best quality level, which means the play-back of great recordings through hi-end hi-fi to achieve the most outstanding results. Without them, a main driver for quality would probably be removed from the music industry. They have always sought out quality but there is now an increasing awareness among the wider public of the serious deficiencies of the highly compressed formats. Full resolution audio streaming, as well as CD quality downloads, are already available and will surely become the eventual norm with this greater awareness of the tremendous quality benefit. Consumers will vote through their purchases and will seek out higher resolution recordings. Look at Qobuz for a new high-profile entry into this field who offer CD quality (16 bit/44.1 kHz FLAC) streaming for over 15 million tracks.

What is the future of recorded music?

The benefits of using a specialist dealer

Specialist hi-fi dealers are also a significant driver for maintaining high quality in the music industry. Hi-end hi-fi very soon exposes poor quality recordings and specialist hi-fi dealers are constantly assessing the relative merits of different brands from manufacturers for potential stocking. With specialist hi-fi dealers, achieving the best system performance and seeking out the most outstanding combinations is almost invariably both their hobby and their livelihood. Without them, hi-fi manufacturers and potential customers would have to rely on the opinion of magazine reviewers to assess levels of performance – a notoriously unreliable decision making process. For specialist hi-fi dealers, their relationship with audiophiles and hi-fi connoisseurs is also crucial to them for, if they are to stay in business, they must satisfy the most discerning customers in the industry. The reality is that audiophiles and specialist hi-fi retailers (and the ones listed on this page represent the UK's finest) are essential to each other.

Specialist dealers know how to choose the products that combine as a superb system and how to get the best out of it by expert installation in the home. They also appreciate how exciting and involving music can be and how it can deliver a powerful emotional experience. If there's a price premium over an internet purchase by choosing a specialist dealer, it's probably a small one, but it's unquestionably worth the difference.

“...there is now an increasing awareness among the wider public of the serious deficiencies of the highly compressed formats. Full resolution audio streaming, as well as CD quality downloads, are already available and will surely become the eventual norm.”

Listed below is our selection of **THE BEST HI-FI DEALERS IN THE UK**. They have been chosen because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards hi-fi that will give years of musical enjoyment and total satisfaction.

Our Top 20 UK Hi-Fi Dealers

SOUTH

Ashford, Kent
SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI
40 High Street.
t: 01233 624441
www.soundcraftifi.com

Chelmsford
RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION

216 Moulsham Street.
t: 01245 265245
www.rayleighhifi.com

Kingston-upon-Thames
INFIDELITY

9 High Street,
Hampton Wick.
t: 020 8943 3530
www.infidelity.co.uk

Maidenhead
AUDIO VENUE
36 Queen Street.
t: 01628 633995
www.audiovenue.com

Norwich
MARTINS HI-FI
85-91 Ber Street.
t: 01603 627134
www.martinshifi.co.uk

Rayleigh
RAYLEIGH HI-FI
44a High Street.
t: 01268 779762
www.rayleighhifi.com

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RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
132/4 London Road.
t: 01702 435255
www.rayleighhifi.com

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t: 020 8567 8703
www.audiovenue.com

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GRAHAMS HI-FI
190a New North Road.
t: 020 7226 5500
www.grahams.co.uk

SW11
ORANGES & LEMONS
61/63 Webbs Road.
t: 020 7924 2040
www.oandlhifi.co.uk

SOUTH WEST
Bath
AUDIENCE
14 Broad Street.
t: 01225 333310
www.audience.org.uk

Cinderford
CERITECH AUDIO
1 Pavilion Business Park,
Speculation Road.
t: 01600 716362
www.ceritech-audio.co.uk

Exeter
GULLIFORD HI-FI
97 Sidwell Street.
t: 01392 491194
www.gullifordhifi.co.uk

MIDLANDS

Banbury
OVERTURE
3 Church Lane.
t: 01295 272158
www.overture.co.uk

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163 Spon Street.
t: 024 7652 5200
www.frankharvey.co.uk

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t: 0333 200 4475
www.cymbiosis.com

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t: 01244 344227
www.acoustica.co.uk

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t: 0191 477 4167
www.lintone.co.uk

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VERDICT ★★★★★



HDMI cables

Digital cables that carry both picture and sound. These carry control signals as well, so they can integrate the operation of components in your system

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Length as tested (m)	HDMI type
Up to £80					
Audioquest Pearl	23	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Best HDMI cable, Awards 2012	1 1.4
Cambridge Audio 500 (5m)	69	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A perfectly acceptable cable for the money	5 1.3a
Kimber Kable HD-09	73	03.09/GT	★★★★★	Picture quality is up with the best and it creates a wide sound field	2 1.3
Philex Thor HDMI/DVI kit	60	09.06/FT	★★★★★	A very decent cable for not much cash - you can't really go wrong	5 1.3
QED HDMI-P	50	11.08/FT	★★★★★	This award winning cable just got better	1 1.3
QED Performance HDMI	70	03.09/GT	★★★★★	Capable performer - finely balanced sound and a wonderfully rendered picture	3 1.3
QED Profile HDMI	25	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Now with 1.4 status, this is still a worthy cable	1 1.4
QED Qunex HDMI-P (5M)	75	09.08/GT	★★★★★	Fantastic picture quality mated with a dynamic and powerful sound	5 1.3
ThatCable HDMI	5	10.09/FT	★★★★★	Brilliant way to spend a fiver - will give rivals up to £20 something to think about	1.5 1.3
ThatCable HDMI (5m)	10	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A no-brainer for those on a tight budget	5 1.3a
Vivanco Sound and Image	30	11.09/GT	★★★★★	A respectable upgrade, it provides greater fidelity in sound and vision over budget cables	2 1.3
Wireworld Island 6	46	10.10/GT	★★★★★	Packs a firm punch and strong dynamics	1.4 2.0
£80 and above					
Audioquest Cinnamon	80	01.11/FT	★★★★★	A top-notch HDMI that's a credit to any system	2 1.4
Audioquest Forest	80	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A true and worthy rival to Chord's Supershield	5 1.4
Audioquest HDMI-X	95	03.09/GT	★★★★★	A real entertainer - chunky bass and images are well defined	3 1.3
Atlas HDMI	160	07.07/GT	★★★★★	Upgraded version of the existing Atlas HDMI - delivers good detail and contrast	7 1.3

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QED XT40 Speaker Cable



Atlas Element Integra Audio Cable



QED Performance Optical Cable



AudioQuest DragonFly V1.2



AudioQuest Pearl HDMI Cable



QED Performance Digital Cable



Supra USB 2.0 Cable



Merlin Tarantula MK6 Mains Cable

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HDMI CABLES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Length as tested (m)	HDMI type
Chord Company Active	115	10.09/GT	★★★★★	1.5	1.3
Chord Co. Supershield (5m)	90	06.10/GT	★★★★★	5	1.3a
Ecosse Picture Perfect Ultra	110	09.08/GT	★★★★★	5	1.3
Ecosse Picture Perfect Ultra +	169	09.08/GT	★★★★★	5	1.3
QED Reference	125	06.10/GT	★★★★★	5	1.3a
Supra HF100 HDMI (8m)	112	08.06/GT	★★★★★	8	1.0
van den Hul Flat 180	90	10.09/GT	★★★★★	2	1.3b
van den Hul Flat HDMI (3m)	105	03.09/GT	★★★★★	3	1.3
van den Hul Ultimate	300	10.08/FT	★★★★★	1	1.3
Vivanco SHQ Ultra	80	06.10/FT	★★★★★	1.2	1.4
Wireworld Chroma 5 HDMI (7m)	109	07.07/GT	★★★★★	7	1.0



Digital interconnects

USB	An increasingly common way to connect your computer to your hi-fi
Optical	Digital cable that uses light to transmit sound between components
Coaxial	Sends audio via an electrical signal between your hi-fi and AV kit

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Length tested (m)
Up to £50					
Audioquest Forest USB 1.5	25	11.10/FT	★★★★★	USB	1.5
Atlas Fibre Optic	32	06.09/GT	★★★★★	Optical	1
Profigold PROI2102	30	03.11/FT	★★★★★	USB	2

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Chord Active V2 HDMI Cable



QED Reference Optical Quartz



Wireworld Starlight 7 USB Cable



QED Reference Audio 40 Cable



AudioQuest Cinnamon USB to Lightning Cable



Atlas Hyper Integra Audio Cable



AudioQuest Cinnamon RJ/E Cable



Tellurium Q Ultra Blue Speaker Cable

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DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Length tested (m)
Up to £50					
QED Performance Coaxial	30	10.08/GT	★★★★★	Best coaxial digital cable, Awards 2012	Co-axial 1
QED Performance Graphite	40	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best optical digital cable, Awards 2012	Optical 1
Supra USB 2.0	29	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best USB cable, Awards 2012	USB 1
True Colours Industries Coral	35	06.09/GT	★★★★★	Best digital interconnect, Awards 2010. Excellent optical lead	Optical 1
Wireworld Nova 6	40	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Like an up-and-coming band: unrefined but likeable and energetic	Optical 1
£50 and above					
Audioquest Cinnamon	60	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Like a fine paintbrush: controlled and delicate but lacking the big, broad strokes of a roller	USB 1.5
Atlas Equator Optical	50	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Worth checking out, but not for the basshunters	Optical 1
Chord Company Optichord	51	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Confident, competent and extremely likeable. Highly recommended	Optical 1
Chord Co. Prodac Pro Digital	70	05.11/FT	★★★★★	Even better following an upgrade to its plugs	Co-axial 1
Clearer Audio Copper-line 75	97	Aw.08/FT	★★★★★	This is another fine cable from the Copper-line stable. It's well worth a listen	Co-axial 1
Clearer Aud. Silverline Optimus	185	09.09/GT	★★★★★	The sheer brilliance of this cable makes it stand out	Co-axial 0.5
Ecosse The Director SE	89	09.09/GT	★★★★★	Spacious sounding and great with higher frequencies	Co-axial 1
Furutech Formula 2	55	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Best USB cable, Awards 2011	USB 1.2
Kimber USB	52	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Worth an audition if you're after something laid-back	USB 1
QED Qunex 75 Signature	80	09.09/FT	★★★★★	Beautifully made, but not quite as thrilling as we'd like	Co-axial 1
QED U Play (Bluetooth)	65	05.10/FT	★★★★★	It's small, cheap, and does an efficient job	Bluetooth 10
Vertere Pulse D-Fi	70	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	A must-audition if you can stretch your budget	USB 1
Wireworld Ultraviolet 5 USB	50	08.09/FT	★★★★★	Best USB cable, Awards 2010. If you use digital kit, this needs to be on your audition list	USB 2



Analogue interconnects

These carry audio signal from source to amplifier, or between pre-amplifier and power amplifier. Some use a shielding construction to reduce external electrical interference

The shortlist



Wireworld Luna 7

06.14 Group Test ★★★★★

"There's no brightness or sharpness to speak of and although weighty, there's no suggestion that bass notes sound overblown."



QED Reference Audio 40

06.14 Group Test ★★★★★

"The Reference Audio 40 looks like a serious stereo interconnect. Build quality and feel are very reassuring."



AWARD WINNER

Atlas Element Integra

Awards 2014: Best Analogue Interconnect

"There's nothing to dislike here: the Element Integra is highly recommended as a first upgrade."

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	RCA phono 3.5mm-to-RCA XLR (balanced)	Length tested (m)
Up to £50					
Atlas Element Integra (1m)	45	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Best analogue interconnect, Awards 2014	● 1
Black Rhodium Twist	36	06.14/GT	★★★★★	We wouldn't recommend this cable for bright-sounding systems but it's a decent option for the money	● 1
Clear. Aud. C-line Alpha One	30	12.11/FT	★★★★★	A bargain interconnect that should be on your shortlist	● 1
Ecosse Conductor CA1.2	49	06.11/GT	★★★★★	Excellent with detail - a good all-rounder	● 1
Ecosse The Composer	37	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Lacks excitement, but a lovely design with warm and punchy sounds	● 0.8
Merlin Mozart	40	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Open and exuberant, if lacking in warmth	● 1
QED Performance Audio 2	40	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Agile, fun and nuanced: would do well in pretty much any system	● 1
QED Profile	18	06.11/GT	★★★★★	At the top of the first upgrade tree	● ● 1
Wireworld Luna	37	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Excellent with subtlety and dynamics: should be on any interconnect shortlist	● 1
Wireworld Luna 7	40	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Delivers a confident and likable sound. A great option at this price	● 1

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ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS continued

ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTScontinued					RCA phono	3.5mm-to-RCA	XLR (balanced)	Length tested (m)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict					
£50 and above								
Atlas Equator Integra	75	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A recommended second-upgrade cable	●	●		1
AudioQuest Red River	85	06.14/GT	★★★★★	What it lacks in smoothness and subtlety, it makes up for in scale and dynamics	●			1
Chord Co. Chameleon Plus	125	11.11/FT	★★★★★	New plugs make these even more essential	●			1
Chord Company Cobra VEE 3	95	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Clear and detailed, this cable brings a very driven and focused feel to music	●			1
Chord Company Indigo Plus	995	05.09/FT	★★★★★	It's genius in an interconnect - but you need the right system	●			1
Chord Crimson Vee3	50	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A nice, easy-going cable that's a little too restrained				1
Ecosse The Baton Mk II	104	08.08/GT	★★★★★	Although there's much to admire, the Baton Mk II can struggle to gel sounds	●	●		0.8
Furutech Alpha Line-1	80	03.11/FT	★★★★★	A cable for owners of midrange systems to get very excited by - very good indeed	●			1
QED J2P	50	12.09/FT	★★★★★	Fast and agile 3.5mm-RCA cable		●		1.5
QED Reference Audio 40	85	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Reassuring build quality from a cable that brings fantastic depth and dimension	●			1
QED Reference Audio J2P	50	12.09/FT	★★★★★	Clean sounding and packed with detail		●		1.5
van den Hul The Bay C5	85	06.14/GT	★★★★★	For bright-sounding systems The Bay could be the antidote	●			1
van den Hul The Name	60	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Energy and fun trump ultimate precision	●			0.8
van den Hul The Wave	100	01.09/FT	★★★★★	The Wave has a formidable array of talents and is one of the best cables at this kind of money	●			1
van den Hul The Well	100	06.11/GT	★★★★★	An ideal booster for thin sounding kit	●	●		1
Wireworld Oasis 6	130	06.11/GT	★★★★★	A truly splendid cable for kit worth £800-£1000	●	●		1



Mains products

IEC Usually a three-pin connector used in most hi-fi (and kettles)
Figure of 8 Small, two-pin connector. Tends to be used on lower-priced products
Blocks and conditioners Multi-plug units, some of which attempt to filter noise out of the mains

Our recommendations

Our recommendations					Cable Block	Conditioner	Figure of 8 (2-pin)	IEC (3-pin)	Number of sockets
Product	£	Tested	Verdict						
Up to £100									
Clear. Aud. C-Line Alpha One	25	11.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine first stage mains cable upgrade	●		●		n/a
Clear.Aud.C-L Alpha P/HUB	90	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Makes a noticeable difference, but not the last word in cohesion	●	●	●		6
Ecosse Big Orange MK2+	60	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Provides worthwhile gains in performance – and plenty of them	●		●		n/a
Lindy 6-way	40	12.08/FT	★★★★★	For just £40, this conditioner is a bona fide system booster		●	●	●	6
Merlin Tarantula Figure '8'	40	01.11/GT	★★★★★	Incredible bang for your buck from Merlin	●		●		n/a
Merlin Tarantula MK6	40	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Best mains cable, Awards 2010. A good tweak for a hi-fi or AV system	●			●	n/a
Russ Andrews Powerkord-8	75	01.11/GT	★★★★★	An ideal choice for a simple upgrade	●		●		n/a
Tacima CS929	40	08.06/FT	★★★★★	Explicitly illustrates the gains a modest outlay can achieve		●	●	●	6
£100 and above									
Audioquest NRG 1.5	100	01.11/GT	★★★★★	A lively and precise cable that does much right	●		●		n/a
Atlas Eos	147	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Well-balanced, delivering impressive depth and scale	●				n/a
Clearer Audio Silver-line	150	07.06/FT	★★★★★	Capable of truly astonishing improvements	●				n/a
Furutech G-320AG	165	02.11/GT	★★★★★	A pricy but worthwhile addition to your set-up	●		●		n/a
R Andrews Ref P/Kord W350i	232	05.09/GT	★★★★★	If you have components costing £2000 upwards, consider this cable	●			●	n/a
Russ Andrews X2	200	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Effective but suffers from a lack of sockets		●	●	●	2
Supra MD-06	150	07.08/FT	★★★★★	It adds clarity, but some might not like the leaner sound		●		●	6
van den Hul M/Server Hybrid	150	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Not boring or dull, but it's just too relaxed and safe sounding	●			●	n/a

Jargon Buster: Cables

Analogue interconnect

A cable that is used to transfer an audio signal from a source (eg a CD player), to an amplifier or between a pre- and power amplifier.

Digital interconnect

Used to transfer a digital signal between two components. There are two types of digital interconnects: optical and coaxial.

Speaker cable

Carries an audio signal from amplifier to your speakers. Also comes in a bi-wirable configuration. Not all speakers support a bi-wired set-up.





Speaker cables

These carry the audio signal from your amplifier to your speakers. Bi-wiring uses two runs of cables per speaker and can lead to improvements in the speakers' performance

The shortlist



Talk Electronics Talk 3
£4/m



Wireworld Lluna 7
£6.50/m



AWARD WINNER
QED XT40
Awards 2014: Best speaker cable

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	
Up to £10/m				
Audioquest FLX-SLiP 14/4	5.80	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Best Speaker Cable, Awards 2013
Audioquest G4	4.50	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Loses out when it comes to the weight and solidity of its sound. Exciting and articulate nonetheless
Audioquest X2	5	07.11/GT	★★★★★	A perfectly smooth and even-handed sounding performer
Atlas Equator 2.0 OFC	6	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Allows for an impressive sense of weight and power, but doesn't quite match its rivals
Chord Co. Carnival Silv. Screen	6	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Slightly overtaken by newer rivals, but still a mighty fine choice
Cl. Audio C-line Alpha Shield	5	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Restrained dynamics hold this otherwise good cable back from the full five stars
Ecosse CS 2.3	5	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Balanced, nuanced and an easy listen, but a little subdued
Ecosse CS 4.2	3	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A decent cable that needs a touch more punch
QED Ruby Anniversary	6	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Rich and detailed but lacking in rhythm and dynamics

Biwire

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QED XT40 Speaker Cable



Wireworld Luna 7 Speaker Cable



Van Den Hul The Clearwater



Atlas Hyper 2.0 Speaker Cable



AudioQuest FLX-SLiP 14/4 Cable



Chord Carnival Silverscreen Cable



QED Silver Anniversary XT



Tellurium Q Black Speaker Cable

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SPEAKERS CABLES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	
QED Ruby Anniversary Evolution	6	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Rich, detailed, energetic and clean. A great cable
QED X-TC	4	09.10/FT	★★★★★	A great budget cable that's able to hold its own
Talk Electronics Talk 3	4	07.11/GT	★★★★★	An essential first cable upgrade
Wireworld Luna 7	6.50	03.14/GT	★★★★★	The all-round ability of this cable means it should sit well with a wide range of systems
Wireworld The Stream 16/2	5	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Still a cracking cable, but losing out to better competition
Wireworld Stream 7	6	11.13/GT	★★★★★	If you're a fan of detail then you should definitely consider the Stream 7

£10/m and above

Atlas Hyper 2.0	15	07.08/GT	★★★★★	If your system warrants this kind of cable, you won't be disappointed	
Atlas Mavros (5m)	2290	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Pair with an extravagant system and get excellent performance	•
Chord Company Signature	125	01.07/GT	★★★★★	One of the most effective upgrades you will ever hear if you own expensive kit	
Ecosse MS2.4	50	01.08/FT	★★★★★	A massively detailed cable that reveals subtleties with refinement	
Kimber 4VS	12	04.10/GT	★★★★★	An accomplished performer with an expressive sound	
QED XT40	10	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best speaker cable, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	
QED Revelation	15	04.10/GT	★★★★★	A fine cable that should be on your audition list	
QED Silver Anniv. XT Biwire	10	10.06/GT	★★★★★	A clear class-leader with exceptional sonic transparency on display	•
van den Hul The Clearwater	10	03.14/GT	★★★★★	A cable with an impressive level of detail and clarity	



Speaker stands

Many stands are hollow and can be filled with sand or other similar heavy materials. This is to increase mass and dampening and the sonic benefit is tighter bass – although too much of it can be counter-productive and end up deadening the sound

Theshortlist



Custom Design FS104 Signature

£200



Q Acoustics Concept 20 speaker stands

£200

AWARD WINNER
Atacama Moseco 6

Awards 2014: Best speaker stands

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Fillable	Finishes
Up to £500							
Atacama Duo 6	65	02.13/GT	★★★★★	A very likable pair of speaker stands	60x31x31	•	1
Atacama Nexus 6	200	12.00/FT	★★★★★	Still fine performers despite their age	60x25x30	•	1
Atacama Moseco 6	120	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Best speaker stands, Awards 2014	60x24x28	•	4
Custom rc60 Deluxe	125	10.07/FT	★★★★★	This bespoke service has made a fine pair stands	60x20x25		5

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Speaker positioning

Wonder-wall?

Where's the best place to position a speaker? Some speakers sound better backed up against a wall (Wharfedale's Diamond 220 speaker, for instance), while others prefer to be out in the open. Your choice of speaker may be dictated by how much space you have.

Ear, ear

Common practice for standmounters is to have the tweeters at seated ear-level. Why? The higher frequency sounds from a tweeter are more directional. Having them at this height ensures they make a beeline for your ears.

Stand to attention

Speaker stands keep the speaker cabinet rigid. This allows for more of the drivers' movement to be translated into sound and not wasted through vibrations. If they're on a carpet, make sure you have spikes to ensure stability.



The Diamond 220s like to be close to a wall for that extra 'oomph'

SPEAKERS STANDS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Fillable	Finishes
Up to £500						
Custom Design FS103	160	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A good pair of stands but rivals offer better overall performance	61x22x26	● 4
Custom Design FS104 Signature	200	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Best speaker stands, Awards 2013	62x16x18	● 4
Custom Design RS300	90	03.07/GT	★★★★★	Minimal design, a thoroughly appealing listen	61x22x26	● 2
Custom Design RS302	120	11.06/FT	★★★★★	Plenty of detail & clarity especially with vocals	61x22x26	● 3
Hi Fi Racks Podium Slimline	120	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A comfortable listening experience that's marred by some less than appealing fuzziness	60x15x21	5
Mission Stance	100	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Will do a fine job with £200-£400 speakers	58x21x28	● 3
Partington ANSA 60	150	09.11/GT	★★★★★	They remain fine stands - but no longer outstanding value	60x23x28	● 1
Part. D'nought Broadside	300	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Deliver wide ranging improvements to sound	60x23x28	1
Part. Super Dreadnought	180	03.07/GT	★★★★★	Best £100+ speaker stands in Awards 2007	60x16x17	● 1
Q Acoustics 20 speaker stands	200	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Clever construction and great performance makes these stands ideal support for all types of speakers	66.5x39x24	2
Soundstyle Z2	70	11.08/FT	★★★★★	Best sub-£100 speaker stand in Awards 2007	57x17x23	● 2



AV & hi-fi racks

Many racks are built to be expanded. Several manufacturers offer you a number of shelving options for ready-made products, but what if you want to get more kit in a few years? We like having the option to build upwards at a later date

The shortlist



Hi-Fi Racks Podium

"You get an enjoyable sound that isn't going to wear on you any time soon, and a product where quality control has taken centre stage"



Atacama Eris Eco 5.0

"Add fine build and easy construction to the list of plus points and there's much to admire here"



AWARD WINNER

Atacama Evoque Eco 60-40

"It might not initially sound quite as immediate as some rivals, but longer listening reveals plenty of attack"

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Modular Shelves	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Finishes
Up to £500						
Alphason Finewood 1100	300	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Looks great and provides sturdy support for your kit	3	51x110x45 1
Atacama Equinox AVI	380	05.07/FT	★★★★★	Neat solution to mount a TV above AV electronics	2	110x106x60 3
Atacama Equinox	339	11.09/GT	★★★★★	Still a good rack, but newer rivals offer more	● 2-5	Variable 60x55 3
Atacama Evoque Eco 60-40	450	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Best equipment support, Awards 2014	● 3	Variable 60x40 3
Atacama Eris Eco 5.0	460	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Best equipment support, Awards 2013	● 4	70x59x56 4

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AV & HI-FI RACKS continued

AV & HI-FI RACKScontinued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Modular Shelves	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Finishes	
Audiophile Base Stratabase	360	01.08/FT	★★★★★	It isn't cheap but justifies the cost	● 1	0.4x43x36	2
Custom Design ConceptAV	350	04.07/GT	★★★★★	Looks and sounds excellent, plus four colour options	3	60x101x40	4
Custom Design Milan 4	470	11.09/GT	★★★★★	Small and well made, but lacks subtlety	● 4	59x57x40	5
Custom Design Milan LCD3	350	09.08/FT	★★★★★	A stylish addition to Custom Design's catalogue	● 3	42x77x40	4
Hi Fi Racks Podium	460	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Best equipment support, Awards 2011	● 3	62x60x40	1
HiFi Racks Podium SL Ak. XL	260	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Easy to build and a very good deal for the good price	● 3	Variablex79.5x40	5
Hi Fi Racks Podium Slimline	350	03.13/FT	★★★★★	A simple rack design with pretty decent results	4	Variablex55x40	1
Quadraspire Q4evo	380	11.09/GT	★★★★★	A solid, cohesive and supremely affordable rack	4	Variablex59x39.5	8
Techlink Ovid	200	04.07/GT	★★★★★	Perfect for a minimalist system in a trendy flat	3	32x95x40	4

£500-£1000

Atacama Elite Eco 12.0	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Offers solid performance and flexibility	● 5	Variablex115x32	1
BDI Valera 9724	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Complicated to assemble but the results make it worthwhile	3	54x112x52	3
Hi Fi Racks Akorner XL	930	09.12/FT	★★★★★	A corner-friendly alternative to the Podium	● 3	45x110x40	6
Optimum Avion 8925	999	06.10/GT	★★★★★	Heavyweight, but likeable and good with sonics	3	57x127x56	3
Quadraspire Q4 Bamboo	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	An all round performer. Easy to set up and excellent results	● 4	Variablex59x40	1
Quadraspire QAVM (Oak)	540	04.07/GT	★★★★★	Solid and rigid, delivers a fine performance	● 3	50x109x50	8
Quadraspire QAVX	560	12.07/FT	★★★★★	Supports a great big telly and expansive system	● 2	Variablex163x52	8
Quadraspire Sunoko Vent T	800	11.09/GT	★★★★★	A first-rate rack, that highlights subtleties	● 4	Variablex59x47	6

£1000 and more

Audiophile Base StarBase	1180	12.06/GT	★★★★★	Exceptional, spectacular results with high end hi-fi	● 3	65x59x52	3
Hi Fi Racks Podium XL	1050	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A great performer: plenty of weight and dynamics	● 3	53x140x40	1
Spectral Closed CL1050	1100	07.07/FT	★★★★★	Fantastic build and style, plus numerous options	2	31x101x53	17
Spectral Closed CL1552	1800	07.07/GT	★★★★★	Awesome style and decent abilities - a great rack	6	VariablexVariablex53	16

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Accessories

Best equipment support

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Accessories
Best equipment rack
Atacama Evoque Eco 60-40

What the team say

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



Headphone amps

The headphone outputs on most products are usually afterthoughts and have had little care taken in trying to make them sound good. A dedicated headphone amp is a must if you want the best headphone sound

Our recommendations

Our recommendations					Line level in Outputs
Product	£	Tested	Verdict		
Up to £1500					
Beyerdynamic A1	975	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Best headphone amplifier £500+, Awards 2010. A formidable combo when partnered with T1 headphones	2 1
Chord Electronics Toucan	800	10.10/FT	★★★★★	A headphone amp with built in DAC that's worth a punt	2 2
Creek OBH-21SE	280	04.09/GT	★★★★★	Perfectly pleasant but it could do with more bite	2 2
Edwards Audio HA1	280	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Packs a punch but not that refined	2 1
FiiO E7	65	03.11/FT	★★★★★	One of the most cost-effective ways to improve headphone sound from a computer	1 2
Lehmann Black Cube Linear	750	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Deeply impressive device given the right system	1 1
Lehmann Rhineland	400	04.09/GT	★★★★★	Best headphone amplifier £300-£500, Awards 2010. Its user-friendly sound makes this a very wise buy	2 2
Meridian Prime	1200	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A top-class headphone amp and a talented preamp to boot	2 4
Musical Fidelity V-CAN II	120	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Does enough right to be worth serious consideration	1 3
Pathos Aurium	850	08.13/FT	★★★★★	This amplifier is a top class choice	4 2



Phono amps

Dedicated units tend to sound better than the circuits integrated into amplifiers. Higher priced options usually allow for electrical optimisation for your cartridge, thus producing better results

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	MM MC	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500						
Cambridge Audio 651P	120	06.13/GT	★★★★★	● ●	1	2.5x8x11
Creek Audio OBH-15	240	02.09/GT	★★★★★	● ●	1	6x10x15
Graham Slee Gr-Amp 2 Comm.	160	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●	1	7x10x25
Leema Elements	495	03.10/FT	★★★★★	● ●	2	5x11x10
Lehmann Black Cube	325	02.09/GT	★★★★★	● ●	1	5x11x11
Pro-Ject Phono Box S	120	06.13/GT	★★★★★	● ●	2	7x10x14
Musical Fidelity V-LPS II	160	06.13/GT	★★★★★	● ●	1	5x11x11
Rega Fono Mini A2D	85	03.12/FT	★★★★★	●	1	6x18x25
Rega Fono MM MK2	200	06.13/GT	★★★★★	● ●	2	7x43x33



Cartridges

Moving magnet (MM) These produce a higher output, giving your phono stage an easier time
Moving coil (MC) Can produce more detail, but is more demanding of your phono stage

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	MM/MC Tracking weight (g)
Up to £500				
Goldring 2100	92	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM 1.7
Goldring 2500	224	03.09/GT	★★★★★	MM 1.7
Grado Prestige Silver	115	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM 1.5
Nagaoka MP110	89	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM 1.8
Ortofon 2M Black	460	04.11/GT	★★★★★	MM 1.5
Ortofon 2M Bronze	275	03.09/GT	★★★★★	MM 1.5
Ortofon 2M Red	80	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM 1.8
Rega Exact	195	03.09/GT	★★★★★	MM 1.75
Roksan Corus Silver	400	01.11/FT	★★★★★	MM 1.9



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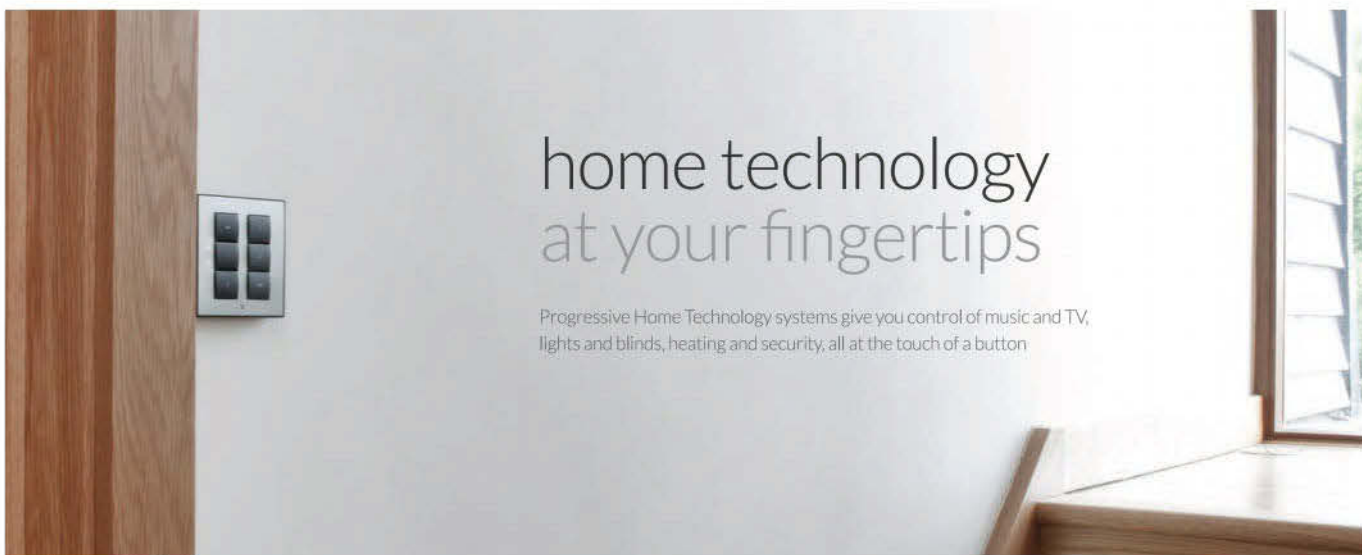


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