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# The best soundbar?

## The experts think so...



Home Cinema Choice 'Best Buy',  
July 2014



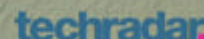
Trusted Reviews 'Recommended',  
October 2014



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



AV Forums 'Highly Recommended',  
July 2014



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



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# The less I give, the more I get back

There's not much we're willing to pay more for to get less of but, since the turn of the century (when we as consumers went collectively crazy for flatscreen TVs) we've been more than happy to pay a premium for ever-thinner TVs. And if we can reduce the amount of bezel around the screen, well, we'll pay extra for that too. It's a point brought home quite forcefully by the **head-to-head test of two outstanding 65in 4K TVs (p64)**. Two huge, high-performance products, with a combined depth of just 12cm. They barely exist in the third dimension at all.

And even more happily, the cost of premium TVs like these has never been more reasonable. Five years ago, a TV from near the top of the model range cost half as much again. So we've got bigger, better, slimmer screens for less money. What a time to be alive.



*Simon*

Simon Lucas, editor

## My products of the month



### Antelope Zodiac Platinum

Temptations p74

From now on I won't tolerate anything that doesn't have an atomic clock

### Geneva Model Cinema

Supertest p43

The most expensive soundbase in the test, and worth every penny

## WHAT HI-FI?

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## NEXT MONTH

### SYSTEM BUILDER HI-FI GLORY!

How to achieve audio Nirvana for less than £2K

### STREAMING SERVICES

Should you be dealing with Jay-Z?



### SPEAKER PACKAGES

Full-fat multi-channel thrills for under £1K

### GROUP TESTS TELEVISIONS

The newest ranges from the biggest brands

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 "You'll be amazed  
 at just how good your  
 music can sound"



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**Group test p50**

"Another knockout speaker from Q Acoustics's new 3000 series. These floostanders give you serious bang for your buck"

*Becky Roberts Staff writer*



**Onkyo A-9010**

**First test p18**

"This Onkyo is one of the most musical budget amplifiers we've heard in years"

*Ketan Bharadia Technical editor*



**TEAC CD-P800NT**

**First test p12**

"A versatile device and a great way into the world of hi-fi separates"

*Ced Yuen News editor*

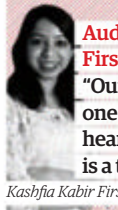


**Audiolab M-DAC**

**First test p56**

"Our favourite DAC is still one of the best we've ever heard - it looks the part and is a terrific listen"

*Kashfia Kabir First Tests editor*



**Samsung Galaxy S6 Edge**

**First test p24**

"Samsung is back on its A-game with the S6 Edge. A stunningly beautiful phone with outstanding performance to match"

*Verity Burns Multimedia editor*



**Samsung UE65JU7000**

**Group test p68**

"Samsung's first 4K TV of 2015 sets a high benchmark - picture quality is seriously impressive"

*Andy Madden Content editor*



**Supertest Floorstanders**  
 "Their faithful reproduction would no doubt give decent speakers closer to £1000 mark a run for their money"

## What's in this issue...

**06 First Tests** Samsung's Galaxy range of phones is back on form with the S6 Edge, Onkyo fires a Dolby Atmos salvo with its TX-NR3030 AV receiver and TEAC's CD-P800NT is an excellent box of tricks.

**34 Supertest: soundbases** Your tinny TV could use a boost, but what should you buy and how much will it cost? Rest assured we have all avenues covered as we test soundbases from six brands at multiple price points so you can figure out what suits you best.

**46 Stereo speakers** Cambridge Audio, JBL, Q Acoustics and Wharfedale are the contenders in this battle of budget floorstanders under £500, but only one thing matters - which offers the best sound?

**54 DACs** A DAC is a priority if you want to take your music collection to the next level. Audiolab's M-DAC is an Award-winner, so Pathos, Pioneer and Sony will need to bring their A-game to topple the king.



**First tests**  
 "As innovative as it is desirable, this is the phone we've been waiting for"



## Insider Record Store Day p30

We interview an engineer from Abbey Road on vinyl's resurgence and how records are mastered

## Subscriptions p80

Save up to 50%

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## That Was Then p146

A glimpse into *What Hi-Fi?* past

We wind the clock back to 1992 as we look at Audiolab's terrific 8000DAC

## Test 4K Televisions

"Now you can get 4K without remortgaging your house"



**64 4K televisions** LG and Samsung's latest 4K sets go head-to-head in what's set to be a defining year for the format. With TVs becoming affordable and more content available, you'll want to know which of these two sets offers the better Ultra-High-def experience.

**70 Temptations** This month's look features the versatile Zodiac Platinum DAC from Antelope that's a fine choice for any system and Burmester's talented and superbly made O32 integrated amplifier.

**76 Playlist** Michael Keaton finds his wings in the Oscar-winning *Birdman*, while *Twin Peaks*-esque mystery *Wayward Pines* looks to unsettle, *Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D* becomes inhuman and there's *Why Make Sense?*, the latest album from Hot Chip.



## Supertest Soundbases

"If size is of importance to you and you're on a very strict budget, this is still an excellent choice"



## Temptation

"Every panel is precisely lined-up and each control feels like it is built to work for decades"

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

### Revamped hi-fi guide!

1500 products rated p83

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

### Find out...

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## Our ratings explained

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

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



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# Exclusive reviews of the latest kit

# FIRST TESTS

**MORE  
FIRST TESTS**



**SonoroSTEREO**  
**£500 Page 14**  
Lifestyle music system  
from a little-known  
German audio firm



**ATC SCM19**  
**£2000 Page 23**  
ATC's latest pair  
of standmounters  
have grown in size



**Samsung Galaxy  
S6 Edge**  
**£700 Page 24**  
This premium handset  
wows us with its looks

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product reviews!

**EXCLUSIVE**

## Sky's the limit for a great-sounding box

**Onkyo TX-NR3030 | AV amp | £2500**

It has been a while since an Onkyo AV receiver received the full five stars from us. At this price, at least, it has been a few years, but much of that has been down to fierce competition from the likes of Pioneer and Yamaha.

But the wait is finally over for Onkyo. The TX-NR3030 is a tremendous bit of kit, and the sort of amp that not only rips the flag out of the competition's turf but takes it home too. At £2500 it's pricey, but what you get for your money is a great-sounding box of many tricks, including the much talked-about Dolby Atmos.

### The next step in surround-sound

For the uninitiated, Dolby Atmos is the next step in surround-sound technology. It brings an element of verticality to your traditional set-up. With added in-ceiling speakers, or up-firing speakers that bounce sound off your ceiling, you'll find yourself being covered by a dome of sound.

The point of this is to create a more natural soundfield. You get a sense of height to the presentation, and sound effects travel around the room more organically than before.

imposing your ceiling really is. Without Dolby Atmos, you've been missing out.

Of course, it's not all about the atmosphere. Sometimes you just want to have a bullet zing past your left ear. In this respect, the effects placement with Dolby Atmos is superb. We load up a Blu-ray of *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (there are very few Atmos discs available as yet) and the sound of drones and helicopters hovering above us brings a smile to our faces. Bullets go through you and hit the other side of the room, rather than sticking to one corner at a time.

But aside from Atmos, we're equally impressed with the Onkyo. With a 5.1 set-up there's still a huge sense of space. More importantly, the character of the sound ticks all the right boxes.

It's a tonally balanced presentation, with no undue emphasis on any part of the frequency range. High notes are crisp but not harsh. The midrange is direct and full-bodied, while the bass is deep and taut. It's a smooth, rounded listen that's very easy on the ears.

We're also impressed with the amount of detail on offer. We watch a Blu-ray of



**Dolby Atmos is the next step in surround-sound technology. The soundfield is spacious and utterly immersive - suddenly you no longer have a ceiling. You may feel mildly concerned when you first hear raindrops falling from above, but that swiftly turns into admiration**

### Spacious and immersive

That's the theory, anyway - but on the Onkyo TX-NR3030 it really works. The effect is a subtle one. Sounds don't blast you from above, but rather you feel your listening room open up. The soundfield is massive, spacious and utterly immersive.

Suddenly you no longer have a ceiling. You may feel mildly concerned when you first hear raindrops fall from above you, but that sense of concern swiftly turns into admiration. Switch between Atmos and standard 5.1 and you'll realise just how

*Black Sea*, and the submarine's creaking and clanking has enough texture to make us concerned about our room's structural integrity. It's a subtle sound, with plenty of nuance.

### Adrenaline rush

The Onkyo is not the last word in agility and punch, but the sound is lightfooted enough, and strong dynamics help. The Pioneer SC-LX88 undoubtedly yields a more exciting, hard-hitting sound, but it's also a more tiring listen over time. And the





Dolby Atmos may be the star of the show, but we are equally impressed with the rest of this amplifier

Pioneer doesn't have quite as much subtlety. The Onkyo may not be as much of an adrenaline rush, but it has no trouble entertaining us.

### Box of tricks

Top marks for sound, then. But elsewhere, this box of tricks deserves some praise. When it comes to features, the Onkyo TX-NR3030 means business. It boasts 11.2 channels. That gives you some degree of flexibility when it comes to your Atmos set-up. We used a 5.1.4 system (meaning five surround speakers, one subwoofer, and four Atmos speakers), but the amp allows up to 7.2.4.

There's very little that the Onkyo doesn't do. Take streaming, for instance. DLNA certification means you can stream music both from networked computers and storage devices.

Network connectivity is by ethernet and built-in wifi. Wifi means flexibility, but for a more stable connection we'd still recommend a wired connection. File compatibility is good, and you'll be able to play MP3, WMA, FLAC, WAV, Ogg Vorbis, AAC, Apple Lossless, LPCM and DSD up to 5.6MHz.

There's also AirPlay, which means you can stream from a number of Apple devices. Don't have an Apple device? That's fine, you can use Bluetooth, which is also built-in. And if you don't want to use your own material, you can find more from the internet. The Onkyo supports Internet Radio, as well as Spotify Connect, Deezer and Aupeo. Now you have the world's content to discover.

When it comes to plugs, the Onkyo is very well endowed. There are eight HDMI inputs, which is more than we find



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

## The app...



### Let your phone take control

Don't want to use the physical remote? Then you can use the Onkyo Remote app. It's a little basic, but very handy. On a basic level you get the main buttons, such as directional arrows. Swipe left and right to access separate pages for adjusting tone setting and listening modes, as well as choosing zones (Main, Zone 2 and Zone 3). You can also use the app to stream music from your phone. And at any point,

you can bring up a volume adjustment bar.

The app is free on Android and iOS. You just need to make sure your phone and amp are both on the same network.





## In detail...



1

### Connections

An ethernet connection will give you a more stable experience, but you also get built-in wifi, which gives you more flexibility. There's built-in Bluetooth too.

2

### Inputs

If you like to plug things in, you'll be right at home. There are eight HDMI inputs (one at the front) and myriad analogue connections for old-school kit.

3

### Speaker settings

Pay extra attention when connecting your speakers. The terminals aren't marked for Atmos. You'll want to use Height 1 and Height 2, and then adjust the settings.

ourselves using at any one time. You get three each of digital optical and coaxial inputs, while a USB port lets you play music from memory sticks and iPods.

There are also plenty of analogue inputs and outputs, which can be used for multi-zone listening.

### Accurate calibration

Now, a word on setting up the Onkyo. Pay special attention to the way you hook up your speakers, because the terminals can be a bit confusing. There's no label for Atmos speakers, so you'll have to connect them to 'Height 1' and 'Height 2'.

Automatic calibration is quite accurate, but we'd suggest taking the time to check the settings so that the Onkyo realises Height 1 and Height 2 are your Atmos speakers. If you're using large speakers, make sure that's reflected in the menus too.

We'd also suggest at least starting with all processing modes off and experimenting with each one in turn. The 'night mode' flattens the dynamic range, making the sound a bit unexciting. Turn this off and you'll hear what the Onkyo can really do.

### No degree required

As for design, it's difficult to get excited about any AV receiver, and the Onkyo is no exception. But it's not unpleasant to look at. There's only one dial (for volume), with input selection left to individual buttons



The remote control is pleasant to operate, but there's a simple app if you prefer

along the face. We'd prefer a dedicated input selection dial, but it's hardly a deal-breaker. The build quality is strong. It's a well-built metal box, available in black or silver, and is heavy enough to convince you not to move it once it's settled.

The remote control is pleasant to operate. It's a good size, with well-spaced buttons, and you don't need a degree to navigate it. If you don't like it (or if you lose it) you can always use the remote control app (free on Android and iOS). It's a bit simple, but it gets the job done.

### A great comeback

We find ourselves very impressed by the Onkyo TX-NR3030. With a class-leading sound and a great list of features, it offers plenty for your money. We had been slightly worried about Onkyo's lack of five-star reviews for a while, but it turns out that our concern wasn't necessary. This is one heck of a comeback for the company. Very well done indeed.

### TECH SPECS

HDMI in 8 • HDMI out 3 •  
Networking yes • 3D passthrough yes •  
Bluetooth yes • Wi-fi yes • Dolby Atmos yes  
• Dimensions (hwd) 337 x 602 x 594mm •  
Weight 26.5kg

### Rating ★★★★★

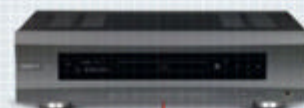
**FOR** Spacious, subtle sound; plenty of connections; Dolby Atmos

**AGAINST** Could do with a little more agility and attack

**VERDICT** Onkyo is back on top of its game with this stonkingly good amp

## SYSTEM BUILDER

Get these three and you'll be fully prepared for home cinema nirvana



**Blu-ray player**  
**Oppo BDP105D £1100**  
★★★★★

If you want a source that does it all with movies and music, this Oppo is the one



**Speaker package**  
**KEF R100 5.1 £2850**  
★★★★★

A lovely speaker package for 5.1 sound. Just add speakers for Atmos



**Projector**  
**Sony VPL-HW55ES £2800**  
★★★★★

Immensely enjoyable picture with inky black levels and beautifully judged colours

**Total build £9250**

**We had been slightly concerned about Onkyo's lack of five-star reviews. We needn't have worried - this is one heck of a comeback**

## REVIEWER'S NOTES... GETTING TO KNOW THE ONKYO TX-NR3030

- |   |   |  |   |   |
|---|---|--|---|---|
| <p><b>1</b> Yikes, this thing is heavy. But it's built like a tank, and looks imposing in black or silver. That glowing dial is nice.</p> | <p><b>2</b> Connecting speakers for a 5.1.4 set-up is tricky. Which terminals do the Atmos speakers go into? Clearer labelling, please.</p> | <p><b>3</b> Auto calibration is quick and fairly accurate. But it pays to tinker with the settings. Turn Night Mode off.</p> | <p><b>4</b> Atmos works! Where did the ceiling disappear to? Those raindrops are almost falling on my head. I need the loo.</p> | <p><b>5</b> It sounds lovely in standard 5.1 too. Looks like Onkyo has made a very strong comeback after a few years in the pack.</p> |
|---|---|--|---|---|

# 6 MONTHS NETFLIX ULTRA HD A GIFT TO YOU FROM LG\*

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**PurePop Maxi | Radio | £100**

# Pure plays everything safe

**What do you** want from your portable radio-cum-Bluetooth receiver? Well, if Pure's research is anything to go by, you want instant access and ease of use just as much as you want best-quality audio performance. So with the Pop range, the company's attempting to fit the quart of consumers' requirements into the pint pot of a compact, decorative design. Although, as the name suggests, this Pop Maxi is the largest of the Pop family. Everything's relative, after all.

## Compact - and feature-packed

Maxi or not, at 17 x 19 x 10cm the Pop's not going to take up much room on your work surface - nevertheless Pure has found space for two 3in drivers served by 4.3W of power each, DAB/DAB+ and FM reception, the usual clock and alarm functions, Bluetooth functionality, a 3.5mm input and space for batteries (4 AAs or Pure's £35 ChargePAK) in the sturdy, smoothly constructed box.

The display is crisp and clear, though it doesn't occupy as much of the fascia as it might, and consequently can be a trifle difficult to read from any kind of distance. The looks are either sleekly discreet or a bit bland, depending on your taste - with the Pop range, at least, Pure is attempting a grown-up, sophisticated vibe.

To an extent this seems to be true too of the sound Pure has given the Pop Maxi, and on that subject we can be less equivocal. Even with what (we're assured) is the highest quality of BBC broadcast, Radio 3, the Pop Maxi sounds a little restrained.

The bottom of the frequency range is short of weight but nicely poised and speedy enough, and there's sufficient space and balance in the midrange to make details reasonably distinct. Up at the top end, though, there's a cloudy, insubstantial quality to treble reproduction that lowers a bit of a veil over proceedings.

## Comfortably competent

Switch to 6Music (statistically more popular yet of lower bitrate than Radio 3) and the story's much the same - a politely undemonstrative presentation, equally hard to enthuse about or be offended by.

That pair of diminutive drivers prove adept at delivering a smooth journey from the bottom of the frequency range to the top - although, as we say, they struggle to define treble sounds effectively - but stereo sound isn't an unqualified success.

The sound the Pop Maxi serves up isn't appreciably larger than the cabinet it emanates from and the soundstage, while distinct, isn't significantly bigger than that presented by Pure's Award-winning (and mono) £85 Evoke D2.

Unlike the D2, the Pop Maxi is Bluetooth-equipped, and when paired with an iPhone 6 and in receipt of a 320kbps Spotify rendition of Tony Allen's *Losun* gives a more convincing account of itself. Low frequencies are altogether more assertive in their extension, and there's greater detail and resolution in the midrange too.

The treble's still on the troublesome side, though not as diaphanous as it is when handling DAB radio, and the whole presentation gets a little more breathing space. It's still not the largest-scale sound ever served up by a portable radio, but it is at least a fairly dynamic listen.

## Decent but disconcerting

Taken as a whole, the Pop Maxi is a decent, if mildly disconcerting, proposition. Where specification, build, finish and (arguably) looks are concerned it's pretty much beyond reproach, yet the sound it produces isn't everything we'd like it to be and we can't help but think Pure, which for so long has had an innate understanding of what this part of the market requires, has taken its eye slightly off the audio ball.

Build and finish are both first-rate but the conservative looks are set to divide opinion



## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Ample functionality; sturdy build and finish; coherent sound...

**AGAINST** ...aside from some treble concerns; can sound small-scale and tentative

**VERDICT** Far from a poor product, but we want (and expected) the Pop Maxi to be better

## Also consider

**Pure Evoke D2**  
**£85 ★★★★★**

Cheaper, and arguably a better listen. No Bluetooth or alkaline battery option though.





Teac CD-P800NT | Network CD player | £350

# Versatile player does the work of many

A network player that plays CDs, or a CD player that streams? The Teac is both



**Contrary to popular belief**, we are not enamoured with the idea of a house filled with big boxes. We'd much rather squeeze multiple features into one convenient system - as long as the sound quality stays good. That's exactly what the Teac CD-P800NT sets out to do - and it succeeds.

What is it? Some would say it's a CD player that can stream music. Others would call it a high-res network player that plays CDs. Either way, it's a versatile device and a great way into the world of hi-fi separates, especially if you've not yet committed to a single format.

## Greater stability

If the Teac CD-P800NT looks familiar, it may be because we recently reviewed the Onkyo C-N7050. The two are stablemates, from the same parent company. On paper there is very little to differentiate them. And since we were rather effusive about the Onkyo, we expected good things from the Teac. We are not disappointed.

What you get is a well-made metal box, in silver or black, with a tray-loaded CD drive and a few key connections: RCA, optical and coaxial outputs, two USB ports, 6.3mm headphone output and ethernet.

That last one is for playing Internet Radio and for accessing networked devices by DNLA. There is no wifi, so it's cable or nothing. Less flexibility, greater stability.

That chunky dial is one of the few differences between the Teac and the Onkyo. Where the Onkyo's input selector is small and a little fiddly, the Teac's offering is easy to operate.

Easier still is the Teac AVR Remote app, free on Android and iOS. It's a little basic, and not as natural as a proper remote control, but it lets your smartphone see and choose music by artist and album listing. You can do this on the main device, but that screen doesn't show as much information.

What can you play? Compact discs are a given, but when it comes to digital files, format compatibility is generous. It can handle AAC, Apple Lossless, WMA, OGG Vorbis and MP3.

Want to go hi-res? You can play WAV and FLAC files up to 24bit/192kHz. The Teac is even compatible with DSD up to 5.6MHz. The player can't handle SACDs, so DSD files only work through network streaming or USB sticks. Speaking of which, the front USB port can handle iPhones and iPods too.

So you're all set up. You're plugged in, with a wealth of music at your fingertips. But how does it sound? It's here that the Onkyo edges ahead, but for the money we're satisfied with the Teac's performance.

## Reassuring confidence

Spinning a few CDs, the Teac demonstrates an upbeat demeanour. On the more animated tracks it charges along with enough energy to get your foot tapping, a surefootedness that borders on panache.

That's not to say it has the same approach to more sedate pieces - the Teac is flexible enough to calm down sufficiently when you switch to a spot of smooth jazz.

Detail levels are good. A clear sense of texture is afforded to vocals and instruments, along with well-defined



Selecting tracks is easier with the app, but still feels more natural with a remote

leading edges to notes. This definition is maintained even with complex rhythms.

Where the Onkyo comes out on top is in dynamics. The Teac punches hard enough, but Onkyo hits harder. It also has a slightly smoother sound that rounds off harsher treble notes, which the Teac occasionally lets slip. The difference is small, however.

As for other inputs, we are pleased to hear the same sonic character displayed whether we streamed across our network, or attached a USB stick. It's a solid, punchy sound with good tonal balance and a reassuring confidence.

The Teac CD-P800NT is a feature-packed box of tricks and it sounds good too. While it may not keep pace with a dedicated CD player or network streaming player, we're impressed with the sound at this price. If you're after a single solution that does the job of many, this deserves an audition.

## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Solid, confident sound; easy to use; remote app

**AGAINST** Could be a little smoother and more dynamic

**VERDICT** Versatile one-box solution for CDs and hi-res streaming alike

## Also consider

**Onkyo C-N7050**  
**£350 ★★★★★**

For the same price, this sounds a little better, though it's more awkward to use. In fact, there's not much between them



## System builder total build £1040

### Amplifier

**Onkyo A-9010**  
**£200 ★★★★★**

Excellent value and one of the most musically satisfying budget amplifiers we've heard in recent years



### Stereo speakers

**Q Acoustics 3020 £190**  
**★★★★★**

Another top-class budget standmounter. Fabulous sound for the money



### Turntable

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

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





## Connectivity without compromise.

*Balanced  
Design  
Concept.*

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Want to find out more? Visit [rotel.com](http://rotel.com) to find your nearest authorised Rotel retailer.





SonoroSTEREO | Musicssystem | £500

# One box, several ticks

**Never heard of Sonoro?** Neither had we, but then a cursory browse on its website enlightened us. This is a German audio company that produces a snazzy 'lifestyle' range: four products, all radios but varying in features and, curiously, each designed for a specific room in the house.

## Each to its own

As Sonoro sells it, the 'room-sensitive' products have 'functionality customized for specific living environments'. The firm's water-resistant GoLondon tuner is aimed at the bathroom and kitchen, while the compact SonoroRADIO is meant for the bedroom. And so on. Of course, they won't self-combust upon crossing the threshold into another room - you can put them anywhere you like.

Here, we're concerned with the SonoroSTEREO, the flagship, made for living rooms but just as suited to a kitchen worktop or (large-ish) bedside table. Combining its siblings' specs and bringing in a few tricks of its own, it makes for a tempting all-in-one system. Your one-stop solution for music playback, if you like.

Let us break it down for you: there's FM and DAB/DAB+ radio, a slot-loading CD player, and a host of connections around the back: a pair of RCA plugs and single 3.5mm for hook-ups to laptops and portable

devices, and a USB socket that supports MP3 and WMA playback (from a key or drive up to 32GB) and can, according to Sonoro, charge any smartphone.

It might not be everyone's cup of tea. Audiophiles who have their hearts set on high-res audio will need to look elsewhere. And network features such as DLNA and internet radio have been left off the list. What you can do is stream songs offline via aptX Bluetooth.

It would be an injustice to miss off its miscellaneous features, which include time and date setting, comprehensive alarm functions and sleep timers. Then there's our favourite: 'relax sounds'. Exactly what it says on the tin, it's an assortment of tranquil sounds from birds to whales, wind chimes to crackling fire. Soothing, indeed.

## A visual treat

Roughly the size of a shoebox, the Sonoro is a block of beauty and would no doubt incite a few 'oohs' and 'aahs' from visitors to your house.

Its solid-wood housing is dressed to impress in a stylish glossy lacquer (available in your choice of red, black or white) which meets a smart, clean frontage.

The brushed-silver front panel features a quadrant of soft-click buttons, a responsive dial and an easily readable (and dimmable) display, all of which make the system a real pleasure to use. The rather plush remote is in keeping with the unit, too, both aesthetically and practically.

Either side is a mesh grille, in each case hiding an 8cm driver. A down-firing 10cm subwoofer underneath the unit also plays its part to bring low-frequency grunt.



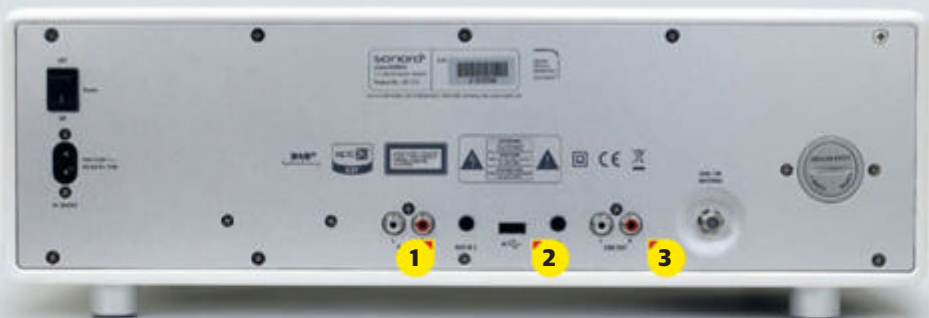
Clean, simple design in an elegant, well-made box - visually, the STEREO is a treat

Before we go any further, know that there's a series of self-explanatory sound modes to experiment with: 'treble' offers a bright listen in which the overpowering top end is a little uncomfortable, while 'bass' is a bit boomy and 'voice' sounds harsh and forward. Default mode 'stereo' produces the clearest, most tonally balanced sound, and those looking for greater low- or high-end presence can adjust treble and bass levels.



The rigorously logical matching remote keeps up the high standards of build

## In detail



### 1 Wired or wireless?

We got good results after hooking our smartphone up via Bluetooth but, as ever, the best sound will come from a wired connection; in this case either through the RCA or 3.5mm inputs.

### 2 Dual-function USB

The USB socket not only opens the STEREO up to a number of possible sources for music, it also acts as a charging point for phones, tablets and other such devices.

### 3 Output possibilities

The line-out sockets can be used to record material onto an external unit or to hook the STEREO up with extra, external amplification and speakers for those with really big living rooms.

**Know your place**

As well as tinkering with the pre-set sound modes, you might want to experiment with the position of your STEREO. A corner spot or one too close to a wall could result in a boomy sound.



**The first thing that hits us about the sound is how big and open it is - this is an audio performance we'd normally associate with a much larger machine. You can tell it's been designed with a view to filling large rooms**

We pair our LG G3 smartphone over Bluetooth and let the STEREO try to make a positive impression. It does so valiantly. The first thing that hits us about the sound is how big and open it is - this is an audio performance we'd normally associate with a much larger machine. You can tell it's been designed with a view to filling large rooms. We don't often hear such a mature, multi-talented sound from a product of this sort, so are pleasantly surprised.

Tonally balanced and intricately detailed, its presentation is very listenable, the unit delivering a good sense of space and weight. Hit play on Red Hot Chili Peppers' *Snow (Hey Oh)* and the dense production never sounds jumbled or unclear.

**Keeping a sense of balance**

Fed a heavy track like this, the STEREO can feel a little strained at high volumes, but it does stay clear and balanced.

There are clear hints of dynamic aptitude as the drumming builds to the chorus, and admirable rhythmic drive and energy when

it finally arrives. The forceful drumbeat is taut and the string-plucking is rendered with pace and enthusiasm.

It's a fun, musical box - athletic and agile, it has a sense of life about it that makes it very hard to sit still when you're playing an even remotely lively track (we tried).

While the clear, insightful midrange and deep, agile bass throw up very few complaints, the same can't be said for the treble. In need of more refinement, it stings as cymbals pierce the soundstage, failing to die down even after a weekend's run-in.

And as much as we like the STEREO's forward, go-getting stance, we'd welcome more subtlety and variation to its delivery for a full star-set. Even mellow music, Sufjan Stevens for example, feels a little ambushed at times.

It's good news for CD advocates. Slot in Drake's *Nothing Was The Same* CD - the mechanism barely whirrs as it loads - and the presentation is analogous in character to that played wirelessly from the LG, but (as you'd hope) cleaner, clearer and more cohesive, tying the various strands of music

together more convincingly. The album's arresting beats pound through the system with punch and potency, the upbeat rhythms sounding agile and explicit.

**A viable alternative**

All things considered, £500 isn't a big ask for a classy-looking system that can play music from a host of devices - and play it pretty well. It might not do enough to rule the roost in this sector, but for those who don't have the room or the budget to build a decent system of hi-fi separates - the cost of even the most modest amplifier, source and speaker set-up would put a larger dent in your pocket - the SonoroSTEREO is a very attractive alternative.

**Rating ★★★★★**

**FOR** Big, clear, musical sound; plenty of detail; decent compatibility; gorgeous casing and finish

**AGAINST** Treble needs refinement; sound could be a tad more subtle; no internet connectivity

**VERDICT** A laudable idea and a decent all-in-one proposition from Sonoro

**USE IT WITH Apple iPhone 6**

Stream music to the Sonoro with the best iPhone to date

**Also consider**

**Denon D-M39DAB £310 ★★★★★**

A talented micro-system that stands out for its engaging sound





RHA T10i | In-ear headphones | £150

# Lightweight, but heavy sound

**There's only so much** you can do within the confines of a headphone, especially the in-ear variety. But RHA has managed to engineer its T10i buds so you can actually tune their sound to suit your musical taste.

How? By selecting one of the three pairs of tuning filters supplied in the form of tiny, beautifully crafted pieces that screw into the steel housing of each earpiece.

Each filter has been tuned to encourage a different balance of sound. They're labelled 'treble', 'bass' or 'reference', with each given a different finish to prevent mix-ups.

## Attention to detail

For a pair of in-ear headphones at this money, it's hard not to be impressed by the look and build of the RHAs. The injection-moulded steel earpieces look intricate and delicate. The small logos in each side show great attention to detail - you're even supplied with steel mounts to hold the ear-tips and filters in place.

The RHAs come with an iPhone-friendly, three-button remote and mic, so you can answer calls as well as skip tracks and alter the volume. Owners of other brands of smartphone will only have limited controls (RHA also does a normal T10 model, which loses the remote/mic combo).

## Relatively lightweight

Each earpiece uses mouldable over-ear hooks to help with fitting. Manoeuvring them into place is more involved than normal buds, but over time this should become easier, as the hooks mould to the contours of your ears. Once they're in place, the T10is still manage to feel relatively lightweight despite their steel construction.

As always, picking the right style and size of ear tips is vital to create a good seal in your ear, and RHA provides you with 10 different pairs to get the job done. These include silicone, memory foam and double-flange designs.

## Hard-hitting sound

We're tempted to go straight for the dark 'bass' filters, but we resist and use the 'reference' ones instead. Play a quick blast of Royal Blood's *Better Strangers*, and immediately the RHAs give you the impression they mean business. They produce a hard-hitting sound - drums are forceful with real intent behind each strike. The bassline to J. Cole's *No Role Modelz* follows the lazy rhythm of the track, but sounds meaty and powerful with it.

Once you've become accustomed to their bold, confident delivery, you then become aware that these in-ears are lapping up more than their fair share of detail. It's not the most open sound we've heard - vocals have an tendency to sound closed-in - but they still extract texture and nuance from the grimey Royal Blood guitar riffs.

## An exciting listen

Switch to the delicate opening guitar play of James Bay's *Hold Back The River* and this demonstrates the RHAs' ability to pick out leading edges and communicate dynamic shifts with the listener. You can almost close your eyes and follow his fingers as he shifts from chord to chord. When the drum kicks in, the RHAs communicate all detail, texture and crispness explicitly.

They are an exciting listen, but the more you listen, the more you realise that low frequencies sound imposing and overpowering. When tracks call for subtlety the T10is can't seem to ease off, especially when using the 'bass' filters (more power and a fuller sound), but even with the 'reference' filters there's just too much bass.

Swap to the 'treble' filters and the soundstage opens up, with a little more clarity and a hint of extra sharpness to upper mids and highs, but the bass could still do with dropping down a notch or two. Long-term, their forceful approach to low frequencies can become draining.

## Bass in your face

With three tuning filters, the RHA T10is should be a versatile set of in-ear headphones. But we found the bass a little heavy on all three settings, and there was a loss of detail as a result



If you're looking for a robust sound, you're sure to get a real kick out of the RHA T10is. But headphones like the Sennheiser Momentum In-Ears have a better balance at a significantly lower price.

## Rating ★★☆☆

**FOR** Excellent build; neat design; weighty, hard-hitting bass; good detail and dynamics

**AGAINST** Bass is overpowering regardless of filter chosen; sound recessed in the midrange

**VERDICT** These in-ears are good in small doses, but they need to rein in that bass

## Also consider

**Sennheiser Momentum In-Ear**  
£90 ★★★★★

Sennheiser's Momentum range has a couple of brilliant headphones in its ranks, including these superb in-ears



## In detail



**Earpieces** The injection-moulded steel earpieces look intricate and delicate



**Filters** Three filters will adjust the balance, but none sounds ideal



**Ear tips** Ten sets of buds are supplied, with a range of designs to fit your ear



**Remote and mic** iPhone-friendly three-button remote for answering calls



# T7 Bluetooth Speaker with Micro Matrix™ Or in layman's terms, it sounds great.

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Onkyo A-9010 | Stereo amplifier | £200

# More to this amp than meets the eye

If you're looking for a musically captivating budget amplifier you're in luck. This new Onkyo A-9010 is a real treat, and it's just the first of a number of stereo amplifiers the company has planned with the view to establish a real presence in the two channel market. Considering the success the brand has had with AV amplification we wouldn't bet against it.

It's fair to say there's been a shortage of talented yet affordable amplification in recent years. This has left just a handful of products such as Marantz's PM6005 and the Rotel RA10 hogging the limelight. The trouble is that these amplifiers weigh in at £300 or higher, leaving those on a more restricted budget looking at discounted stock for something truly musical. We think the arrival of the A-9010 changes that. Not that you could guess just by looking at it.

## Sensible specs

On the surface this Onkyo looks pretty ordinary. Its appearance is neat in a wholly functional way, lacking anything in the way of overt design flourishes. It's clear that pretty much all the effort has gone on getting the electronics optimised.

Like most offerings from established manufacturers, the A-9010 is decently made and specified sensibly. There are defeatable tone controls, a decent array of line level inputs, a moving magnet phono stage and headphone output - all good, but nothing too unusual for this price.

For once, we can say we like the supplied remote control. It's a simple plastic unit but is nicely arranged and easy to use - not something that can be said of all remotes.

It's becoming the norm for budget amplifiers to have digital-to-analogue conversion built in. On paper, this approach makes sense considering most sources are digital anyway. But such an idea only has real value if the conversion modules fitted sound better than those used in the digital sources. In our experience that isn't usually the case, with these number-crunching inputs adding little to the overall quality.

The inclusion of such digital modules can also adversely affect the performance of the analogue circuits around them. Onkyo has decided to bypass the issue

On the outside, the Onkyo A-9010 looks ordinary, but it delivers something special for a budget price

## It's tasty

Onkyo is known for its AV amps, but the A-9010 is the first we've seen of its new range of stereo products. If this strong performer at a budget price is a taste of what's to come, the competition should be worried.

by not going down the DAC route with the A-9010, preferring to spend the budget freed on improving other aspects of the electronic design.

## Clean and crisp

Start listening and it doesn't take long to realise the engineers have managed to deliver something special. This amplifier has been tuned in the UK, and that decision has paid off handsomely. The changes involve the use of improved components in key areas, and fine-tuning the power supply and audio circuits with the aim of producing a musically rewarding sound.

It's worth pressing the Source Direct button before you start listening. This bypasses the tone controls and helps the amplifier sound that bit cleaner and crisper in the way it renders fine detail.

The remote control supplied with the A-9010 is a simple plastic unit that is both easy to use and nicely arranged - and a rare example of one we actually like



## Cohesive and balanced

We start off with *Mountain Sound* from Of Monsters and Men and are swept away with the amplifier's energetic presentation. It sounds cohesive and well balanced, delivering a sense of drive and attack well beyond what we would expect. There's composure too - the amp keeping the multitude of instrumental strands in check even when the music becomes demanding.

Add the Onkyo's superb timing and strong dynamic expression, and you have an amplifier that makes listening to music fun. That's a rare quality at any price.

The A-9010 is happy across musical genres. It has enough refinement and insight to deliver John Williams's *Hymn to the Fallen* (from the *Saving Private Ryan* OST) convincingly. A decent amount of scale is on show here, but it's the way the amplifier deals with dynamic shifts that impresses us the most. There's a pleasing freedom to the way it hits peaks, and surprisingly solidity too.

## System builder total build £730

### Turntable

**Pro-Ject Essential II**  
£210 ★★★★★

Terrific budget turntable delivers a rich musical sound, and is very easy to set up



### Stereo speakers

**Q Acoustics 3020**  
£190 ★★★★★

Excellent budget standmounters that will work a treat with the Onkyo



### DAC

**Audioquest Dragonfly v1.2**  
£130 ★★★★★

Improves the sound from your laptop by delivering a high-grade analogue output into the amplifier





Its tonality is nicely judged. The Onkyo sounds open and lively in the treble but never veers towards aggression. That's a good thing considering much of the budget equipment we hear can sound edgy or thin.

The A-9010's breadth of ability means you don't need to stick with similarly priced partnering kit. It's quite happy driving the Q Acoustics 3050 floorstanders and is transparent enough to show differences

between Marantz's CD6005 and Audiolab's 8200CD. You can build a system around this Onkyo and develop it strongly without the amplifier becoming the limiting factor.

The Onkyo brand is best known for its AV amps. But if the A-9010 is indicative of the standard of its new range of stereo products, that impression could well be about to change. Rival manufacturers should take notice.

**Its appearance is neat in a functional way, lacking anything in the way of overt design flourishes. It's clear much of the effort has gone on getting the electronics optimised**

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Entertaining and energetic presentation; fine rhythmic drive; articulate midrange

**AGAINST** Nothing at this price

**VERDICT** The A-9010 is excellent value and one of the most musically satisfying budget amplifiers we've heard in recent years

### Also consider

**Marantz PM6005 £300**

★★★★★

Our current budget champ is a terrific choice, with refinement and insight



There are no digital inputs, but such is the strength of the 9010 that we're not worried



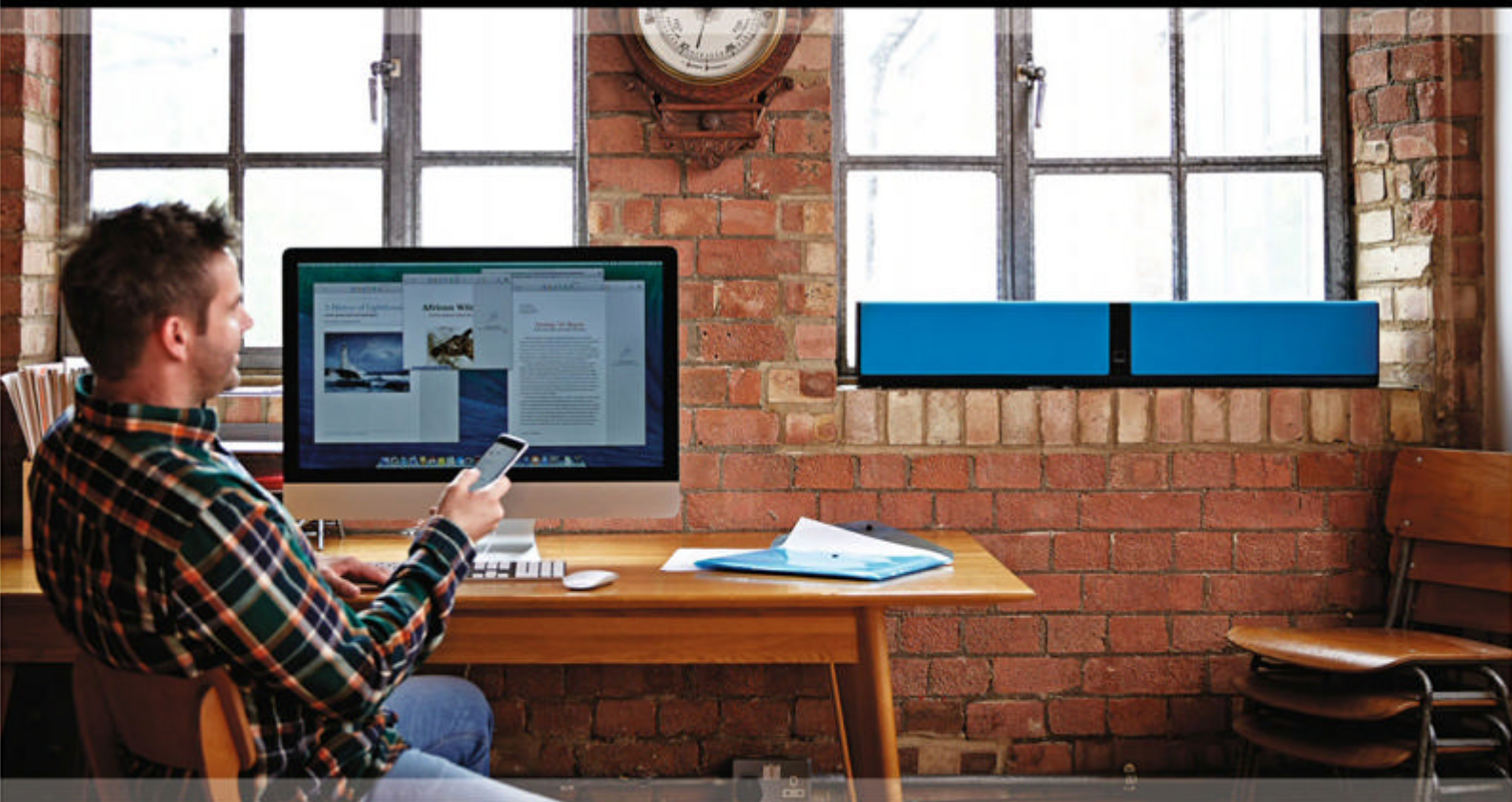




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**Acoustic Research M2 | Portable music player | £900**

# M2 displays a touch of class

A £900 high-resolution music player that looks and sounds like a premium hi-fi product? This portable player's all-metal construction is eye-catching, but it's the superbly detailed and authoritative sound quality that really gets us excited about the Acoustic Research M2.

## Controlled and discerning

Portable music players (either standalone players or smartphones) don't always deliver the same meaty, powerful bass depth you get with dedicated hi-fi kit, but there's a satisfying weight to the M2's performance that comes admirably close.

We are blown away by a 24-bit/192kHz FLAC recording of Hans Zimmer's *Gotham's Reckoning*. Zimmer's signature strings and percussion boom menacingly, with the low-frequency notes reaching incredible depths. The sense of build-up is palpable, and the eventual crescendo hits you like a wall of sound. What's all the more impressive is that it isn't all just a block of noise. The M2 is controlled and discerning enough to convey the texture of the strings and the rich layers of harmonies.

It piles on the punch and power without ever missing a step when it comes to rhythmic precision. Muse's *Supremacy* is a rousing performance in 24-bit/96kHz, with basslines taut and rumbling, guitars crunchy and attacking, and every element working cohesively to deliver the most enjoyable and faithful performance.

You'll hear a drop in detail and clarity with MP3s, but the M2's enthusiasm and meaty delivery remains consistent.

## Expensive finish

Acoustic Research has put just as much effort into the design of the M2. Crafted out of solid metal in contrasting black and silver finishes, the build quality is excellent, and a velvety pouch is provided to protect the M2's expensive finish from getting any scratches. It's considerably thicker than any current flagship smartphone, but we have no trouble wrapping our hands around it.

At the bottom edge, you'll find a 3.5mm headphone output, a single analogue line out to connect the player to your hi-fi system, and a USB port for charging.

The M2's volume wheel gives it a distinctive look, but it is a touch too sensitive and responds a little abruptly to the slightest scroll. It is also prone to being



It is thicker than most smartphones, but we had no trouble handling the M2

accidentally moved when stored in a bag or our pockets, which can be a little annoying after a while.

## microSD to expand the memory

The M2 comes with 64GB of internal storage. It's enough to start with, but you'll soon find that space filling up once you start adding high-res albums. However, there's an expandable microSD slot.

File compatibility is the best we've seen in a high-res player. Not only does it play all the popular formats - FLAC, WAV, ALAC, AIFF, MP3 - it also supports DSD (64 and 128) and DXD. Inside, there's a high-quality Burr-Brown PCM1794A DAC that handles files of up to 24-bit/192kHz.



The AR M2 features both headphone and line level outputs

The 5in touchscreen has a resolution of 720 x 1280 pixels, with album artwork looking crisp and clear. The playback controls in the AR Music Player app have sharp edges and there's no screen noise.

The player runs on a very basic version of Android 4.3, which gives you a degree of familiarity. The settings, pull-down notification bar and app drawer are all there, but you won't find Google Play Store nor any other features that encourage multimedia use. Acoustic Research has stripped it bare to ensure sound quality isn't compromised, bypassing the entire OS to create a dedicated lossless path straight to the proprietary AR Music Player app.

However, the interface isn't as fast as Android can be, and the home screen's widgets linger for a split-second too long in the background. Small hiccups, maybe, but hopefully they will be ironed out with future software updates.

## Drag and drop files from a laptop

The M2 has wi-fi and a web browser, so you can surf the internet while listening to music. In the absence of the Play Store you can download and install APK files from streaming services like Spotify onto the M2. Otherwise, transferring files from your laptop is a simple case of drag-and-drop.

The M2 reportedly lasts around nine hours on a full charge. That's comparable to an Apple iPhone, although not as impressive as the claimed 32 hours of Sony's NWZ-ZX1.

This is the first portable music player we've tested at this price, but the £900 tag is not without justification. It doesn't quite deliver the perfect, seamless experience we're expecting, but there's no denying that it's the best sound quality we've heard yet. If you're after a premium product that will do justice to your high-resolution music

## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Superb weight to sound; stylish build; extensive file compatibility; that volume dial

**AGAINST** High price; limited Android experience; short battery life; that volume dial

**VERDICT** Expensive, but sounds fantastic - the best high-res player we've heard so far

## Also consider

**Sony NWZ-ZX1 £550**

★★★★★

Your best bet for an intuitive portable design with all the benefits of Android



Spacing of buttons means it's hard not to press them when holding the product





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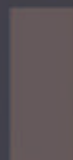
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**ATC SCM19 | Stereo speakers | £2000**

# A bigger box of party tricks

The '19' in these ATCs' name refers to the internal volume of the cabinet

**Regular readers will** know we're big fans of ATC's £1200 standmounters, the SCM11s. They're multiple Award-winners, and continue to set the standard at their price. When it comes to insight and honesty we haven't heard any better.

ATC has expanded on the formula and come up with the SCM19s. The cabinet has grown to 19 litres (ATC's model numbers refer to the internal volume) and the mid/bass driver changes to the company's highly developed 15cm unit. This driver has served in the brand's premium standmounters for years.

## New tweeter

This mid/bass really is something unusual. It uses a cone made of doped polyester weave onto which a 75mm dome is grafted in a bid to improve the unit's performance at the integration point. Take one of these drivers out of the 19s and you'll find a heavily engineered unit with a huge magnet assembly. It weighs in at a hefty 9kg, almost half the weight of the speaker.

But the big news is the new tweeter. This 25mm soft dome is made in-house - some achievement for a small company. The two drivers cross over at a conventional 2.5kHz.

## Acoustic clues

While the SCM19s aren't hard speakers to drive, they excel with quality amplifiers with a bit of poke. Sensitivity is below average at 85dB/W/m, which tends to reinforce this impression. We get great results with Burmester's O32 and Rega's Elicit-R as well as our reference Bryston BP26/4B SST2 pre/power combination.

Given a day to settle, the SCM19s turn in a great performance. We start off listening to a CD rip of *Clair de Lune* from our reference Naim NDS/555PS streamer and are impressed by what we hear.

There's a clear sense of how large the recording venue is, with the SCM19s picking up the subtle acoustic clues. Piano notes are delivered with solidity and finesse. The leadings and trailing edges of notes are crisply defined without sounding artificially hyped. These speakers deliver a presentation that's as convincing tonally as it is spellbinding dynamically.



Those dynamic skills come into even sharper focus when we play Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*. These ATCs have no trouble delivering the piece's crescendos with power, even at high volume levels. There's an impressive degree of composure here, the monitors refusing to compress or harden up even when pushed hard.

We also like the SCM19s' ability to render a large-scale soundstage and populate it with well-focused instruments. Things stay stable even as the piece's complexity increases.

Moving onto Prince's *Love* shows that these boxes like to party too. They deliver the song's relentless rhythmic momentum with enthusiasm. The bass kicks hard, while the drum machines attack with determination. Prince's vocals are handled in a crisp and articulate manner, but they also lack nothing in terms of body or natural warmth.



The SCM19 speakers feature ATC's 15cm mid/bass unit and a new tweeter

These ATCs are highly analytical, but never clinical or passionless, and are transparent to the original recording and system electronics. If these are good there are few better sounding alternatives for around this price. Buy with confidence.

## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Honest and insightful sound; impressive dynamic ability; composure at higher volume levels; crisp rhythmic drive; rock-solid build

**AGAINST** Metal grilles don't look classy

**VERDICT** If you value insight and honesty above all else these speakers are a terrific buy

## Also consider

**PMC Twenty 22 £1970 ★★★★★**

Our current favourite premium standmounters are balanced performers.



## System builder total build £7200

### CD player

**Roksan Caspian M2 CD £1900 ★★★★★**

This CD player combines refinement, bite and rhythmic ability better than anything else at this price level



### Stereo amplifier

**Roksan Caspian M2 £1900 ★★★★★**

An exceptional amplifier for the money, and a big-hearted performer capable of drama and subtlety



### DAC

**Chord Hugo £1400 ★★★★★**

Superb sound quality in an unbelievably small and versatile package





Samsung Galaxy S6 Edge | Smartphone | £700

# Samsung shapes up with S6 Edge

It's been three years since we've given a phone in the Samsung Galaxy S family five stars, but after just a few minutes with the Galaxy S6 Edge we get the feeling that's about to change.

When we first heard about the Edge, we were sceptical. Almost identical spec to the Galaxy S6, with just its curved screen separating them... is there really any point? But the S6 Edge is something you have to feel in your hand to appreciate. Innovative and desirable, this is the phone we've been waiting for from Samsung.

## Unibody design

The S6 Edge is unabashedly a premium handset - and has a price tag to match. It follows the lead of Samsung's Galaxy Note 4 Edge, but takes it one step further with a screen that wraps around both vertical edges of the phone, rather than just one. This makes it feel even slimmer than it is, with the trade off that its edges feel slightly sharp in the hand.

In a long-awaited first for the Galaxy S range, the S6 Edge ditched the plastic body for a metal frame with Corning Gorilla Glass 4 on the front and back. It's also now a unibody design, which means power users lose the ability to swap out the battery. Samsung has also nixed the ability to expand the storage via microSD. It now offers built-in storage options of 32GB, 64GB and 128GB. While the ability to swap out your battery won't be missed by many, the loss of the microSD card slot probably will. It's a shame Samsung has compromised on such a key feature.

## Bezel-free

All is forgiven with one glance at the S6 Edge's screen though. Curved edges aside, it's a gorgeous 5.1in Super AMOLED Quad HD (2560 x 1440) display with 577ppi - some 77% more pixels than the Galaxy S5.

Of course, those curves can't be ignored for long - it's those that make the S6 Edge one of the best-looking phones on the market. Almost entirely bezel-free, and with the image spilling over the edges, the screen makes for a more immersive movie experience. Pictures are crisp and full of detail, with outlines sharp and defined.

The AMOLED display means viewing angles aren't the best, and colours can look a little washed out off axis. Viewed straight on, you'll find them punchy and bright, and while the hues aren't quite as natural as on the iPhone 6, the S6 Edge has a handful of colour palettes to suit your preference.

But with contrast the screen comes into its own, offering seriously deep blacks and bright whites that punch through dark scenes while still maintaining detail levels.

## Refined sound

On the audio side, the S6 Edge is one of the best Samsung phones we've heard. Offering music playback up to 24 bit/192kHz, high-res tracks are handily tagged up with a UHQ logo and their bitrate.

A range of formats are accepted, including FLAC and WAV, and both high-res tracks and Spotify streams alike are filled with punch and attack across the frequency range. It's a refined sound, leaner in tone to that on the iPhone 6 but one that is still dynamic and tonally balanced.

Higher resolution tracks have a touch more subtlety and an increased sense of space around big orchestral tracks, though Sony's Xperia Z3 delivers vocals with more expression.

The S6 Edge packs Samsung's own 64-bit octa-core Exynos processor and 3GB of

**Those curves can't be ignored for long - they make it one of the best-looking phones on the market - but they also make for a more immersive movie experience. Pictures are crisp and full of detail, with outlines sharp and defined**

ultra-fast RAM to help keep things moving along without delay. The result is a super-slick performance that barely stutters even when fed the most graphic-intensive games we could find.

## Light on its feet

Samsung's Touchwiz interface could still be a touch lighter on its feet but there's been some work done to slim it down, including a cleaner design and less bloatware over-running the app tray.

As mentioned earlier, the edges have a few neat tricks built into the interface, but they don't add much to the overall experience. You can assign five contacts to a favourites list down the edge, assigning each a colour in the process. When your contact calls, the edges glow with the chosen colour.

Elsewhere, you can also use it to get details on time,

**The Samsung Galaxy S6 Edge also features a few surprises, such as a glowing colour edge to indicate when one of your five favourite contacts is calling**

weather, news and notifications when the screen is off, but the swiping motion to launch it is temperamental and the information on offer could be better.

## Charging boost

Wireless charging is built in to the handset and Samsung's quick charge plug comes as standard. As you'd expect, we saw a boost compared with a standard charger, particularly when charging from flat. Despite this, we can't help but expect a little more from its battery life, particularly after the strong performances of some of 2014's handsets. With its bright, powerful screen, the S6 Edge struggles to make it through a full day without crying out for a recharge, managing around 10 and a half hours on our battery run down test, looping a 720p video on 50 per cent brightness.

The fingerprint sensor and heart rate monitor from the S5 return on the S6 Edge, with the former being hugely improved. We don't find it quite as foolproof as Apple's scanner when it comes to accuracy, but it makes fingerprint unlocking an option on a Samsung device for the first time.

As for the heart rate monitor, it can be used in conjunction with the cleaned-up S Health app, but Samsung has also extended its usability to allow you to tap it to fire open the camera or decline a call.

## Blur-free shots

The main camera on the Galaxy S6 Edge packs the same 16MP sensor as the S5, but this time features an improved f/1.9 aperture for better low-light shots on both front and back cameras. It is quick to launch too, with a double tap on the home button opening the camera app in a seriously snappy 0.7 seconds.

The auto mode will be fine for most people, but those looking for a little more creative control might prefer the Pro mode, which gives you the ability to tweak exposure, ISO and white balance.

Used outside in good light, the S6 Edge's camera is up there as one of the best, capturing stacks of fine detail, even on zoomed-in shots, and doing an excellent job with colour reproduction.

Autofocus is fast and accurate and the built-in optical image stabilisation (OIS) ensures shots are sharp and blur-free even in low-light situations.





Curved edges not only enhance the movie experience, but also make the Samsung Galaxy S6 Edge one of the best-looking smartphones on the market

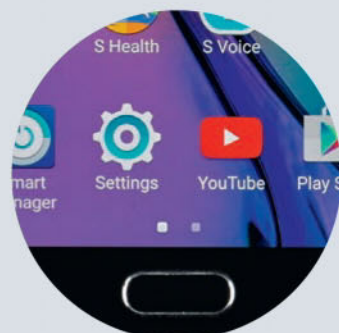
Video capture is available in 4K and full HD, but OIS only plays a role on the latter. We prefer to take the drop in resolution for steadier footage, but it's worth trying both.

With the release of the S6 Edge, Samsung has proved that it is once more back on its A-game, producing a phone that offers a stunning design alongside stonking performance. But there is a small matter of the price. At £700 for the 32GB version, it's

around £100 more expensive than the regular S6, for a similar experience. If the curved screen isn't a draw for you, then the S6 may well be a better option.

The S6 Edge is Samsung simply showing off what it can do, but when it can release a truly excellent handset that takes Samsung's flagship Galaxy S phone range comfortably back to five-star glory, then who can complain?

#### In detail



**Fingerprint scanner** is much improved, making unlocking the phone a breeze



**Heart-rate monitor** works with the S Health app - and will fire shutter for selfies



**Front-facing camera** offers 5MP, a wide-angle lens and an f/1.9 aperture

#### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Stunning screen; high-res music support; strong video performance; great camera

**AGAINST** No expandable storage; battery life could be better

**VERDICT** A stunning handset, inside and out. It's pricey, but worth it for a phone this special

#### Also consider

**Sony Xperia Z3**  
**£450 ★★★★★**

It might not win on looks, but its price and features make it one to consider





# Revolution XT



## Revolution in design. Revolution in sound.

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

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

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

# TANNOY

"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

**Amazon Fire TV Stick | Video streamer | £35**

# Stripped down, but effective streaming

Amazon has a finger in many pies, so it's not hugely surprising the American giant wants a piece of the streaming action. It wants to get into your living room, and it means business.

We recently tested the Amazon Fire TV box, which was lovely but forced Amazon's services on us a little too strongly. Now we have the Fire TV Stick: it's pretty much the same deal but, for less than half the price, we can't resist.

## Sticks or boxes?

There are two species of streaming devices: set-top boxes and sticks. Boxes have more connections and take up more space. Sticks strip it right down to the bare minimum, but have a much smaller price tag. At the time of writing, the Fire TV stick is less than half the cost of the Fire TV box.

It's essentially a chunky memory stick. It plugs into a spare HDMI socket on your TV or AV receiver. It's powered by a tiny cable, which goes into your TV's spare USB socket. If you don't have one, fret not - there is a bundled USB mains adaptor.

## Preregistered for Amazon users

Turn on your TV and you're guided through the installation process with nice graphics. Setting up basically involves connecting to the wi-fi network in your house - it's a process that should take no more than a matter of minutes. If you bought your stick through your Amazon account it comes preregistered to your name, which is a nice touch. There's no ethernet or any other hard-wired connections: streaming sticks are inherently basic devices.

There's not much to say about the aesthetics. It's a matt-black stick, plasticky but solid. You won't be worrying about the build quality once you plug it in and forget it's there. We don't tend to fondle our streaming devices anyway.

What we do fondle are remotes. You get a Bluetooth-connected black wand, but this isn't the clever remote you get with the Fire TV box, with its voice control function. You'll have to enter film titles the old (clicky) way. That's a shame, because voice control is one of the box's coolest features.



The remote control (left) is effective, but lacks the voice-control of the bigger Fire TV box

Stick it in the back of your TV, power it via USB and forget about it: simple

You can get a microphone-equipped remote separately for £25, but that's quite an ask considering the Stick costs just £35.

Thankfully, you can use the Fire TV Remote app (free on Android, iOS and Fire OS devices) on the stick as well. It's not the slickest app we've seen, but it does do voice control. And it works well - although, as with the Fire TV box, voice control is restricted to Amazon Prime Instant Video.

And there's no doubt about it, Amazon's service is the star of the show. The

company has no reservations about imposing itself. It dominates the cleanly organised home screen, and you can't get to the other apps without doing a shuffle of shame past the 'Movies' and 'TV' sections (Amazon Prime Instant Video in disguise).

The Apps section has most of the streaming giants: Netflix, BBC iPlayer, Demand 5, YouTube, Spotify. Sadly, there's currently no sign of Now TV, 4oD or ITV Player. The remaining apps aren't particularly useful - besides Sky News and Vevo, you've got strange things such as Hypnosis TV.

## It's a games service too

Besides the apps, you get games. The Fire TV was designed partly with games in mind and you can buy a separate games controller, not unlike an Xbox handset, for £35. There is 8GB of internal storage for you to download games onto. This is an advantage over the Google Chromecast, for example, which doesn't let you download anything.

Once you're up and running with a video streaming app, you'll find a 1080p picture. It's on par with other video streamers: crisp, with a good amount of detail. As for sound, you get Dolby Digital Plus up to 7.1 (dependent on the app and the content).

Operation is speedy. It's not quite as speedy as the more powerful Amazon Fire TV box, but it's faster and more fluid than the Roku Streaming Stick, for example. Browsing is intuitive and you'll be nipping about in no time.

## Well worth it for TV smarts

The second time is a charm for Amazon. We've always liked how Fire TV works, and the small price tag makes up for Amazon's somewhat in-your-face hard-sell tactics. If you have an older TV and you want to bring add some smart functionality, the Amazon Fire TV Stick is well worth your consideration.

## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Easy to use; decent choice of apps; speedy operation; low price

**AGAINST** Missing Now TV and 4oD; remote has no voice control; Amazon hard-sell

**VERDICT** A lovely little streaming device and a no-brainer for Amazon customers

**There's no doubt about it, the Amazon Prime Instant Video service is the star of the show, but the Apps section has most of the streaming giants, including Netflix and BBC iPlayer**

## Also consider Google Chromecast £30

★★★★★

Another good performer, with basic features





# STREAMING BIG

Why confine great music to one room? LG's MUSICflow wireless multiroom speakers let you enjoy it everywhere. Even outside...

**W**ireless audio streaming is great. Pick a track, podcast or radio station, prod a button and lovely sound bursts from speakers nearby. Not content with award-winning 2014 speakers, LG adds to its wireless range with the MUSICflow **H4**. It's a small, handsome speaker you can beam music to via LG's custom wireless mesh network – use the H4 at the same time as up to 99 other MUSICflow speakers – or via Bluetooth. It's got an eight-hour battery\* too. And there's the **P7**, a Bluetooth speaker with up to 10 hours' playback and a pair of 10W speakers so it doesn't sound like a bee in a jam jar. LG's MUSICflow kit is top-class. The room-filling, 70W **H7**, the four-speaker 40W **H5**, and the compact and convenient **H3** all provide ear-pleasing music, synchronisation and NFC pairing, so music flows all over your home, whatever room you're in and track you want. Send music via LG's intuitive iOS and Android MUSICFlow Player app, easy to use from every source on your phone. And thanks to Google Cast™\*\*, play directly from a wide range of devices; from laptops and PCs, to tablets and smartphones.

## LG MUSICflow

### Serious home entertainment

The best thing about MUSICflow is that it's part of a system. Take the **BP450** Blu-ray player, a powerful HD player that's compatible with MUSICflow – but it also plays CDs. You remember... those silver circles gathering dust that actually produce the best sound? Then add the **HS9** Smart Hi-Fi Audio Soundbar – a powerful and simple way to create a stonking home cinema. It's great on its own but pair with MUSICflow devices and create a surround-sound system – without any wires.



\*Battery life usage varies \*\*Google Cast™ and the Google Cast™ badge are trademarks of Google Inc.



### Home-cinema heart beat

The soundbar that delivers rich immersive audio with outstanding deep acoustics.

▲HS7



### Multi-room maestro

HD audio, via multi-room, stereo and home-cinema modes, through your home.

▲H5

### Versatile audio

Home-cinema speaker, multi-room speaker, compact Bluetooth speaker.

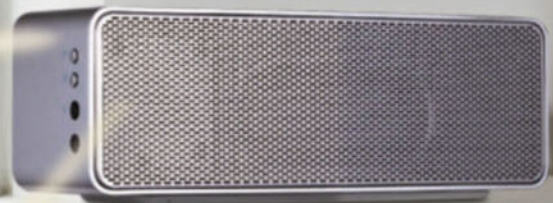
▼H3



### Mobile network

Portable speaker that uses battery or mains power – take to any room in your home.

▼H4



### Room-filling sound

Auto-music play with multi-room, stereo and home-cinema modes

▲H7



### Audio everywhere

Portable speaker with TV sound sync, Bluetooth and dual-speaker pairing.

▲P7

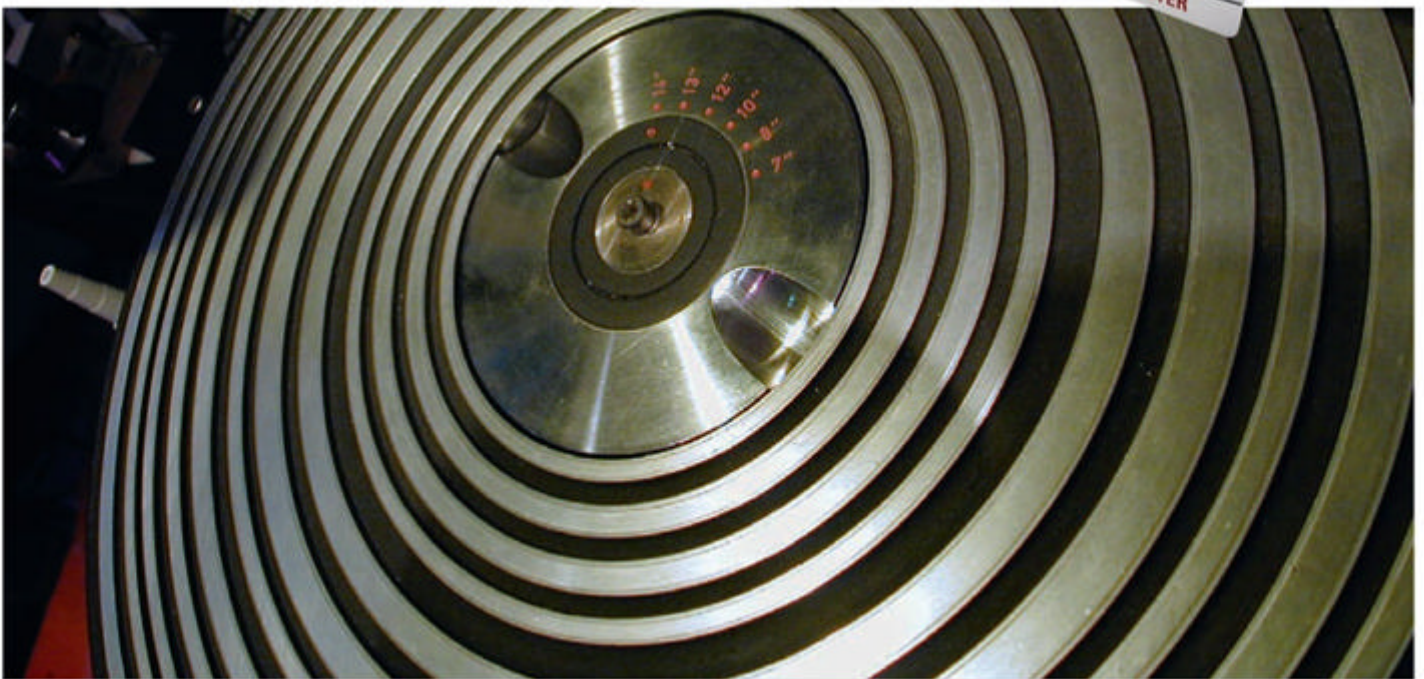




## Abbey Road Studios

# The tech behind the big vinyl revival

We visit the world-famous Abbey Road Studios to talk to a mastering engineer



**V**inyl is back! Or so it would seem. Sales are at their highest in almost 20 years: 1.3 million vinyl albums were sold in 2014, the highest number since 1995. Meanwhile, 2015 vinyl album sales are up 69 per cent compared with last year.

People are taking notice in a big way, thanks to events like Record Store Day, which saw many new vinyl releases marking the occasion. The Official Charts Company has even launched the first ever UK vinyl sales chart. The vinyl love-in, it seems, is in full swing.

But vinyl's popularity is still, of course, a fraction of what it once was. There is much work to be done. Consumers these days are

spoiled for choice when it comes to audio formats. Streaming services such as Spotify and Tidal are making a lot of noise, and high-res audio is on the rise too.

## Poor handling, poor sound

But when it comes to sound quality, it's not really the format that matters. The key is how the music is handled before it is reproduced for mass consumption. A poorly handled record will sound poor no matter how you listen to it.

For an insider opinion, we paid a visit to Abbey Road Studios. We spoke to Sean Magee, a mastering engineer whose work includes albums by The Beatles, Pink Floyd and The Sex Pistols.

Mastering, for the uninitiated, is the final stage of the creative process. It is up to a mastering engineer to make sure the recording is in top shape before it goes off to the factory. It is he who decides what you hear when you get back from the record store – and whether it is what the artist intended.

## Discussion with the artist

"The first thing you do is you discuss how the client [or artist] feels about his mixes, and whether there are any problems. Too much bass or too much high frequency, for example. And then we listen and address the problems, and then transfer the audio to the end medium."



Thanks to Google, you can take an interactive tour of Abbey Road Studios. *Inside*

*Abbey Road* is a free site and it lets you virtually walk around the historic site. There are more than 150 panoramic photos, and you can even 'play' with gadgets such as the J37 4-track recorder used to record *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

**\* Roku upgrades streamers**  
Roku has added new features to its streaming hardware, including an upgraded search facility.  
<http://whfcm/Rokustreamer>



## TOP 5 New launches

McIntosh amps, Onkyo high-res music player, DTS:X and more...



Within that process, a mastering engineer must fix issues such as clicks or an 'S' sung too loudly. He may use equalisers to make something brighter or add more low end.

"The real thing is quality control. A mastering engineer will construct something that will go to the factory, and he will have listened to it from start to finish. He will have the start and end marks of each track in the right place, and each track at roughly the same volume. It is important because this is the last time you get to hear it before it goes to the factory."

**"The real thing is quality control. It's important because this is the last time you hear it before it goes to the factory. Remastering is a different proposition - it's no longer a matter of cleaning up"**

Remastering, on the other hand, is a different proposition. It's no longer a matter of cleaning up, and in the case of some heritage material the artist may no longer be around to have a say. A mastering engineer must exercise discretion, and know when not to open his toolbox.

### Take out the clicks

"You can EQ stuff, but should you? No - people are used to it sounding a particular way. You fix stuff that they probably would have fixed themselves if they could have. If it's a buzz or a click, or a noisy edit, if they could have done it better, then you do it. We take clicks out, and sometimes we put them back in again."

When it comes to the final product, Magee is amused by the idea of format superiority. Unwilling to put formats against one another, he has time for vinyl, hi-res audio and MP3s alike. His priority is the music, regardless of a format's eccentricities.

"High-res audio gets you nearer the analogue sound, which is quite

amusing. Digital was supposed to take over and now these new digital formats and higher sample rates are getting nearer and nearer the analogue sound - when you already had the analogue sound.

### There is a limit

"My cutting lathe can only cut a certain amount of frequency content, because that's all it's designed to do. No matter how high the sample rate is that you throw onto vinyl, at around 20something kHz it disappears because it's not physically able to cut it.

"Is vinyl the best sound ever? If you love vinyl, then yes it is. It's not to be compared with CDs or any other format. If you want to listen to a record and get the record sound, a record is the way you have to listen to it.

"If you're in a gym, then your MP3 or AAC is probably the best format. For me, it boils down to the music. If the music on the record is the music I like, it's the best-sounding thing."

So there you have it. We love vinyl. We love hi-res audio. We love CDs. But none of it really matters without the likes of Sean Magee. And even then, it's only the music that matters.



## "Vinyl record sales: the stats"

News editor Ced Yuen

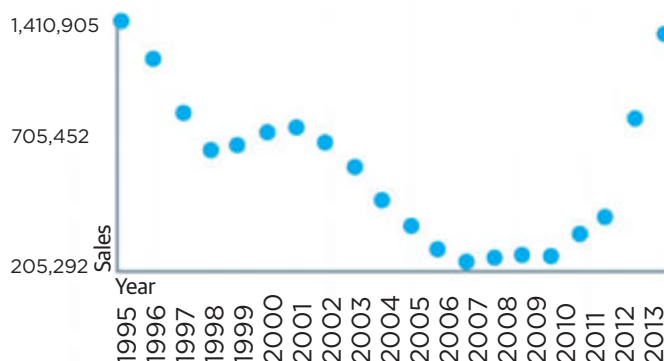


# 1.3 MILLION

## VINYL ALBUMS SOLD IN 2014

**CURRENTLY** **70** **% up on UK album sales in 2015**

### Annual UK vinyl album sales volumes



### Official Vinyl Albums Chart - Q1 2015

**OFFICIAL TOP FIVE OF Q1 2015**

- 1. CHASING YESTERDAY**  
Noel Gallagher's High Flying
- 2. PHYSICAL GRAFFITI**  
Led Zeppelin
- 3. AM**  
Arctic Monkeys
- 4. ROYAL BLOOD**  
Royal Blood
- 5. THE RACE FOR SPACE**  
Public Service Broadcasting





## 1 McIntosh amplifiers from £3750

McIntosh has updated and rereleased the C22 preamplifier from the 1960s, and the MC75 "vacuum tube" power amp from the '70s. Still in touch with their retro roots, the amps feature classic control knobs and switches and visible valves. The C22 benefits from 10 inputs including a MC/MM phono stage and four outputs. The MC75's two stereo channels meanwhile deliver a total output of 75 watts. For more information, head to <http://whf.cm/McIntoshRetro>



## \*Google Nexus Player

The Nexus Player is the first Android TV set-top box in the UK. It gives access to the Play store of movies, apps and games, and supports Google Cast apps too. It costs £80 <http://whf.cm/GooglePlayer>



## 2 Onkyo DAC-HA300 £500

Onkyo's DAC-HA300 is designed to add high-resolution audio capabilities to iOS and Android smartphones and tablets. Connection is via USB and the DAC will sync with Onkyo's own HF Player app. Alternatively it can be used as a standalone music player, with 128GB microSD card support. It comes with a switchable optical/coaxial/analog input, which can accept digital signal up to 24-bit/192kHz. Want to know more? <http://whf.cm/OnkyoDACHA300>



## 3 DTS:X

DTS has created its own object-based surround-sound technology to rival Dolby Atmos. DTS:X doesn't require any extra speakers or configuration, as its remapping engine can support "any configuration within a hemispherical layout". The technology is expected to make its way to some 2015 AV receivers and several major movie studios are looking into using the technology in the future. It supports lossless audio up to 24-bit/96kHz for object mixes and up to 24-bit/192kHz for stereo and multi-channel mixes. [http://whf.cm/DTS\\_X](http://whf.cm/DTS_X)

## 5 Noble Audio Prestige in-ears and Bluetooth receiver from £70

Noble Audio's Prestige in-ears are custom-made from a choice of exotic materials, feature 10-driver balanced armature technology and cost £1650 <http://whf.cm/NoblePrestige>. Noble's £70 Bluetooth adapter works with all types of headphone and offers seven hours of music playback. <http://whf.cm/NobleBluetooth>



## 4 Astell & Kern AK240 and in-ears from £900

Astell & Kern has launched a limited Stainless Steel Edition of its AK240 high-res player, with more ground points for eliminating electrical noise. It has 256GB of expandable storage and costs £2500 <http://whf.cm/AandKSteel>. The company has also released the Layla and Angie high-end in-ears in collaboration with Jerry Harvey Audio. Layla features ten drivers while Angie has eight. <http://whf.cm/AandKLayla>





# YOUR MUSIC RAIN OR SHINE



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SOUNDBASES

# SUPERTEST

# STRENGTH IN DEPTH

Most modern TVs benefit from a boost to their usually paltry sound – but soundbars aren't always the ideal solution. Enter the soundbase, a beefed up 'bar your TV sits on



Listen to our favourite tracks every month!



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





**F**or years, people who didn't have room for a 5.1 surround sound system in their home had to make do with the thin sound that came from their TV. The boom in soundbars put paid to that - but they come with their own problems. Some are too tall to sit underneath a set, blocking the bottom of the screen, while many come with a separate subwoofer.

And so the soundbase was born. A simple one-box solution, it offers you all the sound-boosting qualities of a soundbar, with the space to fit everything it needs within a single chassis - and you can sit your TV right on top of it.

Manufacturers are certainly catching on to this and there is now a plethora of options, with prices from around £200 and up. We decided it was high time to put them through their paces - new names and old faces alike - to see what the best buys are at both ends of the market.

## ON TEST

**Bose Solo 15 Soundstage** p40

**Cambridge Audio TV2** p36

**Cambridge Audio TV5** p44

**Canton DM75** p42

**Geneva Model Cinema** p43

**Sony HT-XT1** p37

**Yamaha SRT-1000** p45





## Cambridge Audio TV2 £200 ★★★★★

**For a small box**, the Cambridge Audio TV2 offers an impressive amount of sound. After all, it didn't win a What Hi-Fi? Award for nothing.

But the sub-£300 soundbase market has changed a lot since last year – not so much with new entries, but with previously pricier products that have lowered their asking prices.

### Closing the gap

All of a sudden, the £100 gap between this and its bigger brother, the TV5, has turned into a £50 one, and that takes the shine from the TV2 somewhat.

But let's pay the TV2 its dues – for £200, it'll transform your TV's sound and not take up too much room in the process. It's tuned very similarly to the TV5 too, with a character that is rich, balanced and decently detailed.

The bass is weighty enough to bring added depth and definition to big action scenes, and there is plenty of clarity in the midrange, allowing dialogue to push through the mix loud and clear.

That said, the TV5 sounds noticeably larger and more authoritative, and the TV2 lacks the same punch in the low end. During the hospital-bombing scene in *Hunger Games: Mockingjay Part 1*, the

impact of the bombs and falling bricks isn't as punctuated as it is on the TV5.

That's understandable considering the TV2 is one bass drive unit down on the larger TV5, but we'd now be very tempted to spend the extra £50 to get the added weight in the low end.

There's plenty of detail though, and it's decently dynamic for its price, with the ability to move sound convincingly throughout its stereo image.

The treble can verge on brightness, though, even after you've tweaked the various EQ settings, and as a tower under fire from the Capitol crashes into Katniss and Gale's hideout, the sound of the glass windows smashing has an unnaturally sharp edge to it – something that's more noticeable at higher volume, and better balanced in the TV5.

### Mode of operation

A word on those settings; we find the 'music' mode gives the most balanced delivery, but the 'film' mode does bring added bass and openness that can add excitement to the movie experience.

At £200, you don't get many bells and whistles here – but then simplicity is half the TV2's beauty. Connections are kept to a minimum, namely a pair of analogue

**The size-to-sound ratio here is good, but the competition is tougher than ever**

inputs, an optical in and a 3.5mm jack. It can't compete with the Sony for flexibility but for those using their TV as their HDMI switcher this selection, along with aptX Bluetooth connectivity, will probably be ample.

The design is relatively simple – a matt-black finish and cloth grille plus a colour-changing LED that illuminates to register commands. We do miss the display of the Sony here, but as there aren't a huge amount of features to scroll through it's not a deal breaker.

As the smaller sibling, the TV2 is meant for smaller sets – Cambridge Audio says the base mustn't be wider than 55cm, nor deeper than 30cm or weigh more than 30kg. Of course, if you have a rack you can always put it there.

There's still plenty to like in this Award-winner, but with its excellent bigger brother now falling within the same price bracket, it struggles to compete. If size is important to you and you're on a strict budget this is still an excellent choice, but spend an extra £50 and you can now get bigger and better.

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Fast, solid performance; plenty of detail; sturdy build

**AGAINST** Remote is a little basic; no HDMI; hard edge to treble

**VERDICT** Still a good option for those short on space, but there are now better budget rivals

**The bass is weighty enough to bring added depth and definition to big action scenes, and there is plenty of clarity in the midrange, allowing dialogue through loud and clear**



### HDMI flexibility

Uniquely in this company, the Sony offers three HDMI inputs. This means you can run multiple sources direct into the soundbase rather than via your TV, making for a purer solution to sonic decoding and neater wiring.

## Sony HT-XT1 £230 ★★★★★

**There's no doubt** that Sony's HT-XT1 cuts a fine shape on our test rack. Sure, it's a rectangular black box like most soundbases tend to be, but with its scratch-resistant glass top, touch-sensitive controls, LCD display and slender metallic frame it pulls off that look with a bit more elegance than many others.

It's not just its looks that have been well considered though - flexibility as to how you're going to want to use this soundbase has been given plenty of thought too, with more connections than we're used to at this price.

### Keen to connect

The HT-XT1 offers you three HDMI's, one optical input and a 3.5mm jack to plug your kit into, plus an ARC-compatible HDMI out. Add to that Bluetooth with NFC connectivity for music playback, and it's easy to see this little box is trying its hardest to impress.

A stylish, slimline remote comes with the HT-XT1, featuring a handful of buttons for the main commands plus a slide-down panel that hides the controls for delving deeper into settings. Some of the options include sound modes, such as 'movie', 'sports' or 'music', and a voice booster in case dialogue is too quiet.

Sound modes are worth playing with to see what you prefer - we find the portable audio setting gives the best balance, though 'movie' mode offers a richer, fuller sound to your blockbusters. 'Voice', on the other hand, is best left alone if you can. The midway setting can help if you're really struggling to hear but go to the maximum and you will lose out in both weight and dynamics.

You can also control the soundbase with Sony's Songpal app for iOS and Android; it's well-designed and easy to use. It also features handy shortcuts to a number of streaming services.

We choose *Fury* to put the HT-XT1 through its paces, and skip to the Tiger tank battle scene. At the first devastating strike from the Germans, the Sony jumps into action, with a crisp, clear sound that's detailed and full of excitement.

Every tank-gun blast is punctuated with plenty of power and weight in the low end, while dynamically it's expressive enough to show off the depth and impact of every blow.

The spread of sound is pretty impressive too - it's big enough to fill our listening room, and there's a decent sense of space compared with the TV2, which sounds a little more closed in.

With TVs looking increasingly elegant, the Sony's stylish design is a major plus

However, as the fight intensifies and the zing of gunfire increases, it's hard to ignore the Sony HT-XT1's rather hard edge in the treble, which gets worse at volume. Not only is this noticeable in big action scenes, but also in dialogue, which can sound a little thin and fragile compared with the more solid TV5.

This isn't helped by a midrange that takes a back seat. You can use the tone controls to help with this but overall it's still outsmarted by the likes of the TV5.

### Better value for money

Despite this, there's still a lot to like about the Sony HT-XT1, especially given the £70 price drop since we last saw it.

The wealth of connections make it a good choice for those looking to use a soundbase as their HDMI switcher, while its premium design means it'll look good under any TV (up to 50in/30kg).

Its punchy, attacking sound never fails to deliver on excitement and its feature-packed spec list is sure to win it some fans. If you can forgive its refinement flaws, the HT-XT1 is well

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Great build and design; well featured; large soundfield; punchy, exciting sound

**AGAINST** Hard edge to treble; midrange could be better integrated

**VERDICT** A stylish, feature-packed answer to the budget soundbase question

**We choose *Fury* to put the HT-XT1 through its paces. At the first devastating strike from the Germans, the Sony jumps into action, with a crisp, clear sound that's full of excitement**





## Cambridge Audio TV5 £250 ★★★★★

**It's only been** a few months since the Cambridge Audio TV5 breezed its way to five stars in our March 2015 issue, but with a recent price drop bringing it to within £50 of its smaller TV2 sibling, we thought it was well worth another look.

Ultimately, the TV5 is a larger version of the Award-winning TV2. It features the same no-frills, functional design as its stablemate, with a matt-black chassis and cloth grille front covering the same dual 57mm drivers.

It is, of course, bigger, measuring 18cm wider than the TV2 (making it 73cm), but the main difference between them comes in the form of the TV5's second downwards-firing 16.5cm bass driver.

### **More mileage from extra driver**

Though this doesn't affect the level of amplification the TV5 is capable of, matching the TV2's 100W power output, the larger enclosure and extra driver help to deliver a much bigger and better-balanced sound.

Inputs are the same as on the TV2, and could perhaps be considered a little basic, with just optical and RCA ins plus a 3.5mm jack on offer. Unless you're planning on using your soundbase as your HDMI switcher though, we'd

imagine this should cover most people's needs. Bluetooth aptX is also supported, with the TV5 capable of remembering up to eight devices, and pairing to them automatically when they are in range.

The remote is as no-frills as the rest of the design, with just a handful of buttons covering EQ settings and volume controls. As ever we'd recommend playing around with them to find a sound mode you like most.

When it comes to character, the TV5 shares the rich, full-bodied presentation of the TV2, but adds to it across the board, with better levels of detail, more clarity, and improved dynamics.

It'll fill larger rooms more easily thanks to the greater scale it's capable of with that second bass unit, and it does so with an openness that makes it one of the more immersive viewing experiences you'll get at this price.

Take the final battle scene of *Fury* and you hear that extra low-end come into its own instantly. With every gunshot and grenade blast, the deep, rumbling bass punches with a level of authority and articulation the TV2 can't quite muster.

This bold bass presence gives the character of the TV5 added solidity compared with its smaller sibling, and

**That added driver is more than worth the extra £50 you'll pay over the TV2's price**

enough refinement to ensure it never sounds flabby or overdone.

It's this weighty low end that helps to balance out any treble brightness audible in the TV2, meaning the TV5 can be pushed loud and still maintain complete control across the frequency range. It's really comfortable to listen to over long periods, with no hint of harshness.

### **More detail, more expression**

There's stacks of detail to play with here too, which makes for a more precise and dynamic listen. In particular, soundtracks benefit from this dynamic flair, filled as they are with the expression they need to build tension and emotion in a way that the TV2 can't convey.

Cambridge Audio describes the TV5 as a "step up in size and sound" from the TV2, and they're right on both counts. The extra driver and bigger chassis do wonders for the TV5's performance. If you can accommodate the TV5's larger size, you'll hear the difference with every film you watch. This is the best budget soundbase you can buy.

**That bold bass presence gives the TV5 added solidity compared with its smaller sibling, and enough refinement to ensure it never sounds flabby or overdone**

### **Rating ★★★★★**

**FOR** Big, powerful sound; punchy, articulate bass; dynamic and detailed; refined, well balanced delivery with movies and music

**AGAINST** Remote a little basic; no HDMI

**VERDICT** A better buy than ever – the budget soundbase market has a newfound champion



### A smart mode of operation

Yamaha's Home Theatre Control app (iOS and Android) clearly shows the soundbase's current and available settings, and lets you enter room info so the '1000 can adjust its sound to suit.

## Yamaha SRT-1000 £300 ★★★★★

**Yamaha is well** known for its talented soundbars, but the SRT-1000 marks the company's first venture into the burgeoning soundbase market.

Like the marque's best soundbars, the YSP range, the SRT-1000 features Digital Sound Processing technology that aims to recreate the sound of a 5.1 surround sound system by bouncing beams of sound off walls. This works to good effect in their soundbars, but can it be reproduced as well here?

You can feel there's been some care behind the Yamaha's build. Made from sturdy MDF, it's a solid bit of kit that will support TVs up to 55in and 40kg.

The metal grille on the front hides quite the array of speakers. There are a total of 12 drivers in the SRT-1000's chassis, including eight 28mm beam drivers arranged horizontally in the middle, with two 4cm drivers in support and a pair of 8cm downwards-firing bass units, powered by a total of 136W.

Yamaha has gone with an arrangement of lights that illuminate to show your selected input and format. These also flash when you make settings changes using the remote, and the effect can become confusing. Much better is the Home Theatre Control app (see roundel).

Prefer to keep it simple? You can choose one of three listening positions on the remote instead to get your sound tailored to that, plus the Cinema DSP modes are there to shape the sound to your taste. If you'd prefer not to use any processing, you should select 'TV program, but we found the 'Movie' mode helped deliver a richer, wider sound that really lent itself to watching films. We can't say the same for the 'Music' mode, which sounds really unnatural.

The Yamaha SRT-1000 is capable of decoding Dolby Digital and DTS Digital Surround and offers two optical ins, one coaxial, a pair of analogue inputs and a subwoofer out.

AptX Bluetooth is also supported making this a pretty well connected box of tricks, though a couple of HDMI's for ultimate flexibility of connectivity wouldn't have gone amiss.

### Plenty of muscle for the battle

Load up the Tiger tank battle in *Fury* and the Yamaha dives straight into the action with a broad soundfield and muscular delivery. The bass is weighty and warm, with a deep, solid rumble to the tanks' engines as they advance on the Germans. As shots begin to fire, the heavy artillery

Yamaha has packed in the features and given the user lots of control over the sound

blasts have power and punch behind them, while the zings of gunfire whizz across the soundfield with a convincing sense of movement and space.

The surround sound experience isn't as convincing as in the YSP models though, and while the sound is wide, its effectiveness will be dependent on your room layout, and we expect you might get better results in smaller rooms.

### Midrange performance

Tonally, the SRT-1000 is pretty open, with a treble that stays on the right side of bright at realistic volumes, but the midrange lacks the sparkle and energy of the Canton DM75 or the Geneva Model Cinema, leaving it sounding a little lacking in excitement.

The SRT-1000 has a lot to like, and we're particularly taken with the level of control Yamaha has afforded the user, but this soundbase needs to be more subtle and expressive in the midrange. It's a strong first attempt from Yamaha but there are better all-rounders both above and below this price.

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Big, expansive sound; rich, solid bass; well featured; extensive set-up control

**AGAINST** Midrange lacks expression and detail; no HDMI; 'surround sound' is room-dependent

**VERDICT** A good first attempt from Yamaha but some competitors deliver more excitement

As shots begin to fire, the heavy artillery blasts have power and punch behind them, while the zings of gunfire whizz across the soundfield with a convincing sense of movement





**Pump up (or let down) the bass**

Though curiously minimalist in its approach to features, this Bose does offer a bass dial on its rear panel. It's useful for adjusting bass output to suit your room, so take time to experiment.

# Bose Solo 15 Soundstage £400 ★★★★★

**Recently there seems** to have been a trend for manufacturers to produce two very similar soundbases – one for smaller TVs and one for larger. This usually means a shared character between the two, as with the twin offerings from Canton or Cambridge Audio for example. Not so with the Bose Solo 15, and that's no bad thing because we were mightily disappointed the last time we saw a Bose soundbase. Scraping three stars, the Solo TV lost marks for its hard dialogue and loose bass.

Thankfully it appears such traits don't run in the family, and the bigger Bose Solo 15 is far better qualified to be left in charge of your movies.

Bose's big message with the Solo 15 is simplicity, so there's little in the way of inputs or features. The back panel is about as straightforward as they come, with just optical, coaxial and RCA inputs while, unlike many competitors, Bose has decided against including Bluetooth.

Despite a rather chunky universal remote in the box, which you can program to work with all your kit, there are no settings to tweak – no EQs to play with or voice settings to choose. The only thing Bose has introduced is a bass dial (see roundel).

The Solo 15 a sturdy, well-built unit that will hold TVs up to 50in and 34kg. Behind its curved metallic front grille are four drivers and a sub. These are configured into a centre channel to help ensure clear dialogue, and speakers mounted on the outside edges, firing sideways to help create a wider sound.

## Deep, tall and wide

It's pretty successful in its endeavours – the Bose Solo 15 does sound big and spacious both horizontally and vertically. With some soundbases you're still able to pinpoint the sound to the unit, but with the Solo 15 there's enough lift here for it to seem like it's coming directly from your TV.

The Solo 15 has been tuned in a way that makes it a really easy listen. The presentation is nicely balanced, with solidity throughout the frequency range and no hint of hardness at the top end, even when the volume is pushed up.

Bass is deep and much better-controlled here than on the Solo TV. During Kitai's showdown with an Ursa in the final fight scene of *After Earth*, every blow is backed up by powerful, punchy bass that helps the Solo 15 sound confident and authoritative.

**Bose takes things back to basics – a no-frills route to better-than-TV sound**

That said, the overall presentation is lacking some expression, particularly though the midrange and treble. While there's definitely a step up in detail from cheaper soundbases here, the Bose can't compete with the subtleties uncovered by the likes of the Canton DM75 or Geneva Model Cinema.

This means, dynamically, it isn't skilled enough to convey the tension as the soundtrack intended in this scene, which can leave it sounding a little flat.

## Clear voices from the centre

Dialogue fares slightly better, thanks to the Solo 15's dedicated centre channel delivering natural-sounding voices with depth and articulation.

The Solo 15 offers a straightforward way of improving your telly's sound, plus a level of refinement you won't find in the sub-£250 units. We don't expect the subtleties found further up the ladder but, even at this price, we'd like to see a touch more expression to complement the Bose's bold character. And Bluetooth connectivity wouldn't go amiss either.

## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Big, bold sound; punchy bass; clean, clear dialogue; well balanced sound

**AGAINST** Lacks expression; limited connectivity and specification sheet

**VERDICT** A big bold 'base from Bose, but it lacks the refinement of some competition

**During Kitai's showdown with an Ursa in the final fight scene of *After Earth*, every blow is backed up by powerful bass that helps the Solo sound confident and authoritative**



# LG MUSIC*flow*

SMART HI FI AUDIO  
Wireless Multi-Room

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

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Currys  PC World

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

 **LG**  
Life's Good





The image shows the Canton DM75 soundbase from two angles. The top view shows the underside with four large circular drivers. The bottom view shows the front of the unit with a blue LED display and a remote control resting on top. The background is a blue textured surface.

**Colouring in**

As a rule, soundbases are square, flat and unremittingly black. Practicalities dictate the square, flat parts but black is a choice, so it's nice to see Canton breaking the mould by offering the DM75 in silver and white too.

**Canton DM75 £450 ★★★★★**

**Canton** has a good rep when it comes to soundbases. This DM75 romped home to victory last year, winning our pricier soundbase Award category, while the smaller DM50 scored an easy five stars and remains an excellent buy.

The DM75 is simply a bigger version of the DM50 - either for people with TVs too big for the dinky DM50, or for those with the space to go bigger.

While the DM50 is best suited to 40in or smaller tellies, the 73cm-wide DM75 is less restricted and can cater for almost any size. TV weight won't be a deciding factor either - Canton claims either model can take up to 40kg, which should allow you plenty of choice.

### Impressive speaker count

It's a smart (if modest) design, with a textured matt chassis and a metal front grille that hides two 5cm midrange drivers and two 25mm tweeters.

Underneath the unit you'll find four 10cm woofers, while on the front panel there's a welcome blue LED display that'll only light up when you use the remote control.

It displays basic information such as volume level and input, and makes controlling the DM75 quick and easy.

Speaking of the remote, Canton's effort is better than many of its competitors: suitably chunky and well made, plus the buttons are well labelled and nicely laid out for ease of use.

All good news then, but we'd like a few more inputs. You get optical and coaxial inputs alongside a pair of analogues, but there are no HDMI's. There's aptX Bluetooth for streaming music, plus a subwoofer output to add more bass to proceedings (although we wouldn't have thought you'd need it).

We fire up *After Earth* to put the DM75 through its paces, and that Canton family sound is immediately evident - it's dynamic, punchy and full of insight.

It's a big, room-filling sound that's also open and airy, offering more space to a movie soundtrack than the Bose Solo 15. This brings with it both strengths and weaknesses, delivering a more expressive midrange that's great for insight but at the expense of a little solidity.

That's not to say the bass isn't impressive - it is. Take the skydive scene in *After Earth* - there's a satisfyingly weighty rumble as Kitai swoops past rock edges, and plenty of attack when he required too. When he dives into the waterfall to avoid becoming eagle prey,

Four downward-firing 10cm woofers show the Canton is serious about bass response

the sound of falling water is crisp and enveloping, with plenty of fine detail to give it depth and texture.

Highs are clear and sharp, but new competition highlights the fact that they can teeter on the edge of brightness at volume. It's not uncomfortable, but it does add to the slight feeling of fragility compared with the likes of the Solo 15 and Geneva Model Cinema.

### Getting in on the action

The DM75 is most at home with action movies, giving them plenty of drive and expression for bucketfuls of excitement. Its fine dynamics also benefit soundtracks, while dialogue proves just as successful, offering plenty of clarity - if not as much richness as the Geneva.

There's no doubting the DM75's virtues, but new rivals have robbed it of its fifth star. While we love its expressive nature, its midrange fragility makes us crave the solidity of the £550 Geneva. That extra £100 is quite a jump though, so if your budget tops out here, we'd recommend giving the DM75 an audition.

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Big, open soundfield; balanced and insightful; expressive; weighty bass

**AGAINST** Lacks solidity of some rivals; treble can verge on brightness at volume; no HDMI's

**VERDICT** This is still a great soundbase, but new rivals sound more solid and assertive

**Speaking of the remote, Canton's effort is better than many of its competitors: suitably chunky and well made, plus the buttons are well labelled and nicely laid out for ease of use**



## Geneva Model Cinema £550 ★★★★★

**We've always found** ourselves fond of products from Geneva, and the company's first soundbase isn't about to break that trend. At £550 there's no doubt this is one of the priciest soundbases we've tested, but spend a few minutes in its company and it's easy to see where the money has been spent.

For a start, the build quality is a notch above some of its cheaper rivals. The cabinet is built from MDF but with a smooth metallic finish in a choice of black or white.

A stylish matching metal grille adorns the front of the unit, while a simple silver logo and a number of touch-sensitive controls sit along the top.

A suitably stylish remote is included in the box too, offering volume and tone controls (we left the default settings, but it's worth playing with them to suit your room), input selection, power, some EQ settings and a Bluetooth pairing button.

It's well built and clearly labelled, plus the buttons have a reassuring click to them with every push. Sometimes, it's the small things.

Behind the grille, there are five drivers in three acoustic chambers - four 5cm tweeter/mid-range units and one 13cm woofer, driven by a total of 120W of power.

There's also a handy LCD display hidden behind the grille in the top corner, to display some information to support your remote commands. This will adjust itself automatically to suit the room's lighting conditions so it can always be seen clearly.

We're finding it a bit of habit, even at this price, for soundbases to go pretty basic on their inputs, and there are no HDMI ports available here. Instead there's one each of optical and coaxial, a pair of analogue ins and a 3.5mm jack for attaching a portable device. There's also Bluetooth A2DP for streaming from a phone, tablet or laptop.

### Sound and Fury signifying a lot

Settle in for the final battle scene in *Fury* and you realise the scale the Geneva is capable of. It's a big, wide sound from a box that measures just 70cm across, with a level of authority unlike any soundbase we've heard. In one breath it's powerful and full-bodied, and the next, subtle and considered. Dynamically it puts much of the competition to shame, remaining nimble enough on its feet to deliver the tension in a demanding soundtrack.

The midrange is open and spacious. It offers an expressive, agile performance

**Geneva's decision to enter the premium end of the market has paid off in spades**

and there's stunning clarity through dialogue - voices are filled with depth and texture. There's no thinness at the top end either, and even at volume the Geneva remains composed, with a clear treble that isn't put under pressure by the constant zinging of gunfire.

### Attention to detail

Detail levels are top-notch too, and we're impressed at the precision with which the Geneva organises its soundfield. In short, it brings together most of our favourite things in the competition into one, and doesn't compromise.

When there are great soundbases out there for £250, it can be hard to see the benefit in spending an extra £300 on the Geneva. But it takes only a quick comparison to make it clear.

The whole experience here is just a notch above the rest. Yes it's pricey, but you'll hear the difference every time you use it. If you can stretch to it, the Geneva Model Cinema will transform your TV sound better than any soundbase we've tested. An easy five stars.

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Big, authoritative sound; clear dialogue; expressive and insightful delivery; agile; well built; stylish design

**AGAINST** No HDMI connections

**VERDICT** It might be pricey, but this is the best soundbase experience money can buy right now

**When there are great soundbases out there for £250, it can be hard to see the benefit in spending an extra £300 on the Geneva. But it takes only a quick comparison to make it**



# TEST VERDICT



**THE WINNER UP TO £300**

**Cambridge Audio TV5**

£250 ★★★★★



**THE WINNER £300+**

**Geneva Model Cinema**

£550 ★★★★★



*Listen to our favourite tracks every month!*

In the budget category, the **Cambridge Audio TV5** is the sound-booster king while, in the higher price bracket, the **Geneva Model Cinema** sets new standards on planet soundbase

**W**e don't do many supertests where every single product scores either four or five stars, but in the world of soundbases, it turns out it's a fairly close-run contest at the moment.

No one is getting it terribly wrong then, but only a handful are really excelling. In that context, we have two winners in two price categories, so you can better pick where your budget is best allocated.

Those winners are, of course, our two five-star products, the £250 Cambridge Audio TV5 and the £550 Geneva Model Cinema.

When we first tested the TV5, we were already of the impression that, given the space and extra budget, you should really stretch up to it from the TV2. With a price drop taking it to within spitting distance of its smaller brother, that is now definitely the case.

For its price, it's a confident, dynamic performer that delivers plenty of detail alongside a well balanced character. We could listen to it for hours.

Owing to the TV5's success, its Award-winning sibling, the TV2, drops to four stars. With just £50 between them, the only reason to pick the brighter, smaller, less dynamic TV2 over the TV5 is if you're really short on space.

Sony's HT-XT1 also scores a four at this lower price level, offering superb build and a lengthy feature list, but with a sound that struggles to balance the hardness in its treble, even after suitable running-in time.

Yamaha's SRT-1000 proves to be a good start for the company in this market, but one that falls just short on the performance front. Offering a good spread of sound alongside a good list of features, it just lacks the sonic

solidity shown by some of its rivals, and so has us awarding four, rather than five, stars.

This lack of solidity and authority also affects the Canton DM75, a former five-star unit that now struggles up against newer competition and drops to a four.

We find the solidity we crave in the Bose Solo 15, which delivers a punchy sound that's weighty, well balanced and nicely judged. Unfortunately the midrange isn't as expressive as we'd like, leaving it sounding a little flat.

It was, perhaps predictably, at the top of the price range that we found the soundbase that combines the best bits of all the others without any of their weaknesses. The Geneva Model Cinema delivers sound with more authority, more detail, better clarity and across a larger soundfield than any 'base we've heard before. If your budget can stretch to it, you won't regret it.


**Cambridge Audio TV2**
**£200 ★★★★★**

**Claimed power** 100W • **Inputs** Optical, RCA, 3.5mm • **Bluetooth** Yes • **Remote** Yes • **Dimensions (hwd)** 10 x 55 x 34cm • **Weight** 8kg

Sound	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★

**Sony HT-XT1**
**£230 ★★★★★**

**Claimed power** 170W • **Inputs** 3 x HDMI, optical, 3.5mm • **Bluetooth** Yes • **Remote** Yes • **Dimensions (hwd)** 31 x 72 x 7cm • **Weight** 8kg

Sound	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★

**Cambridge Audio TV5**
**£250 ★★★★★**

**Claimed power** 100W • **Inputs** Optical, RCA, 3.5mm • **Bluetooth** Yes • **Remote** Yes • **Dimensions (hwd)** 10 x 73 x 34cm • **Weight** 9kg

Sound	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★

**Yamaha SRT-1000**
**£300 ★★★★★**

**Claimed power** 136W • **Inputs** 2 x optical, coaxial, RCA • **Bluetooth** Yes • **Remote** Yes • **Dimensions (hwd)** 8 x 78 x 37cm • **Weight** 9kg

Sound	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★


**Bose Solo 15 Soundstage**
**£400 ★★★★★**

**Claimed power** 75W • **Inputs** Optical, coaxial, RCA, 3.5mm • **Bluetooth** No • **Remote** Yes • **Dimensions (hwd)** 8 x 63 x 36cm • **Weight** 8kg

Sound	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★

**Canton DM75**
**£450 ★★★★★**

**Claimed power** 200W • **Inputs** Optical, coaxial, RCA • **Bluetooth** Yes • **Remote** Yes • **Dimensions (hwd)** 7 x 73 x 32cm • **Weight** 8kg

Sound	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★

**Geneva Model Cinema**
**£550 ★★★★★**

**Claimed power** 120W • **Inputs** Optical, coaxial, RCA, 3.5mm • **Bluetooth** Yes • **Remote** Yes • **Dimensions (hwd)** 10 x 70 x 35cm • **Weight** 9kg

Sound	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★

**You might notice** that all but Sony's admirably connected HT-XT1 have decided to ditch HDMI inputs in favour of the simpler connection of optical or coaxial (or indeed, RCA analogue ins). With simplicity key in soundbases, a single connection makes a lot of sense, although there are some restrictions.

For example, if the soundbase you choose is capable of decoding Dolby or DTS soundtracks, you'll want to check if your TV is able to pass these through via optical – not all can. If it can't, you might prefer to make a direct connection between the soundbase and your Blu-ray player to ensure you can benefit from this decoding. In that case, you might need to go into your Blu-ray player settings to ensure it's set up for this.

Of course, connecting via optical does have its plus points. It means you can keep your TV set up just how you've always had it, and add in your soundbase with a single wire and minimal fuss.

## SYSTEM BUILDER


**Television**
**Samsung UE48H6400 £550**
**★★★★★**

Sharp images, beautiful colours and the full roster of catch-up services – you won't get better at this price


**Set-top box**
**Sky+ HD 2TB £250 ★★★★★**

Space for 350 hours of HD content; wi-fi; easy access to catch up and on demand – Sky has never been better

**Total build £1240/1540**

**Blu-ray player**
**Sony BDP-S7200 £190**
**★★★★★**

This Award-winning player is a sterling source for either of our winning soundbases, offering stunning pictures



# Get up, stand up

For a bolder sound that won't take up too much space, try a slim floorstanding speaker



**Cambridge  
Audio Aero 6**  
£400

**T**here's a valid case for choosing floorstanders over standmounters at the budget end: they don't require you to splash out on stands, and the tall cabinets aren't the hard-to-house space-hoggers they used to be. Best of all, they should get you a bigger, bolder and more powerful sound, so picking the finest do-it-all performers is crucial to making your system the very best it can be.

Off the back of a laudatory first test in last month's issue, the Wharfedale Diamond 230s return here as the ones to beat. However, Q Acoustics' new 3000 Series is hot on its heels: its ultra-talented budget standmounts, the 3020s, have already given the Diamond 220s plenty of food for thought.

Fellow contenders are Cambridge Audio's Aero 6s - the superstars in the award-winning 5.1 home cinema package - and tiny towers from JBL's brand new Arena range. All are going for glory, but which will prevail?

A tall, black, floor-standing speaker with a wood-grain finish on the right side. It features a large circular woofer in the center and a smaller tweeter at the top. The JBL logo is visible near the bottom.

**JBL Arena 170**  
£400

A tall, white, floor-standing speaker with a minimalist design. It features three drivers: a large woofer at the bottom, a smaller tweeter in the middle, and another driver at the top. The Wharfedale logo is visible near the bottom.

**Wharfedale  
Diamond 230**  
£500

A tall, black, floor-standing speaker with a wood-grain finish on the right side. It features three drivers: a large woofer in the center, a smaller tweeter at the top, and another driver at the bottom. The Q Acoustics logo is visible near the bottom.

**Q Acoustics  
3050** £500



# Cambridge Audio

## Aero 6

£400 ★★★★★

The Aero 6s are no stranger to us. The standouts in our two-time Award-winning Cambridge Audio Aero 5.1 home cinema package, they've been regular visitors to our test rooms, but always in the company of their Aero cohorts. Now taking the floor of our hi-fi room as solo entities, and after a considerable price drop from their original £650 tag, the Aero 6s are something of a giveaway.

### Cleaner sound

You get a great deal of tech for your money. Of course, we're referring to the BMR (balanced mode radiator) driver, which appear frequently in the company's higher-range models. The driver covers a wide frequency range (250Hz to 22kHz), allowing the crossover point to be moved to a region where our ears are less sensitive. The distortion inherent in any frequency handover is less audible, resulting in a cleaner sound and better integration.

At a glance, you could mistake the BMR for a tweeter; the small (4.6cm) driver sits above the twin 16.5cm mid/bass drivers, which tackle the rest of the frequency range. Aesthetically, the conventional straight-edged cabinet is pleasing, and cloaked in a smart wood veneer (in either black or walnut). The baffle is neatly symmetrical thanks to a small front-firing port below the mid/bass drivers mirroring the size of the BMR driver.

### Invigorating listen

The front port means they are a little more flexible about being positioned near a wall, though pulling them out a little (and toeing them in) is our preferred set-up. At 98cm tall, and suitably chunky in proportion, they are relatively imposing. But find them a home and you'll be in for a treat.

Offering an invigorating listen full of insight, focus and enthusiasm, the Cambridges are undoubtedly competent performers. In fact, compared with their price-comparable competition, they're quite special.

They scoot through Blue Swede's *Hooked on a Feeling* with punch and enthusiasm, delivering strong rhythmic drive and capturing the upbeat melody's fun factor exactly.

The track's catchy 'hooga chaka' chant reveals an expansive and open soundstage with an impressive sense of scale. That's what makes the Aero 5.1 package a star with movies, after all.

### Dynamic prowess

The Aero 6s are direct and forward, with an assured rather than assertive manner. There's control to keep things steady and clean, and couple that with fine balance and decent clarity and precision, and you have speakers that are hard to tear yourself away from.

The Q Acoustics 3050s (£500) may be sprinkled with more subtlety, but the Aero 6s' hearty presentation is alive with fine detail, and they aren't afraid to parade their dynamic prowess when tested either. Play *Aggressive Expansion* (from *The Dark Knight* soundtrack) and the drums gain intensity as the momentum builds, each strike potent and forceful.

Bass isn't the most agile we've heard in this test (that accolade also belongs to the Q Acoustics) but it never feels lacking in punch or power. The BMR driver fulfils its promise: treble is far-reaching, detailed and composed too. Either side, vocals – be it Eva Cassidy's angelic tones or Kanye West's fast tongue – are distinct and lifelike.

If the Aero 6s fall into your budget, we'd urge you to get your hands on them. You can't get better floorstanders for £400.

### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Powerful sound; expansive soundstage; rhythmic drive; insightful across frequencies; cohesive; sturdy build; clean, traditional fascia

**AGAINST** Quite big

**VERDICT** The Aero 6s are superb speakers, and you'll struggle to find better for £400

The walnut veneer is aesthetically pleasing, but it's the performance of the Aero 6s that makes them stand out

### A giveaway

Cambridge Audio is better known for its highly-rated budget electronics, but this solo floorstanding speaker is a special performer – even before a considerable price drop made the Aero 6 something of a giveaway.



The compact and agile JBL Arena 170s are best suited to smaller spaces, but shouldn't be ruled out for larger rooms too

# JBL

## Arena 170

### £400 ★★★★★☆

**Until recently, JBL's** most affordable floorstanders populated midrange territory in the Studio or ES Series. Not any more. Having introduced its new budget speaker range Arena - made up of two floorstander models, two pairs of standmounters, a centre speaker and a subwoofer - JBL now has a complete 5.1 speaker package available for less than £1000.

The smallest floorstander, the Arena 170s, are our first taste of the range and, at just £400, are very good value.

#### Detailed and agile

If you're after floorstanders for a small to medium-sized room, these should be high on your wish list: they're compact, perform best close to a wall (they're rear-ported) and won't overpower a small space.

Those with larger abodes shouldn't be put off, but the JBLs simply won't generate the same powerful, room-shaking sound of the larger Q Acoustics 3050s or Wharfedale Diamond 230s.

That's partly down to their bass: what's there is fairly detailed and agile, but the fact it lacks power and punch makes the presentation feel a little lacking in heft. Big crescendos aren't as imposing or as impressive as they should be.

#### Supple and lively

Yet we find ourselves taken with the Arena 170s' sound. Equal parts crisp and clean, supple and lively, the JBLs breeze through our diverse playlist (from Van Morrison's bluesy rock to Eminem's edgy raps) with decent precision and timing.

There's a sense of fun and immediacy to the galloping rhythms in The Smiths' *Frankly, Mr. Shankly*, the delivery fast and forward, but not in-your-face. Morrissey's vocals are clear and candid thanks to a convincing midrange. Up top, treble could do with more refinement - the song's ever-present cymbals are a little too cutting and intense.

Despite not being big and bold, the soundstage is relatively

spacious, and never overcrowded when the chorus's dense synthesized strings come into play.

You'll get the best results (and more solidity) by positioning them close to a back wall and screwing the supplied spikes into the rubber feet. System-matching is key - an agile, rhythmically adept amp such as the Marantz PM6005 (£300) will make the perfect ally. We'd avoid overly lean or bright-sounding kit.

#### Fun and entertaining

We rather like the Arena 170s quirky, contemporary design, with only the side panels dressed in a wood veneer. The baffle and interestingly sloped top panel are finished in a grainy-effect plastic instead; it's possibly a cost-cutting measure, but looks smart enough.

With the top-half grille attached, the façade is clean and unspoiled. Remove it and the drivers look like they've been targets at a shooting range, the smattering of screws around them anything but discreet.

Exposing it allows you to see the 25mm soft-dome tweeter's unusual waveguide design, which borrows from the company's high-ranging 'professional' models. According to JBL, this is for wider dispersion and more detail in the higher frequencies (though the latter is questionable). Below it is a more typical 18cm fibre composite driver.

The Arena 170s might not quite have what it takes to trouble the more versatile sub-£500 class leaders, but they are fun, entertaining speakers. And if these are anything to go by, we can't wait to see what the rest of the range has to offer on hi-fi and home cinema turf. Watch this space!

#### Rating ★★★★★☆

**FOR** Lithe and lively; clear, crisp and clean; would suit small, inflexible rooms; well finished

**AGAINST** Lacks bass punch and solidity; up against tough competition in the sub-£500 category

**VERDICT** They may not be all-rounders, but they clearly have myriad talents

#### Arena rocks

With the Arena 170 JBL has moved into the budget speaker market, with a complete package now available for less than £1000. This fun speaker is good value for money, and hopefully a taste of things to come.



# Q Acoustics 3050 £500 ★★★★★

While Q Acoustics' 2000i Series has scooped numerous Awards over the years, its engineers have been working to reach new heights. Enter the 3000 Series, the firm's all-new budget speaker range.

That doesn't mean we're waving goodbye to the 2000i Series just yet - we're told it will see out the end of the year - but sales will surely dwindle once word gets out.

We had a gut feeling the range's floorstanders, the 3050s, would be good - the standmounts had us bandying words like 'sensational' and 'fabulous' about. As it turns out, we're smitten all over again.

## Natural tonality

The changes made over the 2000i Series more than justify the range's overhaul: the material of the twin 16.5cm mid/bass drivers is now a paper/aramid (or Kevlar) mix which, according to Q Acoustics, ensures more natural tonality.

The 25mm tweeter is decoupled from the main cabinet by butyl rubber, isolating it from any vibrations in the cabinet. The crossover uses higher-grade components, too, limiting distortion and reducing phase problems at the crossover point.

The cabinet is made from 15mm MDF panels with a dual-layered 20mm top plate and an even thicker front baffle, which has been further braced to control resonances and increase stiffness. Q Acoustics has also moved the bi-wire terminals from underneath the cabinet to the rear panel, which makes them more accessible, too.

## Curvaceous corners

The 3050s are super-sturdy, epitomising the quality build we've come to expect. They're beautifully finished, with familiar curvaceous corners. Matt graphic (black) or American walnut (brown) come as standard, while black or white gloss lacquers, or a black leather finish, are available for a £150 premium. Appearances aren't too dissimilar from the 2050is (our current Award-winners) but they are slimmer (at 30cm) and shallower

(at 20cm). The towers borrow the plinth and adjustable spikes found on the higher-range Concept 40s, and can sit rigidly on any surface.

## Sonic magic

But while they've shed a little in size, the 3050s gain in every aspect of performance. Dutifully recreating the company's refined and subtle signature sound, they are more authoritative, transparent and precise than their predecessors.

A full, agile and dulcet bass, and crisp and controlled treble define their tonal balance, which in typical Q Acoustics fashion favours the rich side of neutral. That promises listeners a full-bodied presentation that's solid and robust across the frequency range.

You can't tell there's less cabinet volume. Powerful and assertive, the 3050s deliver a huge sense of scale and are capable of filling our largest test room with ease. You can place them quite far apart without losing a tight stereo image, while they strike the best balance pulled at least 20cm from the wall.

Their musical, measured stance and crisp rhythmic drive lie at the heart of their sonic magic, and we consume an entire Dire Straits album before we know it.

By the time *Brothers in Arms* comes on, the 3050s have shown no sign of complacency. Electric guitar solos have plenty of elbow-room, while the tender vocals are stacked with emotion.

Hats off to Q Acoustics: the 3050s are yet another staggering achievement which would give decent speakers closer to the £1000 mark a run for their money. For this price, they're sublime.

## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Rich and refined; class-leading subtlety; powerful and authoritative; good rhythmic drive; quality build and finish

**AGAINST** Nothing

**VERDICT** Q Acoustics has raised its game, and once again are setting standards at this price

They look quite dainty, but the 3050s are extremely sturdy with top and side plates at least 2cm thick

## Strength to strength

Tasked with improving an Award-winning product, the engineers at Q Acoustics have dropped in size and gained performance, making the 3050s a sublime speaker at a budget price.

Standing 95cm tall, the Diamonds are big and burly speakers - but an encompassing sound is great compensation

# Wharfedale Diamond 230

£500 ★★★★★☆

**Things can change** in a blink of an eye. Take these Wharfedale floorstanders for example: only last month they received a five-star review, but they have now dropped a star in the face of stiff new competition. But that doesn't mean these Diamonds 230s are done and dusted - if you're on the prowl for talented floorstanders, compact in size but room-filling in sound, these demand your attention.

## Clear and accurate

Big and burly, their all-encompassing sound gives the impression the 95cm tall, 32cm deep cabinets are larger than they are. The choir's vocals in Macklemore and Ryan Lewis' *Wings* fill the soundstage with dramatic crescendos that not many rivals can match.

Their powerful persona isn't at the expense of agility, either - the 230s are saturated with decent helpings of drive and punch. Their neutral tonal balance is convincing, the bass deep and powerful, and the treble clear and accurate.

Wharfedale has worked hard on the crossover to improve integration between the drive units and we think it's paid off - both work close-knit with the midrange, which is pleasing.

## Weighty and spry

Vocal delivery is smooth, focused and well projected. You can hear the subtle dynamic lifts in Macklemore's raps, and his vocal outbursts are explosive.

We find the Q Acoustics 3050s more precise in the way they time and place notes, though the Wharfedales' manner is affable: instruments have natural warmth and sweetness. That's not to say they're too rounded or without bite - each sound is solid and forceful.

Play Sergei Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* and the piano is weighty and spry, the varying intensity of every struck note flagging the Diamonds' dynamic know-how.

But even then, the Q Acoustics are subtler. They grant more

texture to the keys, revealing more harmonic information.

We find the 230s work best with a little room around them - at least 30cm from a back wall and double that from any side wall. Angling them slightly towards the listener tightens the stereo image, even if it gives away a little soundstage width.

## Touch of class

Thanks to their unusual bass tuning, introduced in the Diamond 100 series, positioning isn't set in stone. Instead of having a front or rear bass reflex port, the Wharfedales fire downwards into a small gap between the cabinet and plinth. This makes them more flexible with placement than most rivals, and also reduces any audible chuffing noises.

Thankfully, the 230s haven't taken the Diamond 100 series' finish, which provoked a few grumbles for its haphazard quality of finish. The new cabinet settles any moans. It's fully competitive with class rivals now, having neatly applied vinyl wrap and crisp edges. The lacquered baffle adds a touch of class too.

Internally, in addition to the new cabinet and upgraded crossover there's also a bigger magnet on the bass driver's motor system, which makes the speakers easier to drive and improves responsiveness. The tweeter, meanwhile, remains the same, sitting in a deeply dished waveguide which helps efficiency.

Losing a star in such short time may be a bitter pill for Wharfedale. But the 230s remain excellent, good-value speakers whose versatile nature will suit many a room and set-up.

## Rating ★★★★★☆

**FOR** Big, authoritative sound; vast soundstage; neutral tonality; precise and solid; decent finish; solid build

**AGAINST** Need more subtlety and texture

**VERDICT** They might have lost a star, but the Wharfedales are still speakers to be reckoned with

## Wishing on a star

We don't often revise our ratings after just a month, but in the face of stiff competition, the Wharfedales drop a star. But they're still talented speakers, capable of filling any room



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Go Deeper

**TEST VERDICT****THE WINNER****Q Acoustics 3050****£500 ★★★★★**

Many budget speakers are vying for your hard-earned cash, but the **Q Acoustics 3050s** stand out among the competition

**N**o matter the product, competition is invariably sky-high at the budget end – and floorstanders are no exception. Thanks to Q Acoustics once again raising the bar with their 3050s, you've never been able to get a better set of floorstanders for £500.

By improving on its Award-winning 2050i, the British company has once again redefined the rules for entry-level towers. Unbeatable for refinement, subtlety and musicality, the 3050s rival pairs from a price-point above.

You have to feel for Wharfedale – in no time at all, its 230 floorstanders have dropped a star (from five to four). But they are still mighty good speakers: powerful, precise and enthusiastic, not to mention well finished.

There's no question they earn a place on our best buy list, but there are now better-value propositions vying for your hard-earned cash. The Cambridge Audio Aero 6s are one of them, joining the five-star club thanks to a significant price drop from their original £650 price sticker. At £400 they are a bargain, gifting your system lashings of power, muscle and insight.

We're pleased JBL is back on our budget speaker radar because the Arena 170s are also worthy competitors, especially fitting for smaller rooms or tight, unyielding spaces. We're looking forward to seeing what else the Arena range has to offer.

It's encouraging to see all four speakers seizing the day. But at the end of it, we'd take home the Q Acoustics 3050s without a moment's hesitation.

**SYSTEM BUILDER**

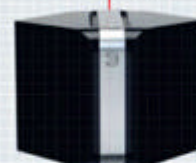
Three partners that will help enhance your experience with the Q Acoustics 3050

**CD player****Marantz CD6005 £300 ★★★★★**

Immense value for money for such a fantastic CD player. Its predecessor was already a winner, and this scooped the 2014 awards

**Amplifier****Marantz PM6005 £300 ★★★★★**

This superb amplifier is one of our favourites, bringing you great sound quality on a budget for all your analogue and digital music

**Music streamer****Bluesound Node £400 ★★★★★**

Our 2014 Award-winning streamer offers you a great way to update your system for streaming without breaking the bank

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**Facts & figures****Cambridge Audio Aero 6****£400 ★★★★★**

Sensitivity 90dB •

Impedance 8 ohms • Max power handling 120W • Biwirable no

• Finishes 2 • Dimensions (hwd)

98 x 24 x 34cm

**JBL Arena 170****£400 ★★★★★**

Sensitivity 87dB •

Impedance 8 ohms • Max power handling 200W • Biwirable no

• Finishes 2 • Dimensions (hwd)

96 x 22 x 28cm

**Q Acoustics 3050****£500 ★★★★★**

Sensitivity 92dB •

Impedance 6 ohms • Max power handling 100W • Biwirable yes

• Finishes 5 • Dimensions (hwd)

100 x 20 x 30cm

**Wharfedale Diamond 230****£500 ★★★★★**

Sensitivity 88dB •

Impedance 8 ohms • Max power handling 150W • Biwirable yes

• Finishes 4 • Dimensions (hwd)

95 x 20 x 32cm



Your hi-fi kit might be getting on a bit, but that doesn't mean you need to replace it to do justice to your digital tunes: add a good DAC to bring things right up to date

# Lofty Conversion

**F**ancy upgrading your hi-fi set up to accommodate your growing collection of digital music? Or maybe you simply want to give your laptop-based music system a boost? What you need is a DAC.


A stand-alone DAC is the simplest and most versatile way of elevating your music system to the next step, giving you the scope to play everything from Spotify streams to CD-ripped WAVs and high-resolution albums. All four DACs on test here meet the same criteria: they can all handle files of up to 24-bit/192kHz across a variety of digital inputs, they have a USB socket and a headphone amplifier with volume control. And with a price range of £600 to £720, the competition is bound to be tough.

The new offerings from Pathos, Pioneer and Sony will need to be at the top of their game as they're up against the king of the DACs in this price category: the multiple Award-winning Audiolab M-DAC. We reckon the long-standing class leader finally has something to worry about.

This is a four-way battle you don't want to miss.



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## TESTED

Sony PHA-3AC  
Pathos Converto  
Audiolab M-DAC  
Pioneer U-05



# Audiolab M-DAC

£600 ★★★★★



**We've been singing** the Audiolab M-DAC's praises for nearly five years, and it looks like we're going to be singing some more. This multiple Award-winner is a terrific DAC and headphone amplifier.

## **Admirably precise**

You'd think we'd stop being surprised, but the way in which the M-DAC unearths intricate details and cogently delivers each element of a song in such a fluid, dynamic way is still astonishing.

The Dead Weather's *I Can't Hear You* has bamboozled many products with its slow-burning, brooding tone, but the M-DAC takes it all in its stride. The tension builds up through the tautly pulled strings, drums hit with impact and precision, and the rasping vocals have bite as well as subtlety.

The DAC is transparent enough to clearly show the benefits of a well-recorded high-resolution album, but it doesn't turn its nose up at MP3s or streamed songs either. Even a 320kbps Spotify stream of The Knack's *My Sharona* has the sense of fun that the agile Audiolab brings to all music files.

The M-DAC has got it all: punchy timing, seamless dynamics and plenty of space in a well-constructed stereo soundfield. It's admirably precise, but it doesn't show off about it - it's having too much fun playing music.

**The M-DAC has it all: punchy timing, seamless dynamics and plenty of space. But it doesn't show off - it's having too much fun**

## **Crisp and seamless**

The M-DAC feels a lot more expensive than it is - the 2.7in OLED display is crisp, seamless in use, and the weighted resistance of the volume dial is nice.

The box itself is well made, with a neat aluminium finish in black or silver. It's a smart-looking DAC, one that wouldn't look out of place with either your desktop or hi-fi system.

It's a joy to use, too. The buttons and wand-like remote are responsive, selecting inputs and switching between preset sonic filters are swiftly done, and you can see everything that's happening with your music clearly on that large, informative screen. Along with bit depth and sampling rate, it even displays signal levels - it's like the modern equivalent of traditional volume meters.

## **Effortlessly fluid**

A USB type B input is the main connection to your laptop, but be warned that file size is restricted to 24-bit/96kHz. If it's high resolution

24-bit/192kHz you're after, you'll have to use the optical or coaxial connections, of which there are two inputs apiece.

Single-ended and balanced XLR outputs can also be found on the back panel if you want to use the M-DAC as a preamplifier, and there's a single 6.3mm jack on the front for your headphones.

The M-DAC is loaded with seven filter options, and each of them has a subtle impact on the overall sound quality. Names such as Sharp Rolloff, Minimal Phase and Optimal Spectrum are easy to confuse, but experiment for yourself to find out which filter works best for you.

The Audiolab M-DAC is a superb DAC in design and performance alike and, we think, offers far more than expected of its £600 price tag. We guarantee you'll be immediately hooked by its effortlessly fluid and punchy sound. It'll make you want to listen to all your songs anew - and you'll be amazed at just how good your music can sound.

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## **Rating ★★★★★**

**FOR** Capable and entertaining sound; smart-looking design; good connectivity

**AGAINST** USB input is restricted to 24-bit/96kHz files

**VERDICT** Effortlessly talented and enjoyable, the M-DAC is still the best product of its kind

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# Pathos Converto

£675 ★★★★★☆



**The new Pathos** Converto may not have the Italian manufacturer's signature look (no valves!), but this DAC has Pathos blood running through it. Its external design can be traced back to the £850 Pathos Aurium headphone amplifier, and the subtlety and weight of sound in Pathos's products is very much present.

## Muscular basslines

There are layers of detail wrapped around each note. The saxophone in Fela Kuti's *Colonial Mentality* oozes character – it sounds sexy. It's textured, the meandering tone is full of subtle dynamics, and it fits in cohesively with the rest of the instruments.

All that detail is underpinned by a real sense of weight. You can hear just how authoritative and solid the sound is when playing The Cat Empire's *Fishies*. The basslines are surprisingly muscular, with the kind of low-end authority rarely heard in this class. Voices are full-bodied and rich with emotion, while that bass rumbles along merrily.

But it's not the most rhythmically agile sound. That funky swing tune is more laidback than it should be and the Pathos needs more pep and precision to do justice to that enthusiastic tempo.

We want more snap and clarity, too. The punctuating, staccato beats of Garbage's *Cherry Lips* lack some punch,

**Pathos has a simple approach to design: no remote, no display, and no labels. Just two buttons: one for power, one for inputs**

perhaps requiring a more precise and energetic machine to show off its attitude. However, the Pathos does a wonderful job of conveying the subtle inflections and tonal changes of Shirley Manson's vocals.

## Second nature

Pathos has a simple approach to its design: no remote, no display, and no labels. Just two buttons: one for power, one for inputs. And four LED strips.

It's a bit disconcerting at first, but natural and intuitive once you get your bearings. After perusing the manual to find out which LED strip corresponds to which input, you'll never forget it. It becomes second nature.

The DAC itself is a rigidly built metal construction that's just the right size to sit unobtrusively on your desk. The inputs change with a satisfying click, and the volume dial is responsive, if a bit fiddly for those with larger fingers. There's not much room once you plug headphones into the 6.3mm jack.

## Weighty sound

The Converto plays high-resolution 24-bit/192kHz files across its digital inputs, including one USB Type B, two coaxials and a single optical input. There are also a pair of line level inputs for an analogue source, and the choice of balanced and single-ended outputs if you want to use it as a pre-amplifier.

You'll also find balance and gain controls on the back panel. Take some time to adjust the gain control: it helps optimise performance across a wide range of headphones and systems.

The Converto isn't quite the five-star product we expected, but it's close. It has a no-frills approach to design, and although some may yearn for a display and remote, we never felt we were missing out. Design aside, it's the smooth, luxuriously detailed and weighty sound that draws us to this DAC. The Converto is a charming and engaging listen that has us yearning for more.

## Rating ★★★★★☆

**FOR** Subtle, refined sound; depth and weight in the low end; sturdy and well-finished design

**AGAINST** Lacks energy and drive; some may want a display or remote

**VERDICT** An engaging performance that's lovely to listen to. Just add more drive



# Pioneer

## U-05

£700 ★★★★★☆



The Pioneer U-05 is one eye-catching machine. If you're not attracted by the glint of shiny metal, you'll be pulled in by those big XLR headphone connectors that dominate the front panel. It could be intimidating, but the U-05 DAC and headphone amplifier is an enthusiastic performer that gets our toes tapping.

### Clean and spacious

Clear, zippy and open, the U-05's naturally pacy rhythm and precisely drawn edges give songs an upbeat vibe that's immediately appealing.

Public Service Broadcasting's *Gagarin* sounds snappy and fast flowing – just what the funky tune needs. The trumpets blare with just enough bite to reel you in, but there's never a harsh moment. Strings are pulled taut, drums hit accurately – although we could do with a touch more low-end muscle. The Pioneer reaches highs and lows with conviction, so there's enough drama.

There's clarity and detail in spades, too, regardless of file type. Whether you're listening to a 24-bit/96kHz recording of Kate Bush's *50 Words for Snow* or a Spotify stream of 90s alt-rock band Soul Coughing, the Pioneer sounds remarkably clean and spacious.

Next to class-leaders, the Pioneer's detail retrieval holds up well, though. It could do with a touch more subtlety to

**The little retro touches, such as the shining metal edges and the perfectly cut slice on the volume dial, make it worth the money**

get us more engaged. The presentation is by no means cold or hard, but we wouldn't mind a richer, more fluid performance, particularly in the warmth and inflections in voices.

### Retro look

The Pioneer's aluminium chassis is sturdy and beautifully machined, and the little retro touches such as the shining metal edges around the buttons or the perfectly cut slice on the volume dial make it worth the money. Available only in silver, the U-05's look should still appeal to many.

The large display is informative and easy to read, and can be dimmed or turned off using the remote. With large, responsive buttons, the compact remote makes using the U-05 a breeze, and it's also handy for switching between Pioneer's sonic filters. It's worth trying the three digital filters (we prefer the Sharp option), and switching between the Up sampling (samples all songs to 32-bit/384kHz) and Direct modes.

### Premium hi-fi

The Pioneer U-05 is one of the most well-connected DACs of its kind. Not only do you get the popular USB type B input, coaxial and optical (two inputs each), and a 6.3mm headphone jack, you also get two balanced XLR connectors for headphones and an AES/EBU input. When you're spending premium money on a DAC, it's good to have options.

All digital inputs can handle 24-bit-192kHz high-resolution files, while the USB input goes one step further by supporting 32-bit/384kHz files and DSD. Most popular file formats – WAV, FLAC, ALAC, MP3 – are also supported.

It's a solid, appealing machine that feels like a premium piece of hi-fi, and it sounds like it, too. There are subtler, more refined performers for similar money (our Award-winning Audiolab M-DAC is the clearest rival here), but that shouldn't deter you from giving this entertaining DAC a listen.

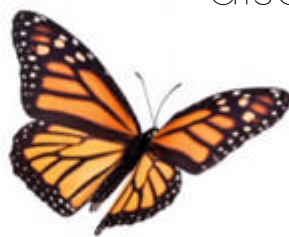
### Rating ★★★★★☆

**FOR** Snappy, upbeat performance; good clarity; plenty of detail; excellent build and design; variety of connections; lovely to use

**AGAINST** Rivals offer greater engagement

**VERDICT** Come for the cool retro design, stay for the clear, agile sound

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BEAUTIFULLY  
ENGINEERED  
SOUND

# Sony PHA-3AC

£720 ★★★★★☆



**Sony's compact PHA-3AC** has the makings of a brilliant DAC. It's a lively performer, has a clever design and supports smartphones too.

Its petite dimensions and the fact that it includes batteries will naturally lead you to think that this is a portable DAC. But alas, it isn't. The batteries are included to smooth the power supply to the circuits, but can't power the unit on their own. And that's a crying shame, as everything else about the PHA-3AC seems designed for portable use.

## Quality finish

The Sony DAC is small – roughly as long and wide as an Apple iPhone 6, but about as thick as a pack of playing cards. It's ideal for using with your laptop or smartphone, although there is a fair bit of wiring at both ends. That it has to be connected to the mains weighs it down, and makes us once again bemoan the fact that it isn't a portable design.

It's a nicely made unit. The build is sturdy with a good quality finish, but it doesn't have that luxury feel you'd expect of a product costing upwards of £700. Rival DACs at this price – while admittedly of the larger, desktop variety – feel more sophisticated.

There's no remote or display, but we never feel we're missing out. Inputs are clearly labelled and easy to use.

**Its petite dimensions and the fact it includes batteries will lead you to think it's a portable DAC. Alas, it isn't – and that's a crying shame**

## Smooth performance

Sony has packed plenty of connections into such a compact space. You'll find mini and standard USB ports (for Sony Xperia, Walkman and Apple smart devices), an optical input and a 3.5mm jack that doubles up as an analogue input and output.

There are also three 3.5mm headphone outputs: one for any headphones (those with 6.3mm plugs will need an adapter) and the other for headphones with balanced inputs.

The PHA-3AC supports playback of 32-bit/384kHz files, as well as most popular file formats. It handles DSD files too, although you'll need to download Sony's 'Hi-Res Audio Player' software, available for Mac and PC.

But it's the smooth performance and sound quality that charms us. *If I Were Me* by Dave Grohl (and friends) sounds fluid and detailed. You can hear fingers sliding along guitar strings, and easily distinguish the layers of harmonies from the multiple vocalists.

While the rhythm could be more attacking, the Sony doesn't lack drive or enthusiasm. Birdy's *Shelter* is composed and delicate, while the build-up of tension in Danny Elfman's *Wolf Suite, Part I* is deftly handled.

The Sony trades outright precision and subtlety for a smooth, easy-going character. This is great news if you listen to a mix of high- and low-resolution files, and especially if you use your smartphone as a source.

## Extra crunch

At £720, the Sony PHA-3AC is pricier than its closest rivals and, compared with the Audiolab M-DAC, it misses out on that extra bit of crunch and low-end wallop. But the smooth approach aids rather than hinders it, and we like that you can use it with a compatible smartphone. Overall, it's a talented DAC that comes ever so close to being an enticing proposition.

## Rating ★★★★★☆

**FOR** Smooth performance; detailed and lively; unfussy with music file type; compact build

**AGAINST** Rivals offer greater precision, insight and clarity; relatively pricey

**VERDICT** Clever design and lively performance, but we're still upset that it's not portable





**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](http://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

**TEST VERDICT****THE WINNER****Audiolab M-DAC £600 ★★★★★**

There are many fantastic products on the DAC market, but none can yet topple the four-time Award-winning **Audiolab M-DAC** from its throne

**Is there any** stopping the Audiolab M-DAC? There's some exciting competition in this category, but nothing else in this test was good enough to topple the M-DAC from its throne. That's not to say the others weren't enjoyable in their own right. In fact, they were all hugely deserving of four stars.

Let's start with the easy-going Sony PHA-3AC. Its lack of sonic fussiness means it sounds just as good with Spotify streams as with high-resolution tracks. It's also nifty how you can use it directly with your smartphone. But we can't get over how, despite the on-board battery and compact design, it isn't portable.

The Pioneer's snappy timing and remarkable clarity are hugely appealing. Even more so is the retro design of the U-05 DAC. It's a well-connected machine, only let down by the Pathos and Audiolab being that much more subtle and refined. The Pathos Converto is intuitive to use, and there's real depth to the sound that the other DACs can't rival. But it lacks the precision and energy to drive its performance.

And so we come to the Audiolab M-DAC. No matter how good rival DACs are, the four-time Award-winning M-DAC goes one step better. At £600, it's the cheapest DAC in the test, but its smart design and ample features make it seem like a more premium product. The wonderfully articulate, agile and masterfully cohesive sound is simply terrific. The M-DAC is a winner once again.

**SYSTEM BUILDER**

With an Audiolab M-DAC you will get the most out of these three companions

**Laptop****Apple MacBook Pro £900**

The ideal laptop to store all your high-resolution and CD-ripped files, and the slickest interface to stream tunes as well.

**Stereo amplifier****Roksan Caspian M2 £1900**

The Caspian's superbly powerful, muscular dynamics will add richness and weight to the M-DAC's performance.

**Headphones****Shure SRH1540 £430**

Our Award-winning cans are perfect for listening at home thanks to supersoft ear cups and a detailed, nimble presentation.

**Total build from £3830**

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

**Facts & figures****Audiolab M-DAC****£600 ★★★★★**

**Inputs** USB, optical x2, coaxial x2 • **Outputs** Optical, coaxial, XLR, RCA • **Headphones** 6.3mm • **Remote** yes • **Finishes** 2 • **Dimensions (hwd)** 6 x 25 x 25cm •

**Pathos Converto****£675 ★★★★★**

**Inputs** USB, optical, coaxial x2, line level • **Outputs** XLR, RCA • **Headphones** 6.3mm • **Remote** no • **Finishes** 1 • **Dimensions (hwd)** 6 x 20 x 23cm •

**Pioneer U-05****£700 ★★★★★**

**Inputs** USB, optical x2, coaxial x2, AES/EBU • **Outputs** XLR, RCA • **Headphones** 6.3mm, balanced XLR x2 • **Remote** yes • **Finishes** 1 • **Dimensions (hwd)** 10 x 30 x 27cm •

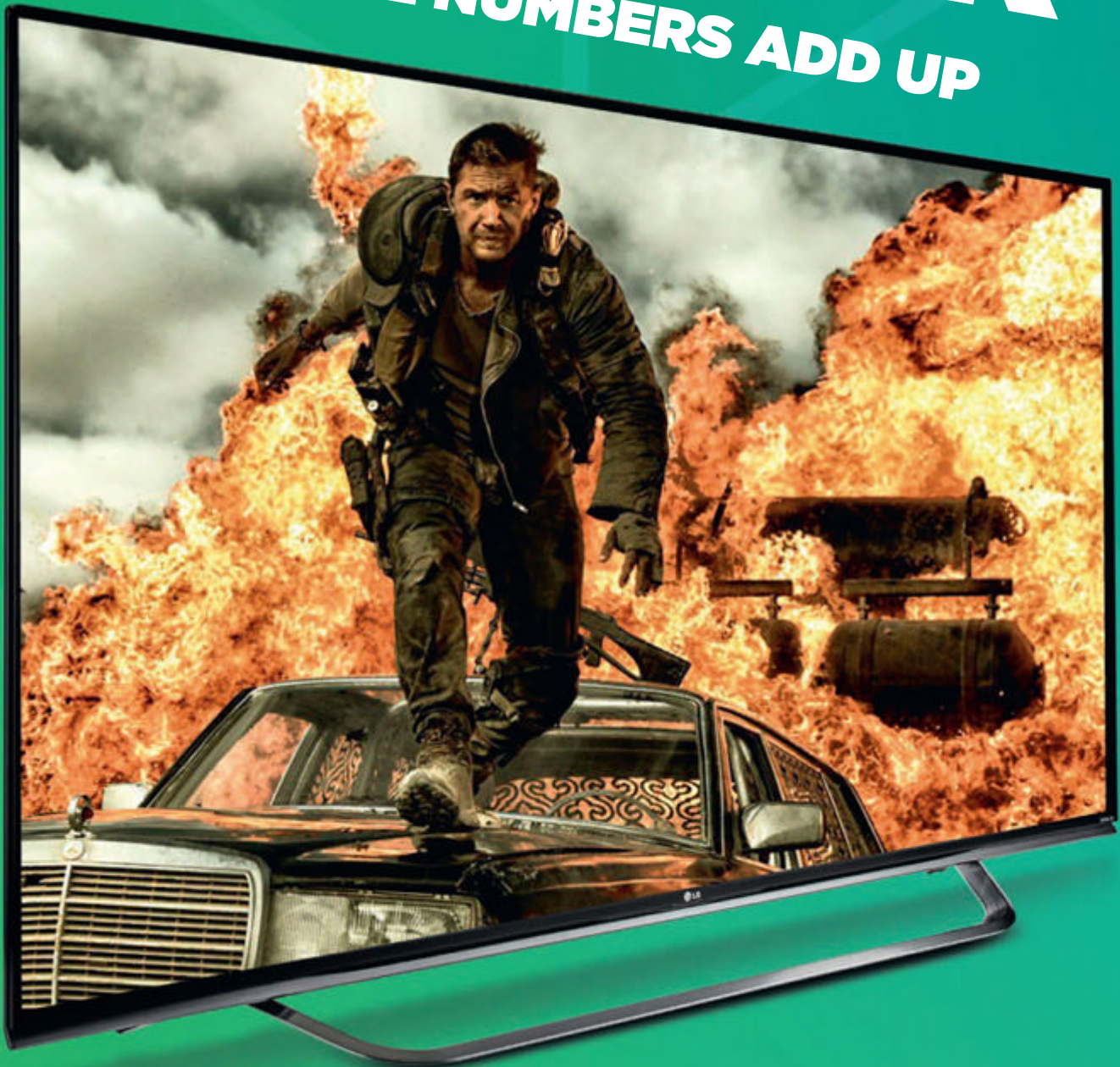
**Sony PHA-3AC****£720 ★★★★★**

**Inputs** USB x2, optical, 3.5mm • **Outputs** 3.5mm • **Headphones** balanced RCA, 3.5mm • **Remote** no • **Finishes** 1 • **Dimensions (hwd)** 3 x 8 x 14cm •



**8.3 MILLION  
PIXELS, 4K,  
65IN, £2.5K**

**ALL THESE NUMBERS ADD UP**





**TECH SPECS**

Aspect Ratio 16:9 • Weight (kg) 28.1 • Dimensions (hwd, cm) 90 x 146 x 30 • Resolution 3840 x 2160 • Type LED/LCD • Screen size (in) 65 • USB in USB in • Integrated Freesat Tuner No • RGB Scart in 1 • HDMI 1.3a Yes • Composite in 1 • Component in 1 • Accepts 1080p Yes • 24fps Yes • Integrated digital tuner Yes • Digital input Yes • Analog input Yes



**WHAT'S ON TEST**  
**LG 65UF850V**  
**Samsung UE65JU7000**

Numbers matter. At least, they do when they translate into super-sized, Ultra-High Definition screens with price tags that don't make your eyes pop. Count your blessings with two new UHD giants

**T**he 2015 battle for TV dominance has begun. Thanks to more Ultra-High Definition material starting to appear and more hardware sources becoming available, this will be the year of 4K. We are one step closer to standardization.

Prices, thankfully, are starting to fall. These days, the same amount of money can get you far larger

screens than you would have found last year. Now you can get 4K without remortgaging your house.

Leading the charge into this new world of UHD TV are LG and Samsung. They're the first out of the gates this year, each armed with 8.3 million pixels and shiny new smart operating systems. Which one will do better? It's a battle of Korean giants, and there can only be one winner.

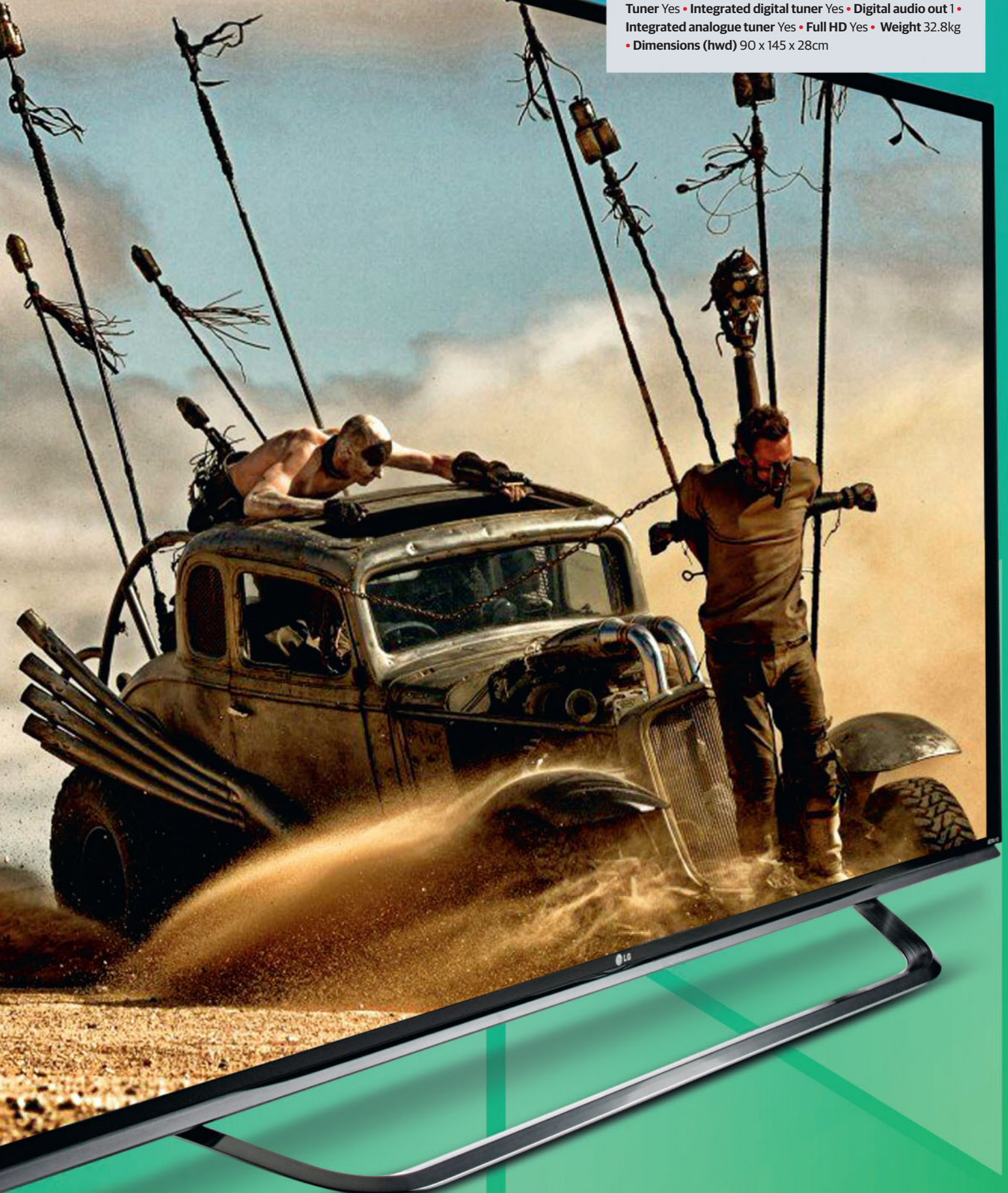


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#### TECH SPECS

Type LED/LCD • Resolution 3840 x 2160 • Screen size 65in •  
HDMI in 3 HDMI 1.3a Yes • USB in Yes • Composite in 1 • RGB  
Scart in 1 • Component in 1 • 24fps Yes • Integrated Freesat  
Tuner Yes • Integrated digital tuner Yes • Digital audio out 1 •  
Integrated analogue tuner Yes • Full HD Yes • Weight 32.8kg  
• Dimensions (hwd) 90 x 145 x 28cm





# LG 65UF850V £2500 ★★★★★

**When LG announced** its TVs for 2015, the focus was all on 4K OLED. It's a good thing too, because our first experience of 4K OLED was a very positive one. But what of the LED screens that still make up the majority of the range?

LG hasn't scrimped on those. What we have here is the LG 65UF850V, a 4K LED TV from the middle of the company's new range. The question: just how well can LG multitask?

## A good case

Pretty well, it seems. While we're not quite blown away by this 4K unit, it does make a convincing case for the £2500 in your bank account.

That is, if you can find a space for it to live. You see, this TV has an attractive but impractical stand. The metal bar at the front is fine, but the hind legs pose an issue. They're spread out, which helps with stability, but it does make the overall footprint unnecessarily large.

Such is the span they exceeded the dimensions of our regular AV racks. You'll need a surface no less than 115cm in width, or a wall to mount it on.

All set? Then let's tuck in. At the time of writing, Amazon Instant Video had yet to allow Ultra High Definition streaming on LG TVs – so we headed to Netflix to get cracking on another season of *House Of Cards*.

It's a striking picture. The level of crispness and sharpness makes a convincing case for having 8.3 million pixels, especially whenever somebody frowns (which happens a lot). The sense of texture is obvious.

Then there's colour, which this LG approaches with confidence. The bold, punchy hues have no trouble grabbing your attention. It's not especially subtle, however. While the colours pop with ease, they're not quite natural.

This becomes more apparent when we compare the LG with the Samsung UE65JU7000, which handles shading with greater nuance. The LG doesn't handle contours as well either, and consequently has a weaker sense of depth in its picture.

Motion is handled well, as long as you go into the menu and manually adjust it to a low setting – the default position makes the picture appear overly processed.

## Compare and contrast

We move down to Full HD with Blu-ray, and it's a similar experience. The LG is a fine upscaler, presenting a sharp picture, but the Samsung offers a cleaner, less processed look.

It doesn't help that the LG struggles with contrast, as we discover early on when we try to calibrate the set using



The neat, intelligently designed remote combines the best of the traditional and 'smart' wands into one

our trusty THX optimisation disc. The blacks are not properly dark unless you tinker with backlight and brightness – in which case the whites are never quite brilliant. No matter how you adjust the screen, the LG never appears quite as dynamic as the Samsung.

The set supports passive 3D, and a pair of glasses are included in the box. This is one area where those mildly exaggerated colours come in handy, as they counteract the specs' natural dimness.

## Up to standard

Time to sample a DVD, and the SD format's inherent noise and fuzziness helps to hide some of the set's weaknesses. It's perfectly acceptable, but you're never unaware that you're watching standard-definition material.

Sound quality is good. LG has worked with Harman Kardon to improve the audio side of things. What you get is more solid and smooth than a typical flat screen, but again the Samsung edges ahead thanks to a more convincing, atmospheric sound.

A word on remotes: LG has a new one, and we love it. In recent years the trend has seen TVs shipped with two remotes: traditional button sticks partnered with slick, oversimplified ones that end up being a little frustrating. Not least because you inevitably end up using both, before losing one of them.

But no more. LG has combined them into a single, versatile unit. The main mode of operation is still an on-screen cursor, operated by gyroscopic sensors in the remote. But now there are also physical keys (some numbers and the good old directional key pad). That means you can get back to punching buttons when you're tired of waving your arms about.

LG has done solid work with the 65UF850V. The Samsung UE65JU7000 is a step above in terms of picture quality, but what the LG offers is still a strong picture performance.

We're also very pleased with the LG's app support and super-slick smart interface, which provides a strong counter-argument against the Samsung. Then there's the slick, versatile remote. If you have £2500 to spend on a TV, this is well worth your consideration.

## App/interface



**When it comes** to the user experience, LG has come up trumps. Last year, the company made waves in the smart TV arena – its slick WebOS interface provided a refreshing alternative to the stagnant 'hub' designs. Now LG has come up with WebOS 2.0.

The changes are minor tweaks rather than sweeping reconfigurations. It's still a system based on the 'Launcher', a line of cards that pops up on top of your content without interrupting it. These cards let you jump between inputs and content as if you were changing channels.

The first thing we notice is the increased operational speeds. LG claims it is up to 60 per cent faster, and we believe them. Booting up used to take up to 30 seconds, but we managed to get from standby to full speed in about 10sec. Apps, of which there are a good number, load up with urgency. No longer will you turn the TV on and have to sit there waiting while the set tries to wake up.

A new 'My Channels' card in the Launcher bar lets you bookmark your favourite channels under a single shortcut. You can add set-top box channels as well as regular TV ones. No need to press numbers anymore. Unless you want to.

The way you adjust settings has also been tweaked. Where previously the settings were necessarily part of a full menu, now there are shortcuts designed to take you straight to messing with picture or sound.

Press the settings button and a bunch of icons will appear. Like the Launcher, these icons sit on top of whatever you're watching – without interrupting. No need to pause just to bump up the brightness a notch.

There's also an 'Input Picker' bar, which can be pulled down from the top of the screen. This removes the need to backtrack through menus – one less step between you and other inputs.

## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Punchy colours; lovely user interface; great remote

**AGAINST** Picture needs greater subtlety and contrast; impractical stand

**VERDICT** Not class-leading, but this is solid 4K performance for the money



# SAMSUNG UE65JU7000 £2750 ★★★★★

The Samsung UE65JU7000 is the first of the Korean company's 2015 TVs to enter our test rooms. It's a mid-range model, but don't let that fool you - it's impressive. A great (and) big 4K picture, a freshly revamped smart interface and a stylish design: this is a tempting proposition.

We're finally starting to see more 4K content on the market, and so it seems rude not to start there. We begin with Amazon Prime Instant Video and an episode of *Bosch* - and the picture performance is rather splendid.

It's sharp and detailed. Given that there are over eight million pixels, you might think we're stating the obvious, but this is precise, revealing stuff. Textures are cleanly drawn, yet not etched and artificial.

Once the picture is properly calibrated, we like the colours. They're beautifully judged. What you get is a natural palette with enough vibrancy to hold your attention but not enough to approach a psychedelic nightmare. That said, we think Samsung may have kicked it up a notch from last year's sets, which we accused of being a little understated.

## A black-and-white issue

Contrast is strong. Let's start with the blacks: it's not the kind of abyssal darkness you'll find on OLED screens (or, indeed, the plasmas of old), but it's



From mango to banana: the smart remote now curves in a new way, but is less than substantial

convincing enough that you won't have a problem with the black bars top and bottom. Whites are brilliant - but not exaggeratedly so. Highlights never produce glare, nor do they threaten to wash out their surroundings.

Shading is nicely executed. It's subtle, with a masterly approach to the nuances of contours. Combine that with the picture's dynamism and you have yourself a convincing sense of depth.

## Subtle difference

Flying picture quality, then - and most of it holds true when we take it down to 1080p Full HD. We serve up a Blu-ray of *Interstellar* and the Samsung demonstrates largely the same properties. Granted, there is the expected step down in outright sharpness and detail, but the difference is subtle.

Freeview HD broadcasts don't fare quite so well, having a pinch of grain. Nonetheless, it remains a solid, precise picture. This TV is an adept upscaler, and has no problem filling those 65 inches.

A note on 3D: Samsung always used to provide glasses with its 3D TVs but - in what we can only conclude is a cost-saving measure - none is included here.

We take things right down to standard definition with a DVD of *The Grand Budapest Hotel* and are met with inevitable picture noise. There's no getting past the massive amount of

scaling the TV has to do. And a Freeview broadcast, as you'd expect, is softer still.

The Samsung makes a valiant effort though. This is still a perfectly watchable image, with colours well balanced and as much clarity and definition as you could hope for from an SD format.

We're pleased to see Samsung has worked at the sound as well. Ever since TVs started dieting, sound quality has suffered. But this set has no interest in being size zero, which is perhaps the reason the sound is rather good.

It's suitably weighty, which we don't tend to expect from flatscreens. Tonal balance is good, resisting the temptation to go shrill whenever somebody talks.

Of course, a TV's internal speakers can't match a good pair of speakers, but today we don't feel utterly compelled to advocate soundbars.

Now, a word on the TV's design. It's a nice-looking unit. There's a good deal of metal in the frame and stand. We dig the minimalist, slightly futuristic vibe.

The problem though, is Samsung's perpetual obsession with making screens that appear to float. The TV is supported by a single thin column, which is not particularly rigid. It's strong enough to hold the screen up, but there will be a worrying wobble should you knock into it. We'd like something that feels a little less precarious.

## All in one

Samsung has maintained its tradition of providing a One Connect box, which houses most of the TV's connections. Your HDMI cables plug into this small box, which then connects to the set with a single cable. It's also a way of future-proofing your TV: you'll be able to replace the box with more advanced iterations when they appear.

Oh, and remotes, of which there are two. The traditional one looks boring but is functional and reliable. The smart one has been redesigned to stop resembling a small mango - it's now a banana with the ends chopped off. Some of us feel it's now a little thin and unsubstantial.

The Samsung UE65JU7000 is a very good TV. It has its flaws, but overall we are suitably impressed, and we think you will be too. This is an excellent first step for Samsung in 2015; we can't wait to see what else the company has lined up.

## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Strong definition; good contrast; natural palette; neat interface

**AGAINST** Wobbly stand; interface could be a little faster

**VERDICT** A very strong 4K TV: Samsung's 2015 range is off to a flying start

## SMART TV-TIZEN



Good sound and a good picture aren't enough these days, so let's talk about the features. Or rather, one big feature: Tizen. This is Samsung's own open-source platform, which will drive its smart TV operating system this year.

Essentially this means a new, streamlined look. Gone is the separate Smart Hub page, replaced by something that bears a striking resemblance to LG's WebOS platform. And that's no bad thing.

What you get is an unobtrusive (perhaps that should be less obtrusive) pop-up bar, where you'll find

recent and recommended content. Apps and channels are lined up in colourful little tiles, and you select or organise them using the motion-sensitive pointer remote.

The system encourages you to multitask with content from different inputs. Flicking from broadcast TV to HDMI to YouTube is made as easy as switching channels. And when you leave an app, you'll return to where you left off: no more automatic shut-downs.

New to the party is Multi-Link, which lets you split the screen into TV and app. So you can now watch television while simultaneously engaging in your Twitter feed, if you're so inclined. You can also change the sizes of these separate windows to give one greater prominence.

Samsung has traditionally been king when it comes to app offerings. Past TVs have offered the full suite of the free UK catch-up services, along with Netflix and Amazon Instant Video. Not all of these were present on our review sample, but Samsung assures us they will become available shortly.

We like the new design, but it's not particularly snappy. We experienced a noticeable amount of lag between button presses and completed actions. While it's not disastrous by any means, it's something we hope can be fixed by a firmware update.



**TECH SPECS**

Type LED/LCD • Resolution 3840 x 2160 • Screen size 65in •  
HDMI in 4 • HDMI 1.3a Yes • USB in USB in • Composite in 1 •  
RGB Scart in 1 • Integrated Freesat Tuner No • Component  
in 1 • 24fps Yes • Integrated digital tuner Yes • Digital audio  
out 1 • Integrated analogue tuner Yes • Weight 28kg •  
Dimensions (hwd) 90 x146 x 30cm





# The world's most desirable kit

# TEMPTATIONS

## “As good as any amp we've heard near this money”

■ **Burmester 032** Integrated stereo amplifier

■ **£12,380** ★★★★★

**H**igh-end purists have always thought of integrated amplifiers as a compromise. Most consider them acceptable when products cost hundreds rather than thousands, or for those that value a compact solution over sound quality. We're not sure what they'll think of the 032, but we like it a lot.

This is Burmester's top integrated amplifier. At over 12 grand it isn't cheap nor, with a 48 x 48 cm footprint, small. It's about as imposing a one-box amplifier as we've come across.

### Quality build

As is typical for the German brand this unit is superbly made. While the combination of heatsinks all round and a reflective chrome front panel may not be to all tastes, there's no denying the impressive quality of it all. Every panel is precisely lined up and each control feels like it is built to work for decades.

### TECH SPECS

**Type** Integrated  
**Claimed power** 105W per channel  
**Inputs** 6 x line level  
**Outputs** Preamp, speaker, headphone  
**Tape loops** 1  
**Tone controls** Yes  
**Remote control** Yes  
**Finishes** 1  
**Dimensions (hwd)** 19 x 48 x 48cm

Having visited the company's factory, we can testify to the seriousness with which Burmester approaches the manufacture of its products, and the commitment it has to being able to service them for decades to come. In our experience, few of the company's rivals work to such high standards.

Take that hefty, but beautifully machined, top panel off and you'll find a generous power supply, dedicated boards for the left and right power amplification and a neat, well-spaced circuit layout. There's plenty of evidence of the kind of attention to detail that a product at this level deserves.

Connectivity is good. Burmester has long promoted balanced connections, so it's no surprise to see them in the majority here. There are four sets of balanced XLRs, including one - which bypasses the preamp stages altogether - intended for an AV processor. There are

also two single-ended inputs as well as a tape output.

Should the 105 watts per channel not be quite enough for you (it's enough for us) there's also a choice of single-ended and balanced XLR preamp outputs for connection to an external power amp.

This integrated is a pleasure to use. The volume control has a hefty, well-damped but very precise feel to it, and the amplifier's on-board software is quick to respond. All the front panel controls work with precision, and even the remote has more luxurious leanings than most alternatives we've seen.

Delve into the menus and you can trim input levels to prevent large differences in volume when you switch between sources. There are bass and treble adjustments too.

### Sort your support

The 032 is a big unit, weighing in at around 40kg, so make sure your equipment support is sturdy enough. It's also advisable to get help when unpacking the product - those heatsinks can be sharp and that weight makes it an uncomfortable single-person lift.

While the use of such extensive heatsinking suggests that the amplifier runs hot, that doesn't prove to be the case. Its casework gets only slightly warm during our testing despite playing demanding music at high levels. But, as always, we would advise leaving plenty of fresh air around the amplifier to prevent any possible build-up of heat.

At this level, good system-matching is a must to get your money's worth and the 032 thrives with highly transparent sources and speakers. Get it right and this is an astonishingly capable performer.



The beautifully engraved logo is just one aspect of the sky-high standards of build, fit and finish

Take that beautifully  
machined panel off and you'll  
find a neat circuit layout

[See overleaf for more detail...](#)





## In detail

**1 Heatsinks** The 032's unusual design, with extensive heatsinks surrounding the whole unit, isn't just for visual effect. These manage the internal temperature of the electronics, keeping them cool and, in turn, helping long-term reliability.

**2 Circuit layout** Burmester pays a great deal of attention to the way in which it lays out the circuits in its products. Components are sited so as to minimise interference with each other and are fed power as cleanly as possible.



The 032 has an understated approach to music replay that doesn't necessarily grab the listener's attention, initially at least. It's only when we spend an afternoon listening to a variety of songs, then go back to alternative amplification we know well, does it click just how capable this integrated is.

There's not a hint of coarseness or grain in the presentation, and that leaves it sounding pure and precise. Previous Burmester amplifiers we've reviewed have always had a smooth, full-bodied balance and this one is no different. The 032's presentation is as refined as they

hear. Eminem's rapid-fire delivery on *Not Afraid* comes through with an engaging fluidity, and every word is crisply rendered and easy to follow. His trademark aggression is unmistakable, and delivered in a concentrated dose.

Just as importantly, the 032 doesn't tone down the rhythmic drive or hard-edged excitement of this track.

### Playing its Part with skill

Switching to Arvo Pärt's *Cantus In Memory Of Benjamin Britten* shows off the Burmester's impressive scale and resolving powers. This track features a

Switching to Nina Simone shows the Burmester's unfussy nature regarding musical genres. We love the articulate way it deals with her passion-laden vocals on *Strange Fruit*, planting them firmly centre-stage. There's everything we want here: subtlety, presence and power, and we're transfixed until the song ends. At times like this, hi-fi is magical.

We give the amplifier's headphone circuit a try with Grado's PS500s and BeyerDynamics' T1s. The output is inconveniently positioned on the back panel, but we hear the same combination of insight and refinement that we liked so much from the speaker outputs.

The 032 is many things. It's big, pricey and has an appearance that will split opinion. It's also fabulously well made and sounds as good as any amplifier we've heard near this money, including pre/power alternatives. If you have an appropriately talented system, take this one seriously. You'll be pleased you did.

**Nina Simone shows the amp's unfussy nature. There's everything we want here: subtlety, presence and power, and we're transfixed until the song ends. At times like this, hi-fi is magical**

come and, despite class-leading resolution, doesn't go out of its way to highlight shortcomings in the recording or partnering system. You'll certainly know all about any flaws, but somehow the amplifier always keeps the musical message front and centre – a rare trick for such a revealing product.

### New-found warmth

We're reminded of this quality when listening to Eminem's *Recovery* set. This recording tends to sound hard and thin on most equipment, but through the Burmester we're aware of a degree of warmth and weight we don't normally

densely layered string section and the 032 takes it all in stride, communicating the texture of the strings without the edge that some rivals add.

We're impressed with the integrated's authority here, and its dynamic reach as the piece builds to a crescendo. There's no trace of stress, the Burmester sounding calm and composed even when pushed hard. This is a smooth and organic presentation we're sure many will love.

The 032 also sets up a wide, expansive stereo soundstage. It extends well beyond the outer edges of our reference ATC SCM 50s and is nicely arranged and focussed sharply.

**Consider if** you're willing to bypass the pre/power route but still want top quality  
**Highlight** It's got to be the Burmester's refined yet insightful sonic presentation

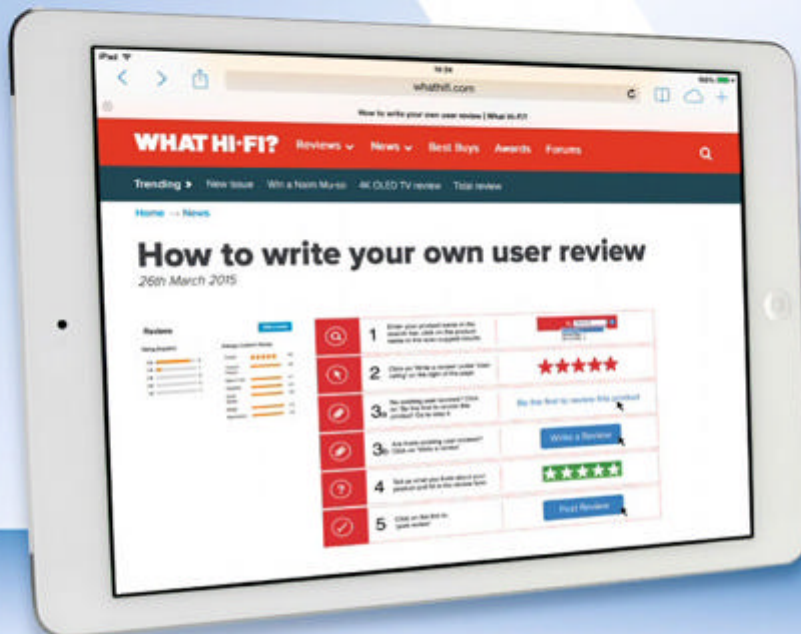
### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Refined but dynamic sound; impressive insight; excellent build; connectivity

**AGAINST** Headphone output is inconveniently hidden on the rear panel

**VERDICT** One of the best amplifiers we've ever heard. The 032 is expensive but excellent

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## EXTREME?

IT IS NOW!



audioquest.



“The outboard clock is worth having, despite its huge price”

■ **Antelope Zodiac Platinum** DAC/10M clock/Voltikus power supply

■ **£8595** ★★★★★



Build quality is solid rather than luxurious, but connectivity is unusually good and includes analogue. Single leads connect the three boxes

**H**ow many boxes does it take to make the ultimate digital-to-analogue converter? The magic number is three if you ask Antelope Audio. The digital specialist's top combination consists of the Zodiac Platinum DAC, Voltikus outboard power supply and 10M atomic clock.

The DAC and power supply can be bought for just under four grand. The 10M clock - available separately for an eye-watering £5570 - takes that to the package price we've quoted. Despite a significant discount on the total of the individual parts, that notable price tag puts the Antelope combination against some pretty big hitters from the likes of DCS, TAD, Esoteric and Chord.

#### It's all about timing

Outboard clocks are rare in domestic applications, but Antelope wants to reduce jitter (digital timing errors) to a minimum. The 10M atomic clock's

Antelope makes a great deal of this DAC's ability with DSD, so that's where we start. Stevie Wonder's *Innervisions* sounds solid, full-bodied and nicely refined through this number-cruncher. There's a substantial kick to the hard-charging bass line in *Higher Ground* and a great deal of insight into the densely layered production.

Stevie's vocals, rendered with finesse and power, brim with their customary passion. This three-box combo delivers rhythms in a surefooted way, nicely conveying this track's pace and drive.

Switching to PCM music files continues that good work. We give a CD rip of Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* a go and follow that up with high-resolution files of Hans Zimmer's *The Dark Knight Rises* - we're impressed. The Antelope has a cohesive and detailed presentation. It's calm and composed, even when the music gets complicated, and delivers large dynamic swings with conviction.

**We have a bit of fun finding out whether the 10M clock makes a difference to the sound of the digital inputs, and it does. Without it, there's less confidence in defining notes**

accuracy is impressive, at a claimed 0.03 parts per billion. Don't worry, despite its name it's not radioactive. You won't need a protective suit to go near one.

The Zodiac Platinum DAC is just as interesting. It will accept 24-bit/384kHz music streams through its USB input and will happily handle DSD files too. DSD (single and double speed) streams are upsampled to DSD256 internally.

#### Making the connection

The unit's connectivity is excellent. There are pairs of optical and coax digital inputs, a USB and the less-commonly seen AES/EBU. Unlike most DACs, the Antelope also has analogue inputs, along with both balanced XLR and single-ended outputs. There are also de-jittered digital outs, in case you want to perform off-board digital processing of the signal.

The build of these three products is good. Only the DAC has front-panel controls but they feel solid and precise in use. The casework is decently robust and nicely finished, but lacks the luxury feel we think its price suggests. Still, the combination is small and easy to house.

The soundstage is fairly compact, but it's precisely layered and stable. The DAC built into our Naim NDS/555PS streamer has a greater sense of space, but the Zodiac still satisfies.

#### You can't beat the clock

We have a bit of fun finding out whether the 10M clock makes a difference to the sound of the digital inputs - and it does. Disconnecting it doesn't change the presentation much tonally, but there's less confidence in defining notes, rhythmic drive slackens and the differences in the sonic textures are less apparent. Add a reduction of overall authority and scale, and it's easy to conclude that the outboard clock is worth having despite its huge price.

Success is a little more qualified when it comes to the analogue inputs. Here the Platinum loses out on some of the transparency and insight so evident through the digital circuits. It's still a pleasant listen, but we'd hoped for more. Much the same could be said of the headphone output.



#### TECH SPECS

##### Zodiac Platinum DAC

**Outputs** Coaxial x2, XLR, RCA, headphone x2, USB

**Inputs** Coaxial digital x2, optical digital x2, RCA, AES/EBU, USB

**Finishes** 1

**Dimensions (hwd)** 11 x 17 x 19cm

Use the Antelope as a preamp - it has a variable output - and it turns out to be good. There's not quite the solidity or dynamic punch of our reference Bryston BP26 preamp, but the shortfalls aren't great and you'd have lower system costs.

We like this three-boxer. If you value the DSD ability and can use its range of features, it's well worth a listen despite the formidable nature of some of the competition. In the right circumstances it would make a fine choice.

**Consider if** you want a versatile high-end digital preamp that also deals in analogue  
**Highlight** It sounds excellent with DSD files. We like its insight and cohesion

#### Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Good rhythmic drive; excellent range of features; insight and cohesion; good build

**AGAINST** Price puts it up against some formidable products

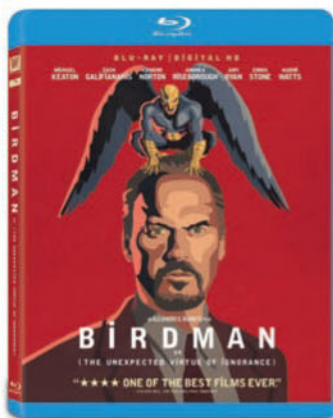
**VERDICT** There's much to like about this DAC. The 10M clock is expensive but worthwhile



# PLAY LIST

The movies, music and games to test your system

## Out this month



### Birdman: (Or The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)

Blu-ray  
Out 30th March

★★★★★

#### Bonus content

- Birdman: All-Access
- A Conversation with Michael Keaton and Alejandro G. Iñárritu
- Gallery: Chivo's On-Set Photos

**Duration** 119m

**Audio** English: DTS-HD  
Master Audio 5.1

**Picture** 2.40:1, 1080p

Picture	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Sound	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Extras	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■



## Flying in the face of convention

**What is it?** That's a tough one. Nobody can answer that one in a confident, succinct manner.

It's best to come out and say it. We have no idea what *Birdman* is. It makes a mockery of the pigeonholes we bring to the movies. It defies classification.

The yarn itself is uncomplicated. An ageing movie star (Michael Keaton; ingenious casting choice) wants to escape his superhero typecast. He tries to prove himself a true artist by writing, directing and acting in a Broadway play.

It's the execution that will have you cheering or jeering. No, there is no middle ground. You will leave this impressed or indignant.

There is heavy melodrama, although a throbbing vein of dark comedy keeps us from too much of a downer. You get a gritty look at the less glitzy side of showbiz, but surreal sequences pull you out and stop you feeling grounded.

There is no rest, especially not when a fluid camera drifts from scene to scene, presenting the whole 119 minutes as a single take.

It's an odd effect, mildly nauseating for some but thrilling for others. It is at once realistic and bizarre. A lack of cuts suggests a documentary vibe while granting everything a dreamlike quality.

### Brought up short

Once in a while the camera pauses, and you're woken with a jolt. Witness the actor's impotence and his daughter's resentment. It's a hard look at the futility of man and his art, made all the more effective by sterling turns from Michael Keaton and Emma Stone.

Harsh realities come out of nowhere and hit hard, but you drift on to the next scene, each impeccably timed and acted, each at once bleak and hilarious. *Birdman* is a curious journey.

It is also a beautiful one. The theatre stage presents an array of colourful sets, but the free-roaming camera keeps the scenery still more varied.

The faint yellow of dim corridors yields to deep-red backstage lamps, blue mist and the neon of a Manhattan rooftop. It's a vibrant, dynamic picture.

Incidentally, the constant panning and tracking will test your system's grasp of motion. And then there's the soundtrack: primarily jazz drumming, with stacked cymbals that sound like trash cans. It is quite spectacular in surround sound.

*Birdman* is a film like no other. Bold and irreverent, it goes out of its way to ensure you're never certain where you stand. That will enthrall some while infuriating others - and it's worth your time finding out. One thing is for sure: this is no superhero flick.

## Spotify highlights [Join us on Spotify whf.cm/playlist15](https://whf.cm/playlist15)



### Sufjan Stevens: *Should Have Known Better*

Effortlessly affecting, confident and open-hearted music from a latter-day king of melody.

### Boys Age: *The Wish Is Father To The Thought*

If you like mumbly, approximate, tremendously exciting and engaging Japanese indie-pop, at last your search is over.

### David Gilmour: *On An Island*

Tasteful, high-gloss, overwhelmingly musicianly fare with *Abbey Road*-era Fab Four harmonies to sweeten the already sugar-coated pill.

### The Fairfield Four: *Standing In The Safety Zone*

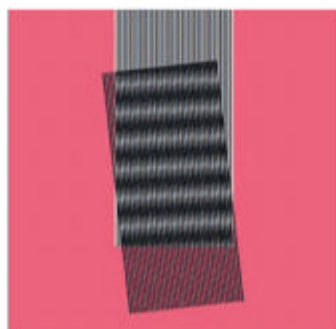
Fast approaching a hundred years as a going concern and yet to deviate from their entirely winning gospel/doo-wop formula.

# Music

GAMES, MOVIES  
& FORTHCOMING  
RELEASES  
p78



## Download, CD, vinyl



### HOT CHIP *WHY MAKE SENSE?*

Out May 18th

★★★★☆

There can be longevity in disposability and, despite the occasional Grammy or Mercury nomination, Hot Chip's modus operandi has always been delivering the disco glitter. Songs that seem urgent and vital when they're blasting from a system but are as anonymous as a last-dance snog-and-grind as soon as they're over is where they do all their best work.

And while with *Why Make Sense?* (their sixth album since 2004's debut *Coming On Strong*) Hot Chip remain a kind of pub-quiz pop-music round (a

bit of Underworld here, a dash of New Order there, a Best of The 80s vibe pretty much everywhere), there's a robustness about the songs here that's entirely new. With *Why Make Sense?* Hot Chip sound like they've grown into themselves.

#### If it ain't broke...

That's not to say this album is any great departure, mind you. Chunky, four-square, mid-tempo teeth-grinders are the order of the day here, but with *Cry For You*, *Started Right* (with its daring deployment of clavinet) and *Dark Night*, Hot Chip hit the hips/feet spot without ignoring the head too much.

It's not without filler ('trite' is too glamorous a description for *Easy To Get*, for instance), but as a test of your system's timing, transient detail retrieval and low-end attack it's action-packed from end-to-end. And while it's not an especially dynamic recording (and consequently radio-friendly), it's a thorough examination of tonal variation.

#### Specifications

**Duration** 44m 51s

**Standout track** *Started Right* "You make my heart feel like it's my brain"

## Download, CD, vinyl



### TWIN SHADOW *ECLIPSE*

Out May 18th

★★★★☆

No one moves from 4AD to Warner Brothers without having at least one eye on the main chance, and for his major-label debut George Lewis Jr (for it is he) sounds like he has the mainstream in his cross-hairs. *Eclipse* may be soft-peddalling the overt 80s synth-pop references of his first two albums, but if it's big choruses, bigger drums and unabashed commitment you want, just set your watch back 30 years and dive right in.

There's a commonality to all 11 songs here, from the 4m 19s of opener *Flatliners* to the 2m 57s of

closer *Locked And Loaded* and through the 3mins-odd each of the nine songs inbetween. Opaque (but opaquely meaningful) lyrics, glossy synth pads, drum fills the like of which T'Pau might have rejected as being a bit too bombastic, and huge, hooky melodies. There's immediacy and urgency here in spades, but between the sincerity and the vast, unmanageable scale of most of the songs (with the title track arguably the only exception) it's the aural equivalent of eating foie gras three times a day for a week.

#### Hardware challenge

Thanks to its occasionally dense layering of sound, its hefty dynamics and the obvious care Lewis Jr has taken with his vocal harmonies, though, *Eclipse* is a superior showcase for your set-up's powers of focus and organisation. Without proper administration this is an album that could provoke hi-fi indigestion, but well-handled it's an intricate listen.

#### Specifications

**Duration** 38m 15s

**Standout track** *Old Love/New Love*

The sound of *The Breakfast Club* grown old and knackered.

## Listen to it this way

#### CD player

**Naim CD5si £1000 ★★★★★**

Boundless energy and enthusiasm, but plenty of poise when required too

#### Stereo amplifier

**Rega Elex-R £900 ★★★★★**

Classic iron-fist-in-velvet-glove stuff from the best sub-£1K integrated amp around

#### Stereo speakers

**Tannoy Revolution XT6F £1000 ★★★★★**

Effortlessly dynamic, casually precise all-round entertainers. Money well spent

This system will relish digesting the meaty dishes Hot Chip serve



## Listen to it this way

#### Smartphone

**Samsung Galaxy S6 Edge ★★★★★**

Outstanding sound quality from one of the best smartphones out there

#### Music streaming service

**Spotify £10 per month ★★★★★**

It's coming under a fair bit of pressure for the first time, but Spotify remains a go-to service

#### Headphones

**Philips Fidelio M1MKII £180 ★★★★★**

Brilliantly balanced, thoroughly engaging headphones and an authentic bargain

These three will be equal to the task of doing justice to *Eclipse*







## Movie shorts

### Into The Woods

Stephen Sondheim has Meryl Streep and friends frolic in the woods and subvert fairytale tropes. There is singing. It's not quite dark enough.

### Unbroken

The true story of an athlete and bombardier captured during WWII. There's nothing new about war-time valour tales, but it's still inspiring.

### Exodus: Gods And Kings

Ridley Scott's latest epic retells the story of Moses. Avoiding biblical fidelity and old-world charm, it gets a bit stale. Sure is spectacular, though.

### The Theory Of Everything

Biopic season concludes with one of Stephen Hawking. A touching and enlightening portrayal of a man who is definitely more than a wheelchair.

## On-screen

### System tester



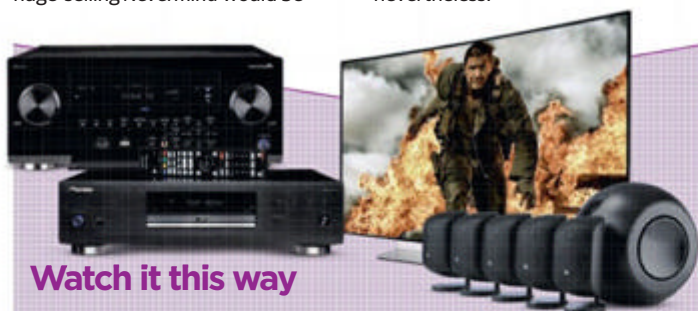
### Cobain: Montage Of Heck Blu-ray Out now

★★★★★

Constantly seeking to replace the family he lost at age nine with his parents' divorce, Kurt Cobain could find solace only in music. Even then, he found the comfort of music taken away from him when his band became wildly fashionable and popular. Money couldn't save him. A family of his own couldn't save him. His threat that the follow-up to the huge-selling *Nevermind* would be

titled *I Hate Myself And I Want To Die* was far from idle.

*Montage Of Heck* is a start-to-finish, top-to-bottom documentary of real ambition. Interviews with Cobain's parents, friends, band-mates and wife, images of global Nirvana hysteria, elegaic animations set to cassette recordings of conversations and demos, vérité home-movie footage and incendiary, blown-gasket concert performances all combine to tell the story of a short, angry, confused and ultimately tragic life. A downer, sure, but compelling nevertheless.



### Watch it this way

#### Blu-ray player

PioneerBDP-LX58 £600

★★★★★

Even at this price it's a bargain

#### Television

LG55EG960V £3800

★★★★★

Just a gobsmackingly fine television

#### Speaker package

Bowers & WilkinsMT60-D £1950

★★★★★

Venerable, in nothing but a good way

#### Home cinema amplifier

PioneerSC-LX58 £1400

★★★★★

Power, precision - and stacks of features

## Games

### Bloodborne PS4, Out now

★★★★★



The sadistic sods behind the *Dark Souls* games have done it again, with another gruesome third-person adventure that delicately treads the thin line between hellishly infuriating and gloriously satisfying. The combat is more intense, but this is still tactical and perilous, with painful penalties for mistakes.

### Dark Souls 2: Scholar Of The First Sin

PS4, Xbox One, PS3, Xbox 360, PC, Out now

★★★★★



If you never played the original *Dark Souls* 2 or simply want an excuse to go through it again, this expanded special edition is just what you need.

Essentially it's a tweaked version of the brilliant but frustrating and brutal third-person adventure, but with all three of the downloadable packs built-in.

### Mortal Kombat X

PS4, PS3, Xbox One, Xbox 360, PC, Out now

★★★★★



Surely the world must be over *Mortal Kombat*? *Mortal Kombat X* might just do enough to convince you that's not the case. The fighting is fast and precise, and the gore is more graphic and inventive than ever. There's even a story that sort of works. If you think you might like it, you probably will.

### Titan Souls

PC, PS4, Vita, Out now

★★★★★



Think *Shadow Of The Colossus* meets the old *Zelda* games and you've about got the measure of this charmingly old-school indie offering. You hunt down monsters and attempt to get the single shot into each one's weak spot to kill it. Each battle is a frantic dash about as you try to pick your moment.

## What we are waiting for...

### **Movies (Blu-ray) Whiplash** (1 June)

The quintessential jazz drumming movie, in which Miles Teller is tormented by a sadistic, perfectionist and Oscar-deserving JK Simmons.

### **Movies (Blu-ray) Taken 3** (13 June)

Nobody is actually taken this time, but that doesn't stop Liam Neeson from continuing his face-breaking rampage. Maybe it's time to stop.

### **Music (Download, CD, vinyl)**

#### **Florence & The Machine - How Big, How Blue, How Beautiful** (1 June)

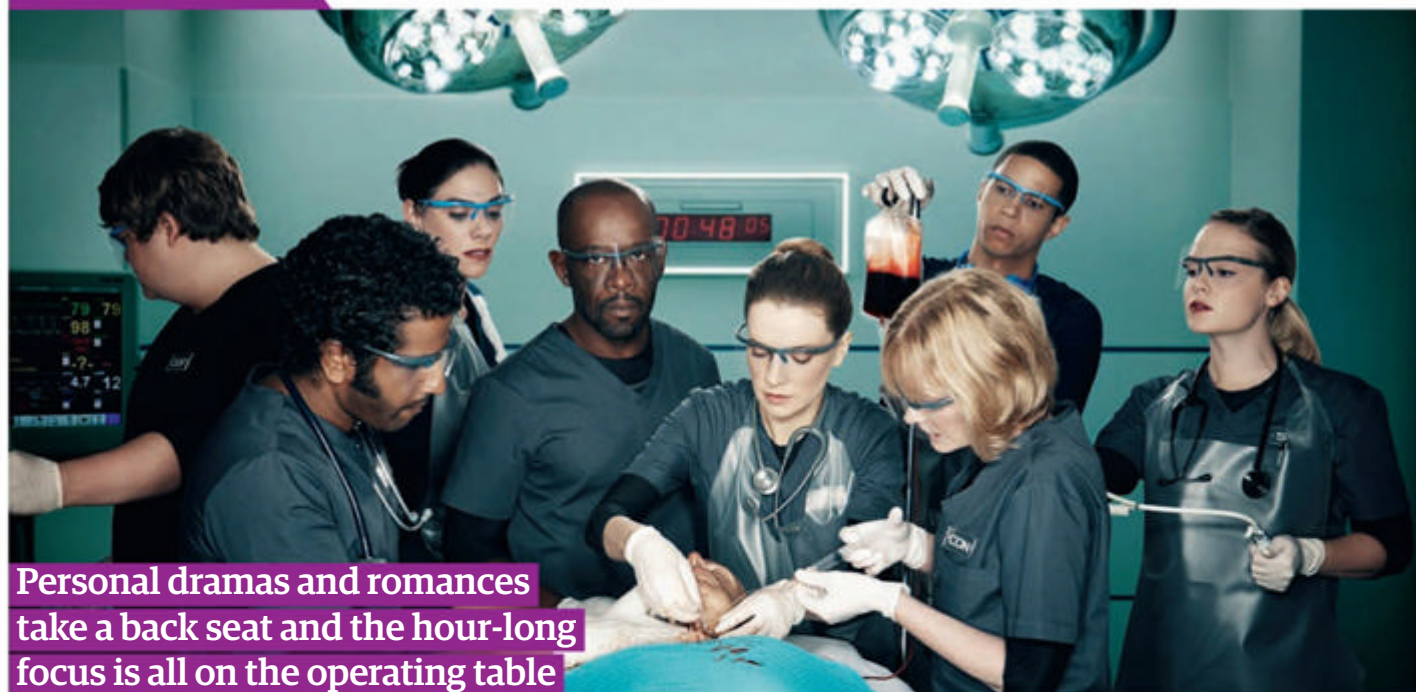
The word 'Florence' is much bigger than any other on the sleeve...

### **Music (Download, CD, vinyl)**

**Leftfield - Alternative Light Source** (8 June) Because what used to be the cutting edge is now a sepia-toned nostalgia vibe.

## May in Hi-Def

### The best on the box



**Personal dramas and romances take a back seat and the hour-long focus is all on the operating table**

### **Critical**

#### **Sky 1 HD - Tuesdays, 9pm**

Blood, guts, and - worst of all - incisions. This visceral medical drama from Jed Mercurio (the man behind the critically acclaimed *Line Of Duty* and *Bodies*) is definitely not one for the squeamish viewer.

Set in a state-of-the-art major-trauma unit, the show focuses on the first 60 minutes after a critically ill patient is wheeled in - the crucial time period within which every action taken by the surgical staff could result in life or death. And it all takes place in real time.

It's an unflinching take on the medical drama genre, where personal dramas and romances take a back seat and the hour-long focus is all on the operating table. Make sure you're not eating your dinner when watching the last couple of episodes - there are bolt cutters involved.

### **Halt and Catch Fire**

#### **Amazon Prime Instant Video - 2 June**

A period drama about the personal-computer revolution in the 1980s? In the capable hands of AMC - the network behind *Mad Men* - this show has garnered enough of a fan-base to clinch a second series.

Much as *Mad Men* spotlights the world of advertising in 1960s New York, this show dives into the Silicon Prairie of Texas in 1983, when personal computers were starting to kick off. The always-compelling Lee Pace plays Joe MacMillan, a former IBM employee who coaxes his colleague Gordon Clark and brilliant student Cameron Howe into reverse-engineering an IBM PC - first done in real life by Compaq in '82.

The resulting rivalry between two companies, lawsuits, the strain on personal relationships and the grunt work of realising their vision is a great watch,

especially if you have a fondness for '80s computing, music and pop-culture references.

### **Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.**

#### **Channel 4 HD - Fridays, 8pm**

Skye's discovery of her powers and her fellow Inhumans is the driving topic for the second series, and we suspect that the fallout from *Avengers: Age of Ultron* will have direct consequences on how the world will view people with alien powers. There's also the war between the two factions of S.H.I.E.L.D. - will Gonzales prevail in his democratic rule and take down everything Coulson has built so far?

This series has been a far cry from the muddled mess it was at the start. With believable characters that interact brilliantly, plots that flow seamlessly together, some great action sequences and a whole lot of humour, this is the superspies-

behind-the-superheroes show we've always wanted.

### **Wayward Pines**

#### **Fox HD - Thursdays, 9pm**

A US Secret Service agent investigating the disappearance of two fellow agents ends up in the small Idaho town of Wayward Pines, where nothing is what it seems. Sounds familiar? If you're getting serious *Twin Peaks* vibes, you're right on the money.

M. Night Shyamalan - the executive producer and director behind the show - hasn't been coy about paying homage to David Lynch's cult '90s TV show. But don't be put off by Shyamalan's involvement - his visual style gives the seemingly idyllic town an unsettling, otherworldly aura. And then there's the cast: Toby Jones, Juliette Lewis and Carla Gugino join protagonist Matt Dillon as his inquiries are thwarted at every turn. Engrossing stuff.



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# WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION

## iPAD EDITION

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# BUYER'S GUIDE

NEW

If you've invested in a **projector** for some big-image action, you'll want it to be performing at its best. Our three top tips will help.

If you're looking to invest in a **media server**, don't miss our pointers on what to look out for before you take the plunge.



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## All the latest kit, all the latest ratings...

Welcome to the **UK's best guide** to TVs, hi-fi, home cinema and mobile, with star ratings for more than **1500 products**. Where other magazines rely on isolated

writers reviewing in a range of locations, our star ratings are decided by an **expert team** of reviewers working together, in a **state-of-the-art testing facility**.

Within this guide you'll find all our favourite **four- and five-star** products - including **Award-winners** - to help you pick the best kit for your budget.



Kobina Monney, Buyer's Guide Editor

### Exciting new additions...



#### LG 55EG960V, p91

"If this gorgeous LG 55EG960V is anything to go by, the future of TV looks spectacular."



#### Q Acoustics 3020, p108

"We're impressed by the dynamics on offer, as the 3020s deliver music crescendos with confidence."

### Inside

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# Your essential system set-ups

# BEST BUYS

GET THE  
BEST KIT  
FOR YOUR  
BUDGET

## Home Cinema Systems

### BLU-RAY PLAYERS



**SONY BDP-S5200**  
★★★★★  
£85

Simply astonishing performance and pictures for less than £100. Smart functionality too: you can't go wrong...



**SONY BDP-S7200**  
★★★★★  
£250

Sony's new Blu-ray offering is a really remarkable achievement. It has huge ability with images and sound.



**PIONEER BDP-LX58**  
★★★★★  
£600

A beautifully crisp, punchy picture and dynamically capable sound make this a stellar Blu-ray player

### RECEIVERS



**YAMAHA RX-V377**  
★★★★★  
£260

This is the perfect entry-level option for those upgrading to five-channel sound on a budget. It's a brilliant buy.



**SONY STR-DN1050**  
★★★★★  
£500

Incredible value, this home-cinema powerhouse has pretty much all the features and ability you want.



**PIONEER SC-LX58**  
★★★★★  
£1400

Mature, powerful, refined - this amp will make you feel as if you're sitting in a large cinema hall.

### SPEAKERS



**Q ACOUSTICS 2000i 5.1 PACK**  
★★★★★  
£625

Our 2013 Award winner produces sound with impressive scale for movies and music.



**DALI ZENSOR 15.1**  
★★★★★  
£980

This package is as entertaining as it is insightful, delivering all the drama and punch we could hope for. Superb.



**KEF R100 5.1**  
★★★★★  
£2850

Best Buy for 2013 and 2014, the R100 5.1 is simply superb with demanding film soundtracks - great in stereo too.

### DISPLAYS



**SONY KDL-40W605**  
★★★★★  
£450

If you're after a great all-rounder in both picture quality and smart features, this TV is it. Splendid.



**SAMSUNG UE48H64800**  
★★★★★  
£700

A whole lot of screen for your money - and this is a superb performer as well. A bargain.



**SONY VPL-HW55ES**  
★★★★★  
£2800

Superb in 2D, this projector also excels at 3D. Edges are sharp, pictures have depth and stability.

## Hi-Fi Systems

### CD PLAYERS



**MARANTZ CD6005**  
★★★★★  
£350

This incredibly musical player offers detail in spades, not to mention a great way with dynamics.



**CYRUS Cdi**  
★★★★★  
£1050

A player that puts detail resolution, agility and dynamic expression above all else. Which is why we love it.



**ROKSAN CASPIAN M2 CD PLAYER**  
★★★★★  
£1900

Combines bite, refinement and rhythm better than anything else we've heard at this price.

### AMPLIFIERS



**MARANTZ PM6005**  
★★★★★  
£300

A return to form by Marantz in this market, and a fine match for its CD-player sibling.



**REGA ELEX-R**  
★★★★★  
£900

One of the most talented sub-£1k amplifiers we know. Delivers a fast, agile sound with superb dynamic shifts.



**REGA ELICIT-R**  
★★★★★  
£1600

The best-value premium stereo amp we know: surefooted, with superb timing, it's very revealing too.

### SPEAKERS



**DALI ZENSOR 3**  
★★★★★  
£300

An entertaining and easy listen - an airy, spacious sound with detail, punch and great tonal balance.



**B&W 683 S2**  
★★★★★  
£1150

The sense of scale these floorstanders produce is massive, but they do delicacy and subtlety too. Superb speakers.



**SPENDOR A6R**  
★★★★★  
£2500

Attacking, detailed and balanced, these floorstanders demonstrate a winning way with dynamics.

## Complete your home cinema system

### SET-TOP BOXES

Sky+HD 2TB  
£250

Humax HDR-1000S  
(500GB) £220

Humax DTR-T1010  
£230

### PROJECTORS

BenQ W1080 ST+  
£1000

Epson EH-TW7200 £1900

Sony VPL-HW55ES  
£2800

### COMPACT SPKRS

Tannoy HTS101  
£400

Q Acoustics Q7000i  
£900

B&W MT60D  
£1950

### SUBWOOFERS

B&W ASW610  
£700

B&W ASW610XP  
£700

Velodyne SPL-1000  
Ultra £1400

### STYLE SPEAKERS

Tannoy HTS-101  
£350

Q Acoustics Q7000i  
£900

B&W MT-60D  
£1950

### SOUNDBARS

Philips HTL 5140  
£270

Q Acoustics Media 4  
£400

Dali Kubik 1  
£800

### SUPPORTS

Target CL430  
£190

Atacama Evoque  
Eco 60-40 £460

Atacama Moseco 6  
£120

### REMOTE CONTROLS

One For All Zapper  
£10

Logitech Harmony  
One £125

Logitech Harmony  
1000 £280

## Grow your hi-fi system

### TURNTABLES

Pro-Ject Essential II  
£200

Rega RP3/Elys2  
£550

Clearaudio Concept  
£1000

### TABLETS

iPad Mini  
£200 (16GB)

Google Nexus 10  
£390 (32GB)

Apple iPad Air  
£480 (32GB)

### RADIOS

Roberts Stream 93i  
£150

Revo SuperConnect  
£250

Arcam T32  
£480

### HEADPHONES

Sony MDR-EX650AP  
£60

AKG Y50  
£80

Philips Fidelio  
M1MKII £180

### MICRO SYSTEMS

Denon D-M39DAB  
£310

Cambridge Minx Xi  
£600

Naim UnitiQute 2  
£1150

### AUDIO CABLES

QED XT40  
£10/m

Atlas Elements  
Integra £45

Supra USB 2.0  
£30

# Package Deals

Stream your digital music collection with these exclusive Bluesound packages.



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BLUESOUND  
PACKAGES AT  
SSAV.COM

## BLUESOUND

HiFi for a wireless generation



The award-winning wireless, multi-room, music streaming system.



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.

### POWERNODE PACKAGES

Hi-Res Wireless Music Streamer / Amplifier & Speakers

**Bluesound Powernode  
KEF LS50**

Special Package Price  
**£1299**

Save  
**£99**



### NODE PACKAGES

Hi-Res Wireless Music Streamer & Amplifier / DAC

**Bluesound Node  
NAD D 3020**

Special Package Price  
**£749**

Save  
**£49**



Hi-Res Wireless Music Streamer / Amplifier & Speakers

**Bluesound Powernode  
Q Acoustics Concept 20**

Special Package Price  
**£819**

Save  
**£129**



Hi-Res Wireless Music Streamer & Amplifier / DAC

**Bluesound Node  
Rotel RA-12**

Special Package Price  
**£949**

Save  
**£49**



Hi-Res Wireless Music Streamer / Amplifier & Speakers

**Bluesound Powernode  
Monitor Audio Bronze BX2**

Special Package Price  
**£729**

Save  
**£119**



Hi-Res Wireless Music Streamer & Amplifier

**Bluesound Node  
Marantz PM6005**

Special Package Price  
**£649**

Save  
**£149**



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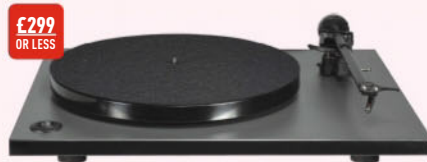


WHAT Hi-Fi? AWARDS 2014

£209 OR LESS

### PRO-JECT • ESSENTIAL II • TURNTABLE

Entry-level "plug'n'play" two speed turntable with single piece aluminium tonearm and pre-fitted Ortofon OM5e cartridge.



£299 OR LESS

### NAD • C 556 • TURNTABLE

Time to enjoy vinyl collections with extraordinary quality! With a minimalist design, the C 556 turntable offers accurate reproduction by using performance-focused parts and components that put music first.



NEW £575 OR LESS

### PRO-JECT • 1 XPRESSION CARBON UKX • TURNTABLE

With its Carbon armtube and supplied Ortofon 2m Silver cartridge, the 1 Xpression Carbon UKX sets new standards in its price range.



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.



NEW £1249 OR LESS

NEW £1249 OR LESS

### ROKSAN • K3 • CD / AMPLIFIER

New integrated amplifier with aptX Bluetooth, a phono input plus five additional line inputs for other sources. The K3 CD player is the perfect match for the K3 amplifier. Three finish options available.



£425 OR LESS

WHAT Hi-Fi? AWARDS 2014

### 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.



£399 OR LESS

WHAT Hi-Fi? AWARDS 2015

aptX CSF Bluetooth

### NAD • D 3020 AMPLIFIER / DAC

Features digital and analogue inputs plus the convenience of wireless streaming with its Bluetooth capability.



£1499 OR LESS

SAVE £500

### NAD • C 390DD • DIRECT DIGITAL AMPLIFIER / DAC

The combination of sound quality and features make the NAD C 390DD a highly capable and versatile amplifier. Featuring NAD's MDC, the C 390DD comes with 8 inputs which can be expanded to 14 with the optional MDC modules.

### AUDIOQUEST • DRAGONFLY v1.2 DAC / HEADPHONE AMP

DragonFly is a sleek, flash drive sized Digital-Audio Converter that connects to a USB jack on a Mac or Windows PC, turning any computer into a true high-fidelity music source.



WHAT Hi-Fi? AWARDS 2014 £129 OR LESS



NEW

£199 OR LESS

MQA MQA READY

### MERIDIAN • EXPLORER<sup>2</sup> • USB DAC / HEADPHONE AMP

Successor to the popular and widely acclaimed Explorer pocket USB DAC with up to 24-bit resolution and 192kHz sampling. Includes Meridian's unique MQA – Master Quality Authenticated.



NEW £399 OR LESS

SAVE £100

### MARANTZ • NA6005 • MUSIC STREAMER

If you prefer direct wireless access to your digital media then look no further. With in-built WiFi, Bluetooth and USB-A capabilities, this player also connects to everything: to your computer, external hard disc, smartphone, and tablet.



NEW £499 OR LESS

### PIONEER • N-50A • MUSIC STREAMER

Developed for the digital age, the N-50A Network Audio Player connects to many different sources and features Internet Radio and Music Streaming from compatible devices, a high quality DAC and Airplay and DLNA compatibility.



£899 OR LESS

SAVE £600

WHAT Hi-Fi? AWARDS 2012

### NAD • M51 • DAC / PREAMP - SILVER FINISH

This award-winning DAC / pre-amp features optical, coaxial, USB and HDMI inputs, all of which can handle files up to 24-bit/192kHz. The M51 will truly transform any system.

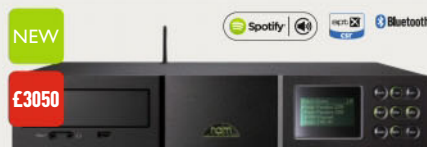


£299 OR LESS

SAVE £100

### DENON • CEOL RCD N-9 • CD/STREAMING SYSTEM

Stream high definition music from NAS, computers, mobile devices and the internet, via Wi-Fi, Ethernet, Bluetooth and USB. Features Spotify Connect, Internet radio, CD and FM/AM radio.



NEW

£3050

### NAIM • UNITI 2 WITH BLUETOOTH ALL-IN-ONE NETWORK SYSTEM

Combines an integrated amplifier, CD player, DAB/FM tuner, internet radio, iPod dock, digital-to-analogue converter and high-resolution 24bit/192kHz capable network stream player.



£699 OR LESS

Hi-Res AUDIO

aptX CSF Bluetooth

### SONY • MAP-S1 • MULTI AUDIO PLAYER SYSTEM

It's all right here - a powerful 2x50W amplifier, tuner and CD player integrated in an elegant compact unit. Just add speakers and you are ready for an incredible Hi-Resolution Audio experience.



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.

### B&W • P5 S2 HEADPHONES



£249 OR LESS

### AUDIOQUEST • NIGHTHAWK HEADPHONES



NEW

£499 OR LESS

### NAD • VISO HP50 HEADPHONES



£229 OR LESS

### SENNHEISER MOMENTUM 2.0 WIRELESS HEADPHONES



NEW

£379.95 OR LESS

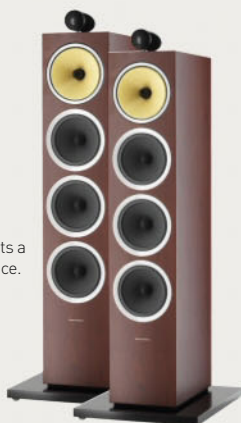


**BOWERS & WILKINS • 685 S2**  
At home on a stand, wall or bookshelf, the versatile 685 S2 is ideal for stereo and home theatre uses in most rooms. And performance is enhanced with the addition of a Decoupled Double Dome tweeter.

**NEW**  
£499  
OR LESS

**WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014**  
Best speaker  
Best value for money  
Best overall value

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



### 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

**WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014**  
Multi-room systems  
Best value for money  
Best overall value



### Q ACOUSTICS • CONCEPT 20

A truly remarkable award-winning speaker which delivers a level of sonic performance previously only available to audiophiles able to invest in high-end models.

**£349**  
OR LESS

Price excludes stands

### PSB IMAGINE X1T

A deceptively slim and discreet floorstanding design, the Imagine X1T has wide bandwidth and high SPL output capabilities that defy its modest size. Features identical 5 1/4" woofers plus a one-inch pure titanium dome tweeter.

**NEW**  
£749  
OR LESS

### Q ACOUSTICS 3020

Replacing the award-winning 2020i speakers, the 3020 incorporates numerous improvements including a revised cabinet with wool fibre damping plus new bespoke drive units.

**NEW**  
£189.95  
OR LESS

Standard finishes  
Premium finishes  
£249.95

**NEW**

**£299**  
OR LESS



Bluetooth  
Dolby Digital  
Dolby Digital Plus

### B&W • T7 • BLUETOOTH SPEAKER SYSTEM

Introducing the pick-up-and-play hi-fi speaker. Perfectly sized for bedrooms, kitchens and gardens, T7 is B&W's most portable, versatile wireless system yet.



**WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014**  
Multi-room systems  
Best value for money  
Best overall value

**NEW**  
£895

### NAIM • MU-SO • WIRELESS MUSIC SYSTEM

Combines Naim's expertise in streaming, amplification and loudspeaker technology. Mu-so is the stage your music deserves, bringing you closer to the songs that inspire your life.



## SONOS

### THE WIRELESS Hi-Fi SYSTEM

The Sonos Wireless Hi-Fi System delivers all the music on earth, in every room, with deep, richly textured sound. **PRICES FROM £169**

**WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014**  
Multi-room systems  
Best value for money  
Best overall value

Wireless Extender  
**Boost**  
**£79**



**BLUESOUND**  
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 2015

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 for money  
Best overall value

Spotify

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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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**SEVENOAKS**  
SOUND & VISION





£2199  
OR LESS

**BUY FOR £1749**  
SAVE £450 WHEN YOU TRADE-IN  
ANY HOME THEATRE PRODUCT  
ASK FOR DETAILS

#### ARCAM • FMJ AVR450 • AV RECEIVER

7.1-channel AV receiver combines 4K "Ultra HD" upscaling and 3D video capability with Arcam's legendary sound quality.  
Also Available: ARCAM FMJ AVR380 & AVR750



£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



NEW

ESSAV  
.COM



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

#### PIONEER • SC-LX58 • AV RECEIVER

New 9.2-channel Network receiver with Class D Amplification, Wi-Fi, AirPlay, DLNA, Bluetooth and Dolby Atmos® upgradability.  
Also Available: PIONEER SC-LX88



£399  
OR LESS

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



NEW

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



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

£599  
OR LESS

#### SONOS • PLAYBAR SOUNDBAR & WIRELESS SPEAKER

This plug-and-play unit incorporates 9 integrated amplified speakers. Simply connect it to your TV with the supplied optical cable to deliver an epic home cinema sound in your own living room. PLAYBAR can also expand your existing Sonos system.



#### YAMAHA • YSP-2500 DIGITAL SOUND PROJECTOR

Reproduces overwhelmingly real presence and impact-filled bass sound. Two-unit YSP with ultra-refined design and high-grade aluminium chassis. Bluetooth® equipped, capable of wireless music play and App control.



NEW

ESSAV  
.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.



NEW

£599  
OR LESS



£169  
OR LESS

SAVE  
£160

#### 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.



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 PV1D subwoofer. Available in a matt black or white.



#### REL • S2 SUBWOOFER

Fast, tuneful, fun and exceptionally dynamic, the REL S2 permits those with limited space or compact speakers to enjoy the benefits of Serie S performance.

NEW

£999  
OR LESS



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**<sup>4K</sup>

**JS9000 SERIES • CURVED 4K UHD TV**

Welcome to a new world of picture quality. The revolutionary S9000 SUHD TV doesn't just raise the bar, it changes the game. This is a new benchmark for design with stunning looks from whatever angle you look at it and picture quality previously only seen in professional editing suites. It's a new world of colour, brightness and contrast, immersed in a sleek and elegant package.

Prices from £2599

NEW

48 55 65

FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY

VISIT [WWW.SSAV.COM](http://WWW.SSAV.COM) FOR LATEST TV PROMOTIONS & PRICES



**SONY**

NEW

**X93C SERIES • 4K UHD TV**

Prices from £2599

The new X93C 4K 3D TV includes Sony's powerful 4K processor X1 chip designed for optimal playback of 4K material and upscaling of lower resolution content to near 4K resolution along with Triluminos colour technology, Motionflow XR1200Hz and edge-lit LED backlighting. This Android TV lets you connect and enjoy any content, from apps to movies, between different Android devices – the simplest and easiest way ever.

The 'wedge' design accommodates the all-important speakers which are the compatible with the new Hi-resolution audio specifications, with the ability to upscale audio to better than CD quality.

FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY

4K

55 65

**SONY** **4K**

**X85C SERIES • 4K UHD TV**

Experience 4K by Sony and there's no looking back. Bring all your favourite TV entertainment to life with fine detail and exquisite colour. Effortlessly explore apps, games and the fast-growing choice of broadcast and internet 4K content that's coming your way.

Prices from £1799

55 65 75

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

Prices from £1999



**PANASONIC • AX902 SERIES • 4K UHD TV**

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



NEW

£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



NEW

£550 .COM

**PIONEER • BDP-LX58 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER**

Enter the world of superior sound and 4K ultra HD pictures. The BDP-LX58 provides just that and more. Experience your Blu-ray films on a whole new level.

Also Available: PIONEER BDP-LX88



£550 .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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Kingston • 020 8547 0717  
Leeds (Wetherby) 01937 586886  
Loughton • 020 8532 0770  
Maidstone 01622 686366  
Norwich • 01603 767605  
Oxford 01865 241773  
Reading • 0118 959 7768  
Sevenoaks 01732 459555

Sheffield • 0114 255 5861  
Southampton • 023 8033 7770  
Tunbridge Wells 01892 531543  
Weybridge 01932 840859  
Witham (Essex) 01376 501733  
Yeovil • 01935 700078

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SOUND & VISION





## 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

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
Kogan KULED22XXXYA	110	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Cheap and cheerful and all the better for it	LCD	22	1920x1080			●		2	39x54x11
LG 32LN575V	400	09.13/ST	★★★★★	A decent looking TV with credible smart and streaming features	LED	32	1920x1080	●		●		3	45x74x8
Linsar X24-DVD	300	04.15/FT	★★★★★	ATV with a built-in soundbar that's a credible option for a second room	LED	24	1920x1080			●		2	39x56x11
Panasonic TX-42AS500B	450	10.14/ST	★★★★★	A user-friendly TV that's a little lacking in black levels but is worth a look	LED	42	1920x1080	●		●		2	57x96x7
Panasonic TX-32AS500B	300	11.14/ST	★★★★★	A multi-talented set but its picture could do with some more subtlety	LED	32	1366x768	●		●		2	47x73x7
Panasonic TX-L32E6B	380	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Quite simply one of the best 32in TVs we've tested	LED	32	1920x1080	●		●		3	43x72x5
Philips 32PHT4509/12	280	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Insightful, refined and available at a good price. Worth a look	LED	32	1366x768	●		●		2	42x72x6
Polaroid 3-32-LED-14	200	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Another tempting package from Polaroid	LED	32	1366x768	●		●		3	44x74x10
Polaroid 5-42-LED-14	370	10.14/ST	★★★★★	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 42FME242S-T	500	10.14/ST	★★★★★	Sharp picture, decent detail and smart features. Finlux is back on form	LED	42	1920x1080	●		●		2	56x96x6
LG 42LB700V	550	10.14/ST	★★★★★	A fine set, with WebOS being the main attraction here	LED	42	1920x1080	●		●	●	3	56x95x6
LG 47LB730V	1000	08.14/ST	★★★★★	Solid sound, premium build and a good picture. A fine effort from LG	LED	47	1920x1080	●		●	●	3	62x106x55
Panasonic TX-L42FT60B	1100	08.13/ST	★★★★★	Likeable TV with a fine picture and great features	LED	42	1920x1080	●		●	●	3	56x96x4
Panasonic TX-L47AS650B	800	08.14/ST	★★★★★	A talented set, but other TVs have the edge in terms of value	LED	47	1920x1080	●		●	●	3	63x107x5
Panasonic TX-L47DT65B	1600	06.13/GT	★★★★★	User-friendly set with clean, detailed images. A stunner	LED	47	1920x1080	●		●	●	3	63x107x4
Panasonic TX-L50ET60B	1300	05.13/FT	★★★★★	Solid telly but could perform better	LCD	50	1920x1080	●		●	●	3	66x112x4
Panasonic TX-L50E6B	850	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Fine picture quality but there are TVs that give more for less	LCD	50	1920x1080	●		●		3	71x112x27
Philips 42PFL6008	1000	08.13/ST	★★★★★	Impressive picture with comfortable 3D – a strong contender	LED	42	1920x1080	●		●	●	4	56x95x3

"We're impressed by how easy the whole smart experience was, from using the new My Home Screen interface to the voice-interaction feature – Panasonic has taken care to ensure the TX-L47DT65B is as user-friendly as possible"

June 2013

## TELEVISIONS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	Active 3D	Passive 3D	Freeview	Freesat	HDMI	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Philips 46PFL8007	1700	12.12/FT	★★★★★	A strong start for Philips' new range	LED	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	5	67x104x21
Philips 47PFL6008	1200	06.13/GT	★★★★★	A few niggles but forgivable thanks to its brilliant picture quality	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	3	63x106x3
Philips 55PFS6609	1200	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Dazzling with HD content, but rivals offer better overall performance	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	72x123x4
Philips 48PFS57093	750	08.14/ST	★★★★★	Excels in many areas but its SD performance is an area of concern	LED	48	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	62x108x6
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	★★★★★	<b>Best 47-52in TV, Awards 2014. Product of the Year</b>	LED	48	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	63x109x5
Samsung UE48HU7500	1600	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Some minor flaws aside, this is a great smaller-sized 4K set	LED	48	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	62x107x36
Sony KDL-46HX753	1150	08.12/ST	★★★★★	A must-see TV: superb performer for the price	LED	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	65x108x5
Sony KDL-42W705B	530	08.14/FT	★★★★★	A promising start for Sony's Full HD range. A consistent performer	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	56x96x6
Sony KDL-42W805A	1000	08.13/ST	★★★★★	A great-looking TV with many strengths	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	58x97x6
Sony KDL-46W905	1550	09.13/FT	★★★★★	A very capable TV with stunning detail but the picture lacks vibrancy	LCD	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	65x105x30
Sony KDL-48W605B	700	08.14/ST	★★★★★	A competitive performer with good picture quality	LCD	48	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	68x108x9
Sony KDL-50W829B	900	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Loses a star but this TV is still worth an audition	LED	50	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	66x112x6
Sony KDL-55W955B	1600	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A good TV but we expect more from a flagship set	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	79x124x9
<b>£2000 and above</b>														
Bang & Olufsen BeoVision 11	5250	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A truly luxurious TV that delivers a great performance too	LCD	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	6	89x96x6
B&O BeoVision Avant 55	5995	01.15/FT	★★★★★	This is one of the classiest TVs money can buy	LCD	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	6	71x129x10
LG 55LA860W	2300	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Close but no cigar. A good TV but the competition is strong	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	72x123x4
LG 55EA980W	8000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	A great first OLED effort from LG	OLED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	80x123x19
LG 55EC930V	2000	02.15/FT	★★★★★	OLED enters the realms of affordability, and it's a thing of beauty	OLED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	75x123x20
LG 55EG960V	3800	05.15/FT	★★★★★	The price is steep but this 4K OLED is truly stunning	OLED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	3	72x123x5
LG 55UB950V	2300	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Not without its flaws, but this TV is good to look at, great to use	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	123x78x24
LG 65LA970W	5500	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Fantastic to look at, but lacks the detail of depth of rivals	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	3	84x143x41
Panasonic TX-L47WT50B	2000	08.12/ST	★★★★★	Stylish, with real areas of expertise	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	63x107x3
Panasonic TX-L55WT65B	2470	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A good performer but there are more capable sets	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	3	72x123x3
Panasonic TX-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 UE55F8000	2500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Can't keep up with the very best. Still a smart, user-friendly set	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	71x122x4
Samsung UE55HU7500	2300	09.14/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best 52-60in TV, Awards 2014</b>	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	75x123x27
Samsung UE65F9000	5000	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented set with few weaknesses to speak of	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	84x146x4
Samsung UE65H8000	3300	07.14/FT	★★★★★	A fine set, but high price and lack of 4K knock it down a star	LED	65	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	89x145x31
Samsung UE65HU7500	3500	08.14/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best 60in+ TV, Awards 2014</b>	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
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

## Getting the most out of your Blu-ray player

Blu-ray players don't just spin discs; they offer an array of entertainment options

## Smart features

If you don't have an internet-enabled TV then buying a Blu-ray player with 'smarts' is one road to go down. Netflix is ubiquitous and Amazon's Prime Instant is a popular app too. LG's BP645 features the Spotify app while Samsung's BD-H6500 has support for ITV Player and Demand 5.

## Upscaling

Blu-ray players make good DVD players. The upscaler in a player converts an image into a higher-res one, filling in the pixels to make up a bigger image. Good upscalers keep picture noise (pixelation) at bay, while rendering colours punchy and images sharp with few soft edges.

## Audio

While they won't usurp the performance of a dedicated CD player, Pioneer's BDP-LX58 and Oppo's BDP-105D support PCM files up to 24-bit/192kHz as well as MP3, WMA and AAC. Put a CD in the Samsung's BD H6500 and you can stream the music to an M5 or M7 speaker.

## Memory sticks/hard drives

The USB port is perfect for extending use beyond that of a Blu-ray player. Video is the most obvious option, with most players capable of handling mkv and MPEG files, but you can also play lossless music as well as display photos on your TV from a memory stick or hard drive.

## DLNA

There's always the option of streaming direct from a device. With a DLNA certificate comes more opportunity for accessing content. Anything from your computer to a DLNA certified smartphone or NAS drive can be used over a home network.





## Blu-ray players

<b>Smart ability</b>	Extends the viewing choice beyond discs with apps like BBC iPlayer
<b>Multichannel out</b>	Analogue outputs that feed high quality sound to a non-HDMI receiver
<b>Twin HDMI outputs</b>	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

Also consider					HDMI out	Optical out	Co-axial out	Multi-channel out	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict						
Up to £500									
LG BP645	85	02.15/GT	★★★★★	A fine Blu-ray player replete with a strong feature list	1	1	0	No	5x43x21
LG BP740	200	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Much improved, but needs to better its sound and video performance to match the best	1	1	0	No	4x43x21
Panasonic DMP-BDT260	80	02.15/GT	★★★★★	An impressive Blu-ray spinner that's even more value for money after its price drop	1	0	0	No	4x31x18
Panasonic DMP-BDT330	200	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Lacks in the smart app area but performance elsewhere is terrific	2	1	0	No	4x43x18
Panasonic DMP-BDT460	190	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Talented with sound as it is with picture, this is a Blu-ray player to be reckoned with	2	1	0	No	4x42x18
Panasonic DMP-BWT740	455	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Mightily impressive, this Blu-ray spinner is a multimedia beast	2	1	1	No	6x43x24
Philips BDP3380	80	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A very good performer that lacks some smart features	1	0	1	No	4x41x21
Pioneer BDP-160	120	01.14/GT	★★★★★	This entry-level unit is pretty spartan, but it delivers an impressive performance	2	0	1	No	6x44x25
Pioneer BDP-450	225	01.12/FT	★★★★★	This budget deck is a real rival for the top performers	1	0	1	No	9x44x25
Samsung BD-H6500	100	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Another solid, competitive effort from Samsung	1	1	0	No	4x36x20
Sony BDP-S4100	80	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player up to £100, Awards 2013	1	0	1	No	4x36x20
Sony BDP-S5100	140	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player £100-£150, Awards 2013	1	0	1	No	4x36x20
Sony BDP-S5200	85	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player up to £150, Awards 2014	1	0	1	No	4x27x20
Sony BDP-S6200	180	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Plenty of smart features, sharp images and well-rendered 3D. A talented disc spinner	1	0	1	No	4x36x20
Sony BDP-S7200	230	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player £150-£300, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	1	0	1	No	5x43x21
Sony PlayStation 3 (2012)	250	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Super slim PS3 feels less special, but it's still multi-talented	1	1	0	No	6x29x23
Sony PlayStation 4	349	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A great gaming machine that's less spectacular when it comes to home entertainment	1	1	0	No	19x3x3
Xbox One	430	01.14/FT	★★★★★	As ambitious a game console as there has ever been, but yet to fulfil its potential	1	1	0	No	8x33x27
£500 and above									
Cambridge Audio Azur 752BD	800	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Features and functions combine in fine style, but audio performance could be a little better	2	1	1	8ch	9x43x31
Marantz UD7007	500	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player £300+, Awards 2013	1	1	1	No	11x44x31
Oppo BDP-105D	1100	03.15/GT	★★★★★	If you want a Blu-ray player that does everything, then this is it	2	1	1	8ch	12x43x31
Onkyo BD-SP809	500	04.12/GT	★★★★★	A fine choice, but not an all-rounder	2	1	1	No	10x43x31
Panasonic DMP-BDT700	500	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player £300+, Awards 2014	2	1	1	7ch	7x45x26
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

## System killers

Five post-apocalyptic films that will give your home cinema set-up a workout



### I Am Legend

Looks fantastic and sounds fantastic; pity the second half doesn't match the first



### Mad Max

*Mad Max: Fury Road* is out but the original is still a lean, hyper-stylised action film



### Oblivion

A gorgeous digital transfer and soundtrack makes this a excellent Blu-ray demo



### The Book of Eli

A post-apocalyptic tale with a religious bent, the film's look is bleak but beautiful



### The Road

A harsh and unforgiving film, this father-and-son story is quite affecting



## 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

### The shortlist



**AWARD WINNER**

**BenQ W1400**

Awards 2014: Best projector up to £1500



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**

**Epson EH-TW7200**

Awards 2014: Best projector £1500-£2000



**AWARD WINNER**

**Sony VPL-HW55ES**

Awards 2014: Projector £2000+

### Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Throw Ratio	Resolution	Rated Brightness (Lumens)	HDMI In	DVI In	PC In	Component In	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Weight (kg)
<b>Up to £1000</b>													
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
<b>£1000-£3000</b>													
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	★★★★★	<b>Best projector up to £1500, Awards 2014</b>	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	★★★★★	<b>Best projector £1500-£2000, Awards 2014. Product of the Year</b>	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	★★★★★	<b>Best projector £2000+, Awards 2014</b>	SXRD	n/a	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1	18x41x46 9.6
<b>£3000 and above</b>													
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	SXRD	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	SXRD	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	SXRD	1.38-2.83	4096x2160	1700	2	0	0	0	20x50x46 14

## Projectors: top tips

Keeping your projector in tip top condition aids performance. Here are a few hints to help you

### Replace the lamp

This won't happen often – lamps tend to last for 2000 plus hours – but if you notice issues with flickering and dimness then it may be time for a change. Get a soft, dry cloth, locate the compartment where the lamp is housed and take it out slowly (it can easily break). If you're unsure if it needs changing then get the remote, have a root around in the projector's menus and there should be a timer that indicates the lamp's usage.

### Clean the lens

Dust will build up. It's inevitable. And if it's not dust then smudges could be a problem. To resolve this buy some lens cleaning tissues (camera stores will have these) and very carefully wipe away – in a circular motion – any dust or smudges you see. Better yet, if the projector came with a lense cap, place that back on when the projector is not in use.

### Don't block the vents

You may have noticed that projectors have big vents. That's because they can get extremely hot in use, so clear some space around your device, (ideally, if you have a rack it'll have its own shelf) and keep objects out of the way. That'll help the projector to keep cool.







## AV receivers & amplifiers

Up to £500	Well-equipped and delivers convincing surround sound
£500-£1000	There are gains in features, build quality and sonic performance
£1000+	Real powerhouses that pack loads of features and cinema-style sound

### The shortlist



**AWARD WINNER**

**Yamaha RX-V377**

Awards 2014: Best home cinema amp up to £350



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**

**Sony STR-DN1050**

Awards 2014: Best home cinema amp £350-£700



**AWARD WINNER**

**Pioneer SC-LX58**

Awards 2014: Best home cinema amp £700-£1500

### Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Channels /power (w)	HDMI in	HDMI out	Networking	3D passthrough	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
<b>Up to £300</b>									
Pioneer VSX-528	285	02.14/GT	★★★★★	A well-equipped budget amp with good surround sound capabilities	5x130	6	1	●	17x44x33
Yamaha RX-V375	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier up to £350, Awards 2013	5x100	4	1	●	15x44x32
Yamaha RX-V377	250	07.14/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best home cinema amplifier up to £350, Awards 2014</b>	5x70	4	1	●	15x44x32
<b>£300-£500</b>									
Harman Kardon AVR-171	450	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Could be subtler but delivers a powerhouse performance	7x100	6	2	●	12x44x30
Sony STR-DN840	350	02.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented, energetic amp that delivers plenty of precision and attack	7x150	6	1	●	16x43x33
Sony STR-DN850	400	08.14/FT	★★★★★	An impressive all-rounder at a great price	7x150	5	1	●	16x43x33
<b>£500-£1000</b>									
Denon AVR-X2000	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Marks a fine return to form for Denon	7x150	7	1	●	17x43x33
Denon AVR-X2100W	500	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A strong contender but competition at this price is fierce	7x150	8	2	●	17x43x33
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	★★★★★	<b>Best home cinema amplifier £350-£700, Awards 2014. Product of the Year</b>	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-V675	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	A powerful and thrilling amplifier for the money	7x150	6	1	●	17x44x36
Yamaha RX-V677	560	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A fun receiver that's not the most balanced, but is endlessly entertaining	7x150	6	1	●	17x43x36
<b>£1000-£2000</b>									
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-LX57	1200	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £700-£1500, Awards 2013	9x190	9	3	●	19x44x44
Pioneer SC-LX58	1400	11.14/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best home cinema amplifier £700-£1500, Awards 2014</b>	9x190	8	3	●	19x44x44
Yamaha RX-A1020	1000	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Delivering excitement, detail and precision, this is a brilliantly capable all-rounder	7x110	8	2	●	18x43x43
Yamaha RX-A1030	1000	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Not without some niggles, this receiver delivers big-time power and muscle	7x110	8	2	●	18x43x43
Yamaha RX-A1040	1000	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Well-featured and full of power, but lacks in the thrill department	7x110	8	2	●	18x44x43
<b>£2000 and above</b>									
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
Yamaha RX-A3030	2000	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £1500+, Awards 2013	9x150	8	1	●	19x44x47
Yamaha RX-A3040	2000	01.15/GT	★★★★★	A smooth and powerful amp, that's well worth auditioning	9x230	8	2	●	19x44x47



## Subwoofers

Sealed cabinet	Tends to produce the tightest bass but limits outright quantity
Reflex port	A more common design that tends to deliver more bass
Room equalisation	Evens out the subwoofer's response to produce a more balanced sound

### Our recommendations

Our recommendations					Power (w)	Driver (cm)	Passive radiator	Sealed	Ported	Drive unit orientation	Line inputs	Speaker ins	Line outputs	Speaker outs	Phase invert	Remote control	EQ	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict																
Up to £500																			
B&WASW610	450	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Best subwoofer up to £700, Awards 2011	200	25		●		Forward	1	1			●		●	4	31x31x38
Monitor Audio Vector VW-8	225	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Capable little sub for an entry-level system	100	20		●		Forward	2	0			●			2	32x28x28
REL Acoustics T-Zero	350	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Small and discreet, but limited by size	100	16.5		●		Downward	2	1			●			2	24x22x26
Tannoy TS2.10	430	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Small, but packs a ferocious punch	300	25	●			Forward	1	0	●		●			3	39x38x33
Velodyne EQ-Max 8	495	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Small, but punches well above its weight	180	20		●		Forward	2	2	●	●	●	●	●	1	37x33x38
Velodyne Impact-12	365	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Fine sub, more of a movie than a music classic	165	30		●		Forward	2	1		●	●			1	39x66x45
Velodyne Impact-Mini	435	10.09/FT	★★★★★	Amazingly small sub with fine movie performance	180	16.5	●			Forward	2	2		●	●			1	25x25x30
W'fedale Powercube SPC-10	300	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Nearly a terrific subwoofer - but there are issues	215	25	●			Downward	1	1	●		●			8	38x35x31
£500-£1000																			
B&WASW610XP	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
<b>Up to £500</b>								
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
<b>Tannoy HTS-101</b>	400	09.11/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best style package up to £700, Awards 2014</b>	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	★★★★★	Agutsy and entertaining sound at this price	22x9x5	22x9x5	22x9x5	31x28x31	7
KEF E305	900	11.13/ST	★★★★★	A room-filling system but there are more dynamic packages out there	26x14x16	16x22x15	26x14x16	32x43x27	2
Mission 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
KEF T105	1200	04.11/GT	★★★★★	A stealthy package that looks the part	33x14x4	33x14x4	33x14x4	38x37x8	1
Monitor Audio Bronze BX2 5.1	1050	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Thrillingly fit for purpose	35x19x26	17x46x17	29x28x11	33x32x33	4
Monitor Audio Bronze BX5 5.1	1215	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Does a good job of filling a big room	85x17x25	17x46x17	29x28x11	33x32x33	2
Monitor Audio Radius R90HT1	1500	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Best style package £1400-£1800, Awards 2014	20x13x14	17x46x17	20x13x14	33x32x33	3
Quad L-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
Dali Lektor 5.1	2320	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Only just fails to get top marks against its rivals	106x25x37	17x60x18	31x17x22	36x31x40	2
Dali Mentor 5.1	5700	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Powerhouse of a system	103x20x39	20x89x29	32x16x24	37x33x33	2
KEF R100 5.1	2850	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £2500-£3500, Awards 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 SE AV	2400	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Despite a few issues with the centre and sub, this is an exciting package	95x20x25	15x31x16	37x20x25	44x43x37	1

## Need to know: subwoofers

## High level? Or low?

Most subs offer a choice of high-level or low-level connections. High is fed from your amp's speaker outputs; low via a pair of preout sockets on your amp, or the main outputs from a preamp. Opinion on what's best is divided, but many choose the speaker-level connections so the sub 'sees' exactly the same signal as the main speakers. The counter argument is that low-level hook-ups offer a more direct connection to the preamp - i.e. the signal isn't being amplified once in the main amp's power section, reduced again in the sub and then boosted by the amp before it gets to the driver. We favour a high-level connection when

playing music, although the low-level feed will filter out the very low bass when used with an amp with preout, or a pre/power combination, so your main speakers aren't trying to reproduce the very low stuff.

## Keep your bass to yourself

One problem with bass is that it travels through structures: nip into the kitchen and all you'll hear is a series of thumps and rumbles. Our advice? Keep the sub away from the walls, and if you have people living in a flat below, consider placing a hefty paving slab under the sub or fitting a sound isolation platform.

## A firm base

Most subwoofers are supplied with spikes for their feet or the base of the cabinet. If you have carpets, use them to stop the sub moving during heavy low-frequency moments, and if you have wood floors either put coins under the tips of the spikes or ask your dealer about purpose-made metal spike cups or floor protectors. If you have a very thick carpet and a sub with a downward-firing driver, consider using a paving slab under the sub or a piece of MDF, to provide a more reflective surface. You can paint either of these black, or cover them in black felt, for a more professional look.



## CD players

**Integrated** \_\_\_\_\_ Has both a CD mechanism and digital-to-analogue conversion tech  
**Transport** \_\_\_\_\_ Needs an outboard DAC but can deliver a higher standard of sound

### The shortlist



**AWARD WINNER**  
**Marantz CD6005**

Awards 2014: Best CD Player up to £500



**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**  
**Cyrus CDI**

Awards 2014: Best CD Player £500-£1500



**AWARD WINNER**  
**Roksan Caspian M2 CD**

Awards 2014: Best CD Player £1500+

### Also consider

Also consider					Integrated Transport	Co-axial out	Optical out	XLR out	RCA out	Headphone out	Co-axial in	Optical in	AES/EBU in	USB in	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict													
Up to £500																
Cambridge Audio Azur 351C	300	11.12/FT	★★★★★	A worthy rival to the Award-winning Marantz CD6004	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	9x43x31
Cambridge Audio Azur 651C	450	03.12/FT	★★★★★	A spacious sounding disc spinner	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x31
Marantz CD6004	300	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Best CD player up to £500, Awards 2012	●	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	11x44x34
Marantz CD6005	350	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Best CD player up to £500, Awards 2014	●	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x44x34
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	0	2	10x44x30
Sansui CDD-201V	200	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Sensibly priced, but not quite an all-rounder	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	7x43x28
£500-£1000																
Audiolab 8200CD	800	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1000, Awards 2012	●	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	0	1	1	8x44x30
Audiolab 8200CDQ	950	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Improves on the sky-high performance of the 8200CD	●	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	0	1	2	8x44x30
NAD C 546BEE	500	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Talented but struggles against the more enjoyable budget Marantz	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	9x44x31
Cyrus CD Transport	750	01.12/ST	★★★★★	An impressive and affordable CD transport	●	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36
Cyrus CD6 SE2	700	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Subtly upgraded, with worthwhile results	●	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	8x22x36
Naim CD5si	995	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1500, Awards 2013	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	7x43x30
Pioneer PD-50	500	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Worth considering but this SACD player doesn't quite engage	●	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	13x44x33
Rega Apollo-R	550	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Admirable, but lacks some cohesion	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	9x22x32
Roksan Kandy K2	900	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Big and powerful, with an entertaining sound	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	10x43x38
Yamaha CD-S2000	979	03.09/GT	★★★★★	A beautiful object that's involving to listen to	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	14x44x44
£1000 and above																
Audio Research CD6	8050	08.14/FT	★★★★★	In the market for a top-class CD player? This could be the one	●	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	1	1	2	13x48x31
Burmester 069	35840	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Quite possibly the best CD player money can buy		2	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	16x45x34
Cambridge Audio Azur 851C	1200	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Impressive sonic presentation but a touch too clinical for our tastes	●	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	1	1	2	12x43x34
Copland CDA 825	4298	05.13/FT	★★★★★	A hugely capable player with stunning sound quality	●	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	10x43x39
Cyrus CD 8 SE2	1200	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Best CD player £1000-£1500, Awards 2012	●	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36
Cyrus CDI	1050	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1500, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	7x22x36
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

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Solid build quality and connectivity make the AM1 a great first amp.  
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PRICE**



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TSP £399

5 year Supercare only £19.90

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**£199**



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CARBON  
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**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."

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"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."

5yr Supercare 10% of DM39 price  
DM39 also available in black | Q3020 available in other colours.



**DAB+**

**£299.95**

**SAVE £300**

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### MARANTZ MCR610 MELODY MEDIA & TANNOY REVOLUTION DC6 STREAMING MINI SYSTEM & BLACK SPEAKERS (PAIR)

"This is an excellent all-in-one system" said What Hi-Fi of the MCR610, while of the DC6s they said, "The outstanding Revolution DC6s marry speed, detail and agility in an unrivalled package."

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TSP £4599.95 | 5 year Supercare only 10% of amp & CD player purchase prices  
Amplifier & CD player also available in silver.

Speakers also available in gloss walnut and gloss black.

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- What Hi-Fi.

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**ONKYO TXNR636 & TANNOY HTS101**  
HOME CINEMA AMPLIFIER & 5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE

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– What Hi-Fi.

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"This is an amazingly talented soundbar delivering captivating sound."

– What Hi-Fi.

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– What Hi-Fi.

5 year Supercare only £79.90

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"The Q7000i is a stunning package at this price."

– What Hi-Fi.

5 year Supercare only £89.90

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"The Canton DM 50 is a lesson in what a sound base should sound and look like."

– What Hi-Fi.

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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)
<b>Up to £500</b>														
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	★★★★★	<b>Best DAC £300-£500, Awards 2014</b>	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	4x12x19
Arcam irDAC Wireless	380	09.12/GT	★★★★★	No longer the default choice at the money, still very much a contender	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	4x16x11
Arcam miniBlink	90	05.14/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best Bluetooth receiver, Awards 2014. Accessories Product of the Year</b>	0	0	0	10	0	●	0	1	0	2.5x3x4
Arcam rPAC	150	04.13/ST	★★★★★	More desirable alternatives, but the rPAC still has plenty of merit	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	3x10x6
Audioengine D1	150	05.12/FT	★★★★★	A DAC and headphone amp with a fine sound	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	3x9x10
Audioquest DragonFly	215	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC up to £300, Awards 2012	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	6x2x1
Audioquest DragonFly v1.2	130	02.14/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best DAC up to £300, Awards 2014. Product of the Year</b>	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	6x2x1
Belkin Song Stream BT HD	50	05.14/GT	★★★★★	A solid performer for the price	0	0	0	0	0	●	0	1	0	n/a
Camb. Audio DacMagic 100	200	06.12/FT	★★★★★	An affordable, fine looking and listenable DAC	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	5x11x13
Camb. Audio DacMagic Plus	350	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Better sound and features than the original - but pricey	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	1	5x22x19
Camb. Audio DacMagic XS	100	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Drops down a star but still a delightful little device	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	5x3x1
Crystal Acoustics BluDAC	60	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Doesn't quite have the finesse of others but this is still a real entertainer	0	0	0	0	0	●	0	1	0	6.5x7.5x2
Denon DA-300USB	330	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Soft bass detracts from what is otherwise a great first DAC from Denon	1	2	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	6x17x18
Furutech ADL GT 40	400	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Cables & Accessories, Awards 2011	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	6x15x11
Focal Universal Wireless Receiv.	85	05.14/GT	★★★★★	A very talented performer that comes with a few quirks	0	0	0	0	0	●	0	1	0	n/a
HRT microStreamer	180	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC up to £300, Awards 2013	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1x3x6
LH Labs Geek Out	200	09.14/FT	★★★★★	A clever little device that's a solid performer	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1.3x3.5x6.7
Meridian Director	450	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Packs a sonic punch but lacks the swagger found in others	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	3x14x8
Meridian Explorer DAC	250	07.13/GT	★★★★★	The Explorer's design and assured sonic performance makes it a top contender	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2x3x10
Micromega MyDAC	260	04.13/ST	★★★★★	If you like your music to have an attacking edge, then this DAC's for you	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2x3x10
Musical Fidelity V-90 DAC	200	12.13/FT	★★★★★	A well-featured DAC that's a little too relaxed in its sound	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	5x17x10
NAD D 1050	400	06.14/GT	★★★★★	For those looking for a desktop DAC, the NAD D 1050 is a brilliant box of tricks	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	1	19x6x21
Pro-Ject DAC Box DS	299	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A solid performer but doesn't excel in any area	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	7x10x14
<b>£500-£1000</b>														
Audiolab M-DAC	600	08.13/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best DAC £500-£700, Awards 2014</b>	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	6x25x25
Cambridge Audio Azur 851D	1000	07.14/GT	★★★★★	A fine DAC, even if it can't scale the heights of the class leaders	1	4	3	1	0	●	1	0	1	12x43x36
Chord Chordette QuteHD	990	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £700-£1000, Awards 2013	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	7x16x4
Chord Electronics Qute Ex	990	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best DAC £700-£1000, Awards 2014</b>	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	7x16x4
Rega DAC	500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Beefy build; natural, unforced, dynamic and detailed sound	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	8x22x27
Musical Fidelity M1 SDAC	800	08.13/FT	★★★★★	An impressive spec list but performance is trumped by cheaper rivals	1	1	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	10x22x31
Parasound Zdac	500	11.13/GT	★★★★★	The Zdac produces a lively, likable sound	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	5x22x26
Rotel RDD-1580	600	05.14/FT	★★★★★	Plenty to be impressed with, but the poor quality of its USB input holds it back	1	2	2	0	0	●	0	1	1	5.5x43x32
Sony PHA-3AC	720	02.15/FT	★★★★★	A fine performer with plenty of strengths but more than a few weaknesses	2	1	0	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	0	2	1	0	3x18x14
<b>£1000 and above</b>														
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	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	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	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	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	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	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	0	1	1	6x34x15
Chord Hugo	1400	03.15/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best DAC £1000+, Awards 2014</b>	2	1	1	0	0	0	3	1	0	2x13x10
dCS Debussy	7930	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Worth every penny of its asking price	1	0	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	7x45x39
McIntosh D100	3000	06.13/GT	★★★★★	A solid and entertainer performer. Well featured, too	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	10x45x41
Musical Fidelity M6 DAC	2000	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A mighty performer but its price and competition rob it of a fifth star	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	13x44x39
NAD M51	1500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £1200+, Awards 2012	1	1	1	1	2	0	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	0	1	0	7x43x30
Naim DAC-V1	1250	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £1000+, Awards 2013	1	2	3	0	0	0	1	1	1	9x21x32

## DACs continued

DACs continued					USB in	Optical in	Co-axial in	AES EBU in	HDMI in	Wireless	Headphone out	RCA out	Balanced/XLR out	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict											
£1000 and above														
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 DAC8	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

## Theshortlist


**AWARD WINNER**  
**Pro-Ject Essential II**

Awards 2014: Best Turntable up to £400  
 “The Essential II is a frill-free entry-level product that gets all the basics spot-on.”


**PRODUCT OF THE YEAR**  
**Rega RP3/Elys2**

Awards 2014: Best Turntable £400-£800  
 “It’s easy to set up, easy to use as long as you don’t mind the manual speed change and sounds as musical as they come.”


**AWARD WINNER**  
**Clearaudio Concept**

Awards 2014: Best Turntable £800+  
 “If you feel the need for an outstanding turntable, don’t think twice.”

## Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	33.33	45	78	Elec. speed change	Manual operation	Phono amp	Tonearm inc.	Cartridges inc.	USB port	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
<b>Up to £1000</b>														
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	★★★★★	<b>Best turntable up to £400, Awards 2014</b>	●	●		●		●	●			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	★★★★★	<b>Best turntable £400-£800, Awards 2014. Product of the Year</b>	●	●		●		●	●			3 10x45x36
<b>£1000 and above</b>														
Clearaudio Concept	1000	12.14/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best turntable £800+, Awards 2014</b>	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	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
Michell Orbe SE/Tecnoarm A	2675	01.09/FT	★★★★★	Don’t buy anything without hearing this deck first	●	●		●						2 26x64x53
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

**“If you’re looking for a relatively fuss-free deck, the Thoren TD309 is well worth considering”**

June 2010





## 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)
<b>Up to £100</b>									
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
<b>£100 and above</b>									
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/FT	★★★★★						18x21x11
Pure Evoke F4	180	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★						18x21x11
Pure Digital One Flow	100	11.12/GT	★★★★★						15x21x8
Pure Digital Sensia	250	01.10/FT	★★★★★						17x28x18
Revo AXIS XS	200	11.12/GT	★★★★★						12.5x22x15
Revo AXIS X3	200	01.14/FT	★★★★★						12.5x22x15
Revo 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 Alberg+	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)
<b>Up to £200</b>								
Acoustic Energy Compact 1	150	10.11/FT	★★★★★				2	22x15x20
Audioengine P4	183	02.10/FT	★★★★★				3	23x14x17
Cambridge Audio Aero 2	150	03.15/ST	★★★★★				2	37x20x31

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## SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
<b>Up to £200</b>							
Cambridge Audio SX-50	130	04.14/ST	★★★★★	●		2	23x16x24
Mission MX1	150	06.11/GT	★★★★★	●		4	28x17x26
Monitor Audio MR2	160	03.15/ST	★★★★★	●		2	35x19x25
Polk Audio TSx110B	100	03.15/FT	★★★★★	●		2	28x18x23
Q Acoustics 2010i	120	07.12/GT	★★★★★	●		4	23x20x15
Q Acoustics 2020i	150	03.15/ST	★★★★★	●		4	26x17x28
Q Acoustics 3020	190	05.15/ST	★★★★★	●		5	26x17x23
Roth Oli RA1	100	12.14/FT	★★★★★	●		2	23x15x15
SoundScience QSB	85	04.11/FT	★★★★★	●		1	85x85x85
<b>£200-£500</b>							
Acoustic Energy Neo One V2	210	08.11/GT	★★★★★	●		2	36x18x23
Acoustic Energy 301	425	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●		2	30x19x25
Audioengine A5+	290	07.12/GT	★★★★★	●		3	27x18x20
Audio Pro Addon T8	250	06.14/ST	★★★★★	●	●	2	16x10x14
Bose Companion 20	200	05.13/GT	★★★★★		●	1	22x9x12
Bose Computer MusicMonitor	250	09.13/GT	★★★★★	●		2	12x7x12
B&W 685	400	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●		4	34x20x33
B&W MM-1	399	07.12/GT	★★★★★		●	1	17x10x10
Cambridge Audio Aeromax 2	450	12.14/FT	★★★★★	●		2	37x20x3
Cambridge Audio SX-60	200	09.13/FT	★★★★★	●		2	34x20x27
Dali Lektor 2	299	03.10/GT	★★★★★	●		2	31x18x22
Dali Zensor 1	200	03.15/ST	★★★★★	●		2	27x16x22
Dali Zensor 3	300	10.14/GT	★★★★★	●		3	35x21x29
Epos K1	400	04.15/ST	★★★★★	●		2	31x19x25
Focal Chorus 706V	390	03.11/FT	★★★★★	●		3	39x22x29
Focal XS Book	300	07.12/GT	★★★★★		●	1	28x11x20
Focal XS Book Wireless	300	10.13/FT	★★★★★		●	1	28x11x20
KEF Q300	450	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●		3	36x21x30
Monitor Audio Bronze BX1	200	05.11/FT	★★★★★	●		4	26x17x18
Monitor Audio Bronze BX2	250	07.12/ST	★★★★★	●		4	35x19x26
Monitor Audio Silver RX1	425	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●		6	31x19x24
Mission MX2	200	08.11/GT	★★★★★	●		4	34x21x31
Mission MX3	350	11.11/GT	★★★★★		●	4	82x17x34
Pioneer S-CN301-LR	200	04.14/ST	★★★★★	●		1	23x14x22
Q Acoustics Concept 20	350	10.13/GT	★★★★★	●		2	26x17x28
Q Acoustics Q-BT3	350	06.14/ST	★★★★★	●		4	31x19x24
Q Acoustics 2050i	460	07.13/GT	★★★★★		●	4	100x32x27
Quad 11L Classic	330	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	●		4	31x19x24
Ruark Audio MR1	300	06.14/ST	★★★★★	●		3	17x13x14
Tannoy Mercury V1i	150	04.14/ST	★★★★★	●		2	30x17x26
Tannoy Mercury V4	380	07.12/GT	★★★★★		●	2	97x20x28
Tannoy Mercury V4i	400	01.14/FT	★★★★★		●	1	100x20x28
Tannoy Revolution DC4	380	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●		2	27x15x16
Tannoy Revolution DC6	400	10.12/GT	★★★★★	●		1	36.5x20x25
Wharfedale Diamond 121	230	10.13/GT	★★★★★	●		7	32x17x23
Wharfedale Diamond 220	200	03.15/ST	★★★★★	●		4	50x32x41
<b>£500-£1500</b>							
Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic	1000	07.11/GT	★★★★★	●		2	30x18x26
Audio Pro LV2e	700	09.12/FT	★★★★★			3	98x14x24
Audiovector Ki3 Standard	1200	03.12/FT	★★★★★		●	5	98x14x24
ATC SCM11 (2013)	1200	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	●		2	38x21x25
AVI ADM9.1	1125	07.12/GT	★★★★★	●		5	30x20x26
B&W 683 S2	1150	10.14/GT	★★★★★		●	2	99x19x36
B&W 684 S2	800	05.15/ST	★★★★★	●		2	92x16x23
B&W 685 S2	500	04.15/ST	★★★★★	●		2	35x19x32
Cabasse MT32 Antigua	500	04.15/ST	★★★★★	●		2	41x22x30
Cambridge Audio Aeromax 6	900	10.14/FT	★★★★★		●	2	98x24x34
Dali Ikon 1 MK2	530	05.14/GT	★★★★★	●		3	33x15x26

## SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
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 DM 2/7	600	08.09/GT	★★★★★	A seriously competitive speaker at this price point	●	1	36x22x27
Dynaudio DM3/7	1300	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Plenty of positives in this mid-range floorstander	●	2	96x20x27
Dynaudio Excite X14	945	12.13/ST	★★★★★	A crisp and clean sound is shortchanged by a lack of versatility	●		29x17x26
Dynaudio 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
Opera Mezza	850	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Suave-looking and good-sounding, but these don't possess the sonic assertiveness of some	●	3	32x20x33
Q Acoustics Concept 40	1000	05.15/ST	★★★★★	A talented and easy-going pair of speakers. They deserve serious consideration	●	2	97x17x29
Quad 9AS	600	07.14/FT	★★★★★	A decent pair of speakers but they need more punch and verve	●	3	30x15x21.5
Quad 12L Classic	500	11.11/FT	★★★★★	There's plenty to admire here	●	4	34x21x28



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Sam Tellig, *Stereophile* Nov 2014

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*What Hi-Fi* Oct 2013

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## SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
<b>£500-£1500</b>							
Rega RS3	780	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Floorstanders that are effortless with dynamics	●	3	80x22x25
Tannoy Precision 6.1	900	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Rhythmic, detailed speakers but a lack of solidity leaves them sounding unbalanced	●	2	33x22x26
Tannoy Revolution DC6 SE	700	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Responsive with a good sense of cohesion. Could do with a little more spark	●	1	37x20x24
Tannoy Revolution DC6T	799	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £700-£1500, Awards 2011	●	1	95x26x29
Tannoy Revolution DC6TSE	1000	07.14/ST	★★★★★	Best floorstander £800-£1500, Awards 2013	●	1	100x31x28
Tannoy Rev. Sig. DC4	600	07.12/GT	★★★★★	DC4s are still appealing across the board	●	2	27x17x18
Tannoy Revolution XT 6	600	04.15/ST	★★★★★	Tannoy's new range is an exciting step forward, although a little more detail wouldn't go amiss	●	2	40x22x30
Tannoy Revolution XT6F	1000	05.15/ST	★★★★★	These Tannoys offer a stunning, potentially class-leading performance	●	2	100x27x32
Triangle Antal 902	900	05.15/ST	★★★★★	The power comes through at the cost of subtlety. Still, there aren't many that offer this much fun	●	1	110x26x31
Triangle Color 123	600	08.12/FT	★★★★★	A brilliant desktop speaker package		3	14x14x14
Triangle Esprit Titus EZ	600	04.15/ST	★★★★★	A classy pair of articulate and expressive standmounters	●	3	31x17x27
Wharfedale Denton	500	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Relaxed yet engaging sound has a lot of appeal	●	1	32x20x31
Wharfedale Diamond 155	500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Class leaders when it comes to sound, but let down by average build quality	●	7	94x20x31
Wharfedale Diamond 230	500	04.15/FT	★★★★★	A compact pair of floorstanders with big sound and terrific detail	●	4	94x20x33
<b>£1500 and above</b>							
Acoustic Energy Reference 1	1500	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Terrific all-rounders for the money	●	1	31x19x28
Analysis Audio Omega	14500	08.11/FT	★★★★★	These planar floorstanders are a sonic treat	●	1	168x61x6
ATC SCM 100A	11615	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Massively talented and proportioned	●	4	107x40x56
ATC SCM40A	6280	04.14/FT	★★★★★	Favours an analytical reproduction of music, these ATCs offer exceptional sound performance	●	2	98x37x34
B&O BeoLab5	11000	10.08/FT	★★★★★	Active speakers with outlandish looks that sound fabulous	●	1	97x49x49
B&W 800 Diamond	18000	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Some of the best speakers money can buy	●	3	118x45x65
B&W 805 Diamond	3750	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Good, but easier to admire than really love	●	3	42x24x35
B&W CM6 S2	1500	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Good speakers but they lack the freedom of expression that we'd expect	●	3	40x20x30
B&W PM1	1995	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Best standmounter £1500+, Awards 2011	●	1	33x19x30
Burmester B10	3220	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Well built, well refined and an engaging listen. We're in love	●	3	39x22x28
Dali Epicon 2	3750	01.13/FT	★★★★★	Reinforces Dali's reputation for making top-class speakers	●	3	39x21x37
Dali Epicon 8	11500	08.13/FT	★★★★★	Give them space and they'll deliver a muscular, enthusiastic sound	●	3	126x35x50
Dali Fazon F5	2700	12.11/FT	★★★★★	Stylish deliverers of audiophile sound	●	3	92x28x32
Dali Rubicon 2	1600	11.14/GT	★★★★★	A great pair of standmounters that deliver an expressive and enthusiastic sound	●	4	35x20x34
Dali Rubicon 5	2400	03.15/FT	★★★★★	Another pair of fine speakers from Dali – fast, agile and authoritative	●	4	89x20x34
Dynaudio Focus 160	1800	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Just do the job and don't intrude on the entertainment	●	6	35x20x29
Dynaudio Xeo 4	1775	11.14/FT	★★★★★	The Xeo 4s serve great-quality, convenient, versatile wireless sound	● ●	2	28x17x25
Diapason Astera	6050	02.11/FT	★★★★★	Spellbinding performance with the right kind of music	●	1	38x26x44
Eclipse TD 510Z Mk2	3840	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Superb timing, detail and imaging	●	3	98x38x39
Eclipse TD 712z Mk2	6500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	They have a few compromises but their strengths can't be matched at any price	●	4	99x35x43
Focal Diablo Utopia	7686	12.12/FT	★★★★★	When it comes to levels of insight, little at this price even comes close	●	Any	43x26x43
Focal SM9	4580	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Intended for professional use, the SM9s work brilliantly as home speakers	●	1	32x49x39
Focal Easys	1800	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Convenient and easy to use, these Focals are compromised by a relaxed delivery	●	2	90x17x24
GamuT M'inenTM3	5140	03.14/FT	★★★★★	These are some of the best standmounters we've ever heard	●	10	40x23x46
Image Audio IA8	2000	02.12/GT	★★★★★	Deeply impressive wall-mounted alternatives to convention		1	59x48x10
Linn Akubarik	15600	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Deeply impressive engineering but its presentation veers towards the clinical	●	200+	105x35x45
Monitor Audio Gold GX200	2300	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Pretty looks and excellent refinement	●	2	90x17x30
Mon. Audio Platinum PL300	6000	03.08/FT	★★★★★	Its been a long time coming, and it is well worth the wait	●	3	111x41x47
Naim Ovator S-400	3650	10.13/GT	★★★★★	The most rounded Naim speaker we've heard	●	5	106x33x35
Neat Ultimatum XLS	4500	09.12/FT	★★★★★	An entertainer of the highest order if partnered with care	●	9	38x22x37
PMC Fact 3	4100	08.11/FT	★★★★★	Hugely capable but a touch overcontrolled	●	4	54x16x30
PMC Fact 8	4700	04.10/FT	★★★★★	These PMC floorstanders are quite simply magical - even at this price	●	4	103x15x38
PMCTwenty 22	1970	11.14/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best standmounter £1200+, Awards 2014</b>	●	4	41x18x37
PMCTwenty 23	2300	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £1500+, Awards 2013	●	4	92x15x33
PMCTwenty 26	5750	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Yet another top-class speaker from PMC's Twenty range	●	4	109x19x44
PMC Wafer 2	2295	02.12/GT	★★★★★	A real achievement for those after proper hi-fi		2	57x35x10
ProAc Response D18	2145	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £1500+, Awards 2011	●	6	93x19x27
ProAc Response D30R	4750	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Superb all-rounders	●	6	104x22x31
ProAc Response D40/R	6125	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Articulate and dynamic, a top-class pair of floorstanders	●	6	120x21x34
ProAc Studio 140 Mk2	1650	12.10/FT	★★★★★	An entertaining and dynamic performer	●	4	104x19x28
Quad ESL-2812	6500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Won't be to everyone's tastes but these electrostatic speakers truly excel	●	1	107x69x38
Quad ESL 2905	6000	01.07/FT	★★★★★	A truly world-class speaker	●	1	143x70x39
Roksan Darius S1	5000	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Excellent pair of performers and one of the most enjoyable stand-mounters we've heard	●	2	38x20x38
SPAcoustics SP1 Signature	14950	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Able to challenge the very best at this exalted level	●	Any	106x35x46

## SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount	Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Spendor A5	1695	03.11/GT	★★★★★			●	4	79x17x25
<b>Spendor A6R</b>	<b>2500</b>	<b>02.14/GT</b>	<b>★★★★★</b>			●	<b>5</b>	<b>87.5x19x28</b>
Spendor D7	3500	10.13/GT	★★★★★			●	6	95x20x32
Tannoy Precision 6.2	1700	10.13/GT	★★★★★			●	3	100x31x28
Tannoy Precision 6.4	2200	02.14/GT	★★★★★			●	3	105x31x35
Tannoy Definition DC8	2500	03.12/GT	★★★★★			●	3	47x27x26
Tannoy Definition DC10T	5250	10.13/GT	★★★★★			●	3	113x34x32
Totem Element Ember	3995	05.14/FT	★★★★★			●	2	36x11x25
Triangle Signature Delta	4900	07.14/FT	★★★★★			●	3	123x37x39
Wharfedale Jade-5	1650	01.12/ST	★★★★★			●	3	106x25x40
Wilson Audio Duette II	19000	02.15/FT	★★★★★			●	16	47x27x31
Wilson Audio Sophia 3	16500	10.13/GT	★★★★★			●	7	105x35x48



## Stereo amplifiers

**Integrated** These amplifiers combine a preamp and power section in one box  
**Power output** A higher number usually means louder, depending on speakers  
**Digital inputs** Some amplifiers now have a DAC built in, which could be useful

## Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Power (w)	DAC	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	USB in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Speaker outs	Tone controls	Headphone out	Remote control	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
<b>Up to £1000</b>																	
Audiolab 8200A	750	05.13/ST	★★★★★	60		6	0	0		3	●	1		●	●	2	7.5x45x34
<b>Arcam FMJ A19</b>	<b>650</b>	<b>10.14/GT</b>	<b>★★★★★</b>	<b>50</b>		<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>		<b>1</b>	●	<b>2</b>		●	●	<b>1</b>	<b>9x43x28</b>
Cambridge Audio Azur 350A	250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	45	●	6	0	0		1	2	●	●	●	●	2	9x43x34
Cambridge Audio Azur 351A	300	11.12/FT	★★★★★	45	●	5	0	0	●	1	2	●	●	●	●	2	9x43x34
Cambridge Audio Azur 651A	450	03.12/FT	★★★★★	75	●	5	0	0		1	●	2	●	●	●	1	12x43x35
Cambridge Audio Topaz SR10	230	06.10/FT	★★★★★	85		5	1	0		1	2	●	●	●	●	1	11x43x34
Creek Audio Evolution 50A	800	01.15/GT	★★★★★	55		5	0	0		0	1		●	●	●	2	6x43x8
Cyrus 6a	800	01.15/GT	★★★★★	40		6	0	0		0	●	2		●	●	2	7x22x36
Denon PMA-720AE	350	02.13/GT	★★★★★	50		4	1	0		1	●	1	●	●	●	2	12x43x31
Icon Audio Stereo 25	500	01.09/FT	★★★★★	30		3	0	0		0	1					1	22x32x31
<b>Marantz PM6005</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>05.14/GT</b>	<b>★★★★★</b>	<b>45</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	●	●	●	●	<b>2</b>	<b>11x44x37</b>
Micromega MyAmp	480	12.14/GT	★★★★★	30	●	3	0	0	●	0	1		●	●	●	2	7.5x14x14
Monitor Audio Airstream A100	400	12.14/GT	★★★★★	50	●	1	0	0		0	●	1		●	●	2	5x37x21
NAD C316BEE	260	01.12/ST	★★★★★	40		5	0	0		1	1	●	●	●	●	2	8x44x29
NAD C326BEE	300	07.10/GT	★★★★★	50		7	0	0		2	●	1	●	●	●	1	10x44x29
NAD C356BEE	600	10.10/FT	★★★★★	80		7	0	0		2	●	2	●	●	●	1	13x44x34
NAD C356BEE DAC	695	01.12/FT	★★★★★	80	●	8	0	0	●	2	●	2	●	●	●	1	13x44x34
NAD D 3020	400	12.14/GT	★★★★★	30		2	0	0	●	0	1		●	●	●	1	19x6x22
NAD D 7050	800	12.13/FT	★★★★★	50	●	0	0	0	●	0	●	1		●	●	1	24x7x27
Naim Nait 5i	875	05.13/ST	★★★★★	50		4	0	0		1	1			●	●	1	7x44x31
Naim Nait 5si	925	01.15/GT	★★★★★	60		3	0	0		1	1	●	●	●	●	1	7x43x31
Onix A-25	775	05.13/ST	★★★★★	30		3	0	0		0	●	1		●	●	1	9x21x36
Onkyo A-9030	300	12.12/FT	★★★★★	65		4	1	0		1	2		●	●	●	2	14x44x33
Onkyo A-9050	350	02.13/GT	★★★★★	75		5	1	0		1	●	1	●	●	●	2	14x44x33
Peachtree iDecco	999	01.11/FT	★★★★★	40		1	0	0	●	1	●	1		●	●	1	13x38x29
Pro-Ject Stereo Box S	200	11.11/FT	★★★★★	40		2	0	0		0	1			●	●	2	4x10x10
Pioneer A-70	800	05.13/ST	★★★★★	90		3	1	1	●	1	●	2	●	●	●	2	14x44x36
Quad Vena	600	01.15/FT	★★★★★	46	●	2	0	0	●	0	●	1		●	●	4	10x31x30
Rega Brio-R	480	06.12/ST	★★★★★	50		4	1	0		1	1			●	●	2	8x22x31
<b>Rega Elex-R</b>	<b>900</b>	<b>01.15/GT</b>	<b>★★★★★</b>	<b>72</b>		<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>		<b>1</b>	●	<b>1</b>		●	●	<b>1</b>	<b>8x43x32</b>
Roksan Kandy K2	795	12.11/ST	★★★★★	125		5	1	0		1	●	1		●	●	3	10x43x38
Roksan Kandy K2 BT	895	05.14/FT	★★★★★	140		5	1	0		1	●	1		●	●	2	11x43x38
Rotel RA-10	350	05.14/GT	★★★★★	40		4	1	0		1	●	2	●	●	●	2	7x43x34
Rotel RA-12	600	05.13/ST	★★★★★	60	●	4	1	0	●	1	●	1	●	●	●	2	14x44x36
TEAC AI-301DA	400	12.14/GT	★★★★★	30	●	2	0	0	●	0	●	1		●	●	2	6x21.5x25
Wadia 151 PowerDAC Mini	999	02.12/FT	★★★★★	25	●	0	0	0	●	0	1			●	●	1	7x20x20
Yamaha A-S501	360	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	60		6	1	0		1	1	●	●	●	●	2	15x44x39



## 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																
£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
ATC SIA 2-150	2379	02.10/GT	★★★★★	One of the best amplifiers at this price level	150		4	0	0		1	●	1		●	●	1	14x44x33	
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		5	0	0		1	●	2		●	●	2	7x22x36	
Cyrus 8 DAC	1400	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Meticulous and engaging amp and DAC combo	70	●	6	0	0		●	0	2		●	●	2	7x22x36	
Cyrus 8XP	1250	11.09/GT	★★★★★	The Cyrus 8XP misses nothing out in sonic thrills	70		6	0	0		1	●	1		●	●	2	7x22x36	
Cyrus DACXP Signature	3000	11.13/FT	★★★★★	With the Signature upgrade, the DACXP remains a fine product	70		2	0	0		1	●	1		●	●	2	7x22x36	
Denon PMA-2010AE	1700	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Listen to this amp in full flow and it's a monster	80		4	1	1		2	●	2	●	●	●	1	18x43x44	
Devialet 110	4490	02.14/FT	★★★★★	An exceptional all-rounder	110	●	1	1	0		●	0	1			●	1	4x38x38	
Devialet D-Premier	11450	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A fresh look at amp design	240		2	1	1		1	●	1	●		●	3	4x40x40	
EAR Yoshino V12	7000	07.13/FT	★★★★★	This terrific integrated amp needn't fear any rival at this price	50		5	0	0		1		1				1	14x42x14	
Heed Audio Obelisk si	1300	06.12/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £1000-£1500, Awards 2012	35		5	1	0		0	●	1			●	2	9x22x36	
Karan Acoustics 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 5XS	1500	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Still a top class premium amplifier	60		3	0	0		2	●	1			●	1	7x43x30	
Naim Nait XS 2	1595	10.13/GT	★★★★★	An improvement on the Nait XS, even if it sacrifices a little detail	70		5	1	0		1	●	1		●	●	1	7x43x30	
Naim Supernait 2	2750	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Even at this price, the Supernait 2 is a fantastic buy	80		5	0	0		1	●	1		●	●	1	9x43x31	
Pathos ClassicRemix HiDAC	2850	05.15/FT	★★★★★	Another intriguing offering from Pathos that offers top-notch sound	70	●	5	0	0		●	0	1		●	●	5	17x37x28	
Pathos Ethos	3800	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Mixes style and substance better than any rival	100		7	0	0		●	0	1			●	1	15x43x49	
Pathos InpolRemix	3800	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Not cheap or powerful - just brilliant	10		1	0	0		0	●	1			●	2	18x33x29	
Pathos Logos Mk II	3950	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Mixes fine aesthetics with a great sound for a terrific amp	110	●	5	0	0		●	1	●	1		●	1	17x42x43	
Quad II Classic Integrated	4500	04.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine integrated amplifier with a hefty price tag	25		3	1	1		1		1				1	20x31x38	
Rega Osiris	5998	06.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine amp that makes sense partnering its Isis sibling	162		6	0	0		1		1			●	1	12x44x35	
Rega Elicit-R	1600	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier £1500+, Awards 2014	105		5	1	0		1	●	1			●	1	8x43x34	
Roksan Caspian M2	1695	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier £1500+, Awards 2013	85		5	0	0		1	●	1			●	2	8x43x33	
Roksan K3	1250	02.15/GT	★★★★★	An excellent all-rounder at a reasonable price	150		5	1	0		1	●	1			●	3	10x43x38	
Sony TA-A1ES	2000	04.14/FT	★★★★★	Not quite a flawless effort but talented enough in key areas	80		5	1	1		0		1		●	●	1	13x43x42	
T+A PA 3000 HV	9900	11.13/FT	★★★★★	A truly impressive piece of kit despite its polite disposition	300		6	0	0		0		1		●	●	1	17x46x46	
Unison Research 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	



## Preamps

Preamps are also known as control units. On a most basic level, they perform two functions: source selection and volume control. Most powered preamps also amplify the signal slightly in order to make matching to a power amplifier easier. Some include phono stages.

## Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Balanced out	Headphone out	Tone controls	Remote control	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £5000													
Audio Research LS17	3399	01.09/FT	★★★★★	This top quality product should serve you for decades	7	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	14x48x31
Cyrus DACXP+	2550	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Massive ability in a small box	2	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	7x22x36
Cyrus PreXP d	1300	02.10/GT	★★★★★	Works wonders when coupled with the matching 8 power amp	6	0	0	0	0	●	●	●	7x22x36
Heed Audio Obelisk pre/px	2230	04.13/FT	★★★★★	A superb-sounding preamp, but Heed needs to make it feel more luxurious	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	9x22x33
Lavardin C62	3471	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Belongs near the top of any shortlist	6	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	9x43x31
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	0	●	●	●	8x44x29
Naim NAC 152XS	975	02.10/GT	★★★★★	It's good, but could do better with dynamics	5	0	0	0	0	●	●	●	7x43x30
Quad Elite Pre	850	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Doesn't blow us away, but it's still worth consideration	6	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	7x32x31
Quad QC-twenty four	1000	06.13/FT	★★★★★	Pleasant listen but works best with Quad's valve power amps	5	0	0	2	●	●	●	●	9x30x22
Townshend Allegri	1895	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Basic features, but terrific sound	6	0	0	0	0	●	●	●	5x13x31

## PREAMPS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Balanced out	Headphone out	Tone controls	Remote control	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
<b>£5000 and above</b>													
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
GamuT D3i	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

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
Leema Hydra II	3595	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A top class power amplifier for the money	Stereo	160	1	1	11x44x31	33
NAD C275BEE	820	08.10/FT	★★★★★	A great power amp, best matched with the C165BEE preamp	Stereo	150	1	0	13x44x35	15
Naim NAP 155 XS	1115	02.10/GT	★★★★★	It's a good performer, but not the last word in dynamics	Stereo	60	0	0	7x43x30	7.5
Naim NAP 250	3050	11.08/FT	★★★★★	Paired with the NAC252 preamp it's magical	Stereo	80	0	0	9x43x32	16
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

## Picking the right... stereo amplifier

A stereo amplifier is the heart of any hi-fi system, so picking the right one is crucial to getting the most out of any set-up

## Try before you buy

If possible, always listen to an amplifier with your speakers. If you can't take your pair to the dealer, ask if you could listen to alternative speakers that are as close as possible to what you have. The source is likely to be less of an issue as long as it's relatively even-handed in the way it performs.

Other than sound quality, make a list of the features you're looking for. If you have a complex system you'll need an amp with lots of inputs. Got a record player? Take a look at amps with phono stages or consider an outboard phono unit. Similarly, a built-in DAC would be useful for digital-based set-ups.



Rega's Elicit-R has a hint of brightness so take a little care when it comes to choosing speakers to match

Amplifiers don't tend to have as strong a sonic character as speakers, but they affect the way the system works in a fundamental way. It pays to take care in choosing one.





## 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)
<b>Up to £500</b>									
Audyssey South of Market	350	04.11/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	n/a	23x13x28
B&W Z2	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	18x32x10
Epoz AktiMate Micro	260	09.13/GT	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	24x15x20
Epoz AktiMate Mini	350	07.12/GT	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	30x19x21
Epoz AktiMate Mini+	360	08.13/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	40	30x19x21
Gear4 AirZone Series 1	200	04.12/ST	★★★★★	●		iOS	●	n/a	18x33x19
JBL OnBeat Venue LT	200	03.13/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	30	13x42x14
Klipsch iGroove HG WWI	110	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	30	14x40x16
KitSound Boom Dock	100	12.10/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	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
Philips Fidelio Primo DS9010	400	08.11/GT	★★★★★			iOS	●	100	21x56x23
Pure Digital Contour 100Di	100	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	20	18x31x15
Pure Digital Contour 200i Air	200	09.12/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	36	23x37x18
Revo K2	300	02.12/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	33x11x11
Ruark Audio R2i	280	09.09/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	20	12x34x18.5
<b>£500 and above</b>									
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)
<b>Up to £300</b>									
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

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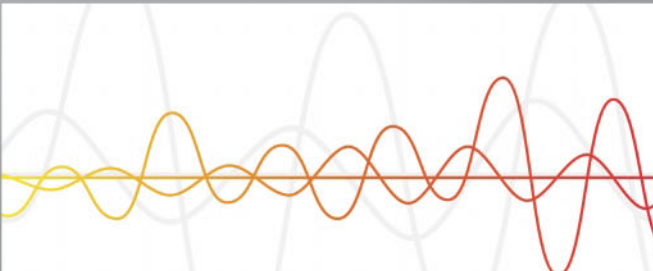
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## WIRELESS SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	Aux	Charging	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
<b>Up to £300</b>									
Cambridge Audio Minx Go	100	08.13/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	23x24x6
Denon Envaya DSB200	170	11.14/FT	★★★★★			●	●	●	14x26x5
Harman/Kardon Go+Play	280	05.13/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	24x50x23
Jawbone Big Jambox	260	09.12/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	9x26x8
iLuv MobiOut	70	05.13/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	0x0x0
JBL Charge	120	01.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	18x7x7
JBL Flip	100	05.13/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	0x0x0
JBL Flip 2	100	07.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	6.5x16x16
JBL OnBeat Rumble	230	10.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	17x45x22
Loewe Speaker 2go	200	02.15/ST	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	11x24x5
Logitech UE Mobile Boombox	75	05.13/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	6x7x11
Monitor Audio Airstream S200	200	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	27x12x14
Monitor Audio Airstream S300	250	10.14/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	15x47x15
Monitor Audio Airstream WS100	250	09.13/GT	★★★★★			●			13x12x12
Panasonic SC-NA10	130	01.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	10x20x3
Philips BT3500B	70	03.15/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	10x20x4
Pure Jonga S3	170	06.13/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	13x13x14
Pure Voca	65	03.15/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	7x19x5.5
Roberts Travel Pad	80	03.15/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	8x19x2.5
Roth OLI POWA-5	250	06.14/ST	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	27x18x21
Samsung M5	230	10.14/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	14x34x17
Sonos Play:1	170	01.14/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	16x12x12
Sony RDP-XA700	285	03.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	18x40x16
Sony SRS-X3	130	07.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	7x19x7
Sony SRS-BTM8	85	05.13/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	19x25x9
Ultimate Ears Boom	170	01.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	16x6.5x6.5
Ultimate Ears Megaboom	250	04.15/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	n/a
<b>£300 and above</b>									
Audio Pro Allroom Air One	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	20x31x19
Bang & Olufsen BeoPlay A2	300	02.15/ST	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	14x26x4
Bluesound multi-room system	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★			●	●	●	n/a
B&W A5	400	08.13/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	18x30x20
B&W A7	700	12.12/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	22x36x16
B&W T7	300	02.15/ST	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	11x21x5
Bose SoundLink Air	300	12.12/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	17x31x10
Cabasse Stream 1	500	08.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	14x46x33
Cambridge Audio Minx Air 200	430	08.13/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	45x22x17
Dali Kubik Free	645	03.14/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	31x15x15
Eclipse TD-M1	1000	08.14/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	24x16x22
Geneva Model M Wireless	500	08.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	22x30x18
Geneva Model S Wireless DAB+	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	15x14x18
Libratone Zipp	370	10.13/ST	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	26x12x12
Libratone Zipp BT	300	02.15/ST	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	26x12x12
Libratone Loop	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	33x33x8
Loewe AirSpeaker	500	03.13/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	24x13x24
Naim Mu-so	895	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	12x63x26
NAD Viso 1 AP	500	08.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	26x48x30
Nocs NS2v2	300	02.15/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	16x11x14
Philips Fidelio E2	300	06.14/ST	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	30.5x16x16
Pioneer XW-SMA4	350	12.12/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	21x36x17
Pure Jonga S3 (pair)	340	06.14/ST	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	13x13x14
Pure Jonga System	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	n/a
Samsung M7	330	09.14/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	14x40x19
Samsung Shape Audio System	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	n/a
Simple Audio Roomplayer+	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	n/a
Sonos System	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	n/a
Sony SRS-X9	600	06.14/FT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	13x43x13
Tangent Classic	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●	●	23x60x32



## 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



#### AKG Y50

Awards 2014: Best portable on-ears up to £100  
 “Excelling in sound and style, the Y50s are a promising start for AKG’s latest range.”



#### AWARD WINNER

#### Philips M1MKII

Awards 2014: Best portable on-ears £100-£200  
 “If you have just under £200 to spend on a pair of portable on-ear headphones, this is a most worthy candidate.”



#### AWARD WINNER

#### Beyerdynamic T51i

Awards 2014: Best portable on-ears £200-£300  
 “They’re easily some of the best portable on-ear headphones we’ve heard at this price.”

### Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight (g)
<b>Up to £70</b>									
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

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## HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	In-ear On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight (g)
<b>Up to £70</b>								
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	★★★★★	<b>Best in-ears up to £50, Awards 2014</b>	●	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	★★★★★	<b>Best in-ears £50-£100, Awards 2014. Product of the Year</b>	●	Closed		9
Soul Electronics Flex	50	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Performance surpasses expectations at this price, a great buy for fitness bods	●	Closed		18
<b>£70 and above</b>								
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	★★★★★	<b>Best home on-ears up to £150, Awards 2014</b>	●	Closed		305
AKG K551	230	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Smashing all-rounders that really sing	●	Closed		305
AKG K812	1100	10.14/FT	★★★★★	It needs a top-class system to shine but these cans sound heavenly. Highly recommended	●	Open		390
AKG K845BT	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★	If you like your music clear and uncoloured, then these AKGs are definitely worth a listen	●	Closed	●	292
AKG Y845BT	110	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Both portable and comfortable, these cans could do with a bit of subtlety and refinement	●	Closed	●	150
AKG Q701	250	09.14/ST	★★★★★	A great, solid sounding set of cans. Comfy, too	●	Open		235
AKG Q460	140	02.11/GT	★★★★★	More pros than cons, but still not complete	●	Closed		120
AKG Y50	80	09.14/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best portable on-ears up to £100, Awards 2014. Product of the Year</b>	●	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
Beats & Olufsen BeoPlay H2	170	05.15/GT	★★★★★	A stylish pair of on-ears that combines impressive build quality with accessible sound	●	Closed		150
Bang 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	★★★★★	<b>Best portable on-ears £200-£300, Awards 2014</b>	●	Closed		174
Beyerdynamic T51P	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A fine replacement for the T50Ps, superbly entertaining	●	Closed		174
Beyerdynamic T70	456	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Undeniably capable, but d=on't quite feel worth the money	●	Closed		330
Bose AE2w	200	02.14/GT	★★★★★	No aptX Bluetooth onboard, but still a very listenable pair of cans	●	Closed	●	150
Bose MIE2i	120	09.11/ST	★★★★★	A perfect headphone meets microphone solution	●	Closed		19
Bose QuietComfort 15	280	04.12/GT	★★★★★	Best noise-cancelling headphones, Awards 2013	●	Closed	●	227
Bose QuietComfort 25	270	04.15/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best noise-cancelling headphones, Awards 2014</b>	●	Closed	●	195
Bose Soundlink On-ear	220	01.15/GT	★★★★★	A talented pair of Bluetooth cans with impressive battery life	●	Closed	●	153
B&W P3	170	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Stylish and sonically talented on-ear headphones	●	Closed		130
B&W P5	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	They look fantastic and sound just as good	●	Closed		195
B&W P5 Series 2	250	02.15/FT	★★★★★	Gorgeous looks and a stunning sound, these are a great upgrade on the P5s	●	Closed		195
B&W P7	330	09.14/ST	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears, Awards 2013	●	Closed		290
Denon AH-D600	200	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Open and spacious. A crisper presentation would make this a five-star product	●	Closed		365
Etymotic Research HF2	180	08.09/FT	★★★★★	The same money buys punchier cans, but not ones that fit as well	●	Closed		26
Focal Spirit Classic	250	09.14/ST	★★★★★	Needs more 'oomph' to challenge the best	●	Closed		310
Focal Spirit One	200	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Refined enough, but not the most exciting	●	Closed		225

## HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	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	★★★★★	<b>Best home on-ears £150-£300, Awards 2014</b>	●		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	★★★★★	<b>Best portable on-ears £100-£200, Awards 2014</b>	●		Closed			166
Philips Fidelio M1BT	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best wireless headphones, Awards 2013	●		Closed	●		500
Philips Fidelio M2BT	185	01.15/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best wireless headphones, Awards 2014</b>	●		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	★★★★★	<b>Best in-ears £300+, Awards 2014</b>	●		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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## 4K Televisions

4k Ultra HD LED Television  
Sony KD49X8305

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SONY HT-CT80\*\*

OUR PRICE:  
**£1299.<sup>00</sup>**



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Panasonic TX-55CR430

OUR PRICE:  
**£1449.<sup>00</sup>**



## HiFi Separates

Bookshelf Speakers  
B&W 685 S2

OUR PRICE:  
**£499.<sup>00</sup>**



WHAT HI-FI? AWARD 2014  
TEST WINNER  
★★★★★  
APRIL 2015

Bookshelf Speakers  
Q Acoustics 3020

PRICES FROM:  
**£189.<sup>00</sup>**



WHAT HI-FI? AWARD 2014  
★★★★★  
MARCH 2015

Award Winning Separates from Marantz  
CD Player CD6005, Amplifier PM6005  
& Network Audio Player NA6005



CALL OR CHECK ONLINE  
FOR LATEST PRICE

USB Turntable  
Project Elemental

OUR PRICE:  
**£159.<sup>00</sup>**



WHAT HI-FI? AWARD 2014  
★★★★★  
APRIL 2014

Networked CD Player  
Onkyo CN7050



RRP: £349.95  
SAVE: £50.95  
**£299.<sup>00</sup>**

WHAT HI-FI? AWARD 2014  
★★★★★  
APRIL 2015

## Systems

Multi-purpose Mini System  
Marantz Melody  
Media MCR610

- CD-audio, FM, DAB and HD music files
- Built-in WiFi



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FOR LATEST PRICE

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see how much you could **SAVE**  
when you purchase **Speakers**  
with a **Micro System**

CD/DAB/DAB+/FM/USB Micro System  
Denon DM39DAB



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Introducing **HEOS by Denon**.  
The evolution of multi-room sound.

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With 20% OFF:  
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## Home Cinema

3D/4K BluRay Player  
Pioneer BDPLX58

RRP: £599.00  
SAVE: £50.00

**£549.00**



WHAT Hi-Fi? TEST WINNER  
APRIL 2015

5.1 Home Cinema  
Speaker System  
Polk TL1600

CALL OR CHECK ONLINE  
FOR LATEST PRICE



7.2 Channel Networked  
Home Cinema Receiver  
Yamaha RXV677

CALL OR CHECK ONLINE  
FOR LATEST PRICE



WHAT Hi-Fi? TEST WINNER  
SEPTEMBER 2014

Soundbase  
Canton DM75

OUR PRICE:  
**£449.00**



WHAT Hi-Fi? TEST WINNER  
OCTOBER 2014

Home Cinema Projector  
Epson EHTW6600

CALL OR CHECK ONLINE  
FOR LATEST PRICE



"Punchy, crisp picture; stable, smooth delivery; well equipped"  
What Hi-Fi April 2015

WHAT Hi-Fi? TEST WINNER  
APRIL 2015

## Wireless Speakers

Wireless Bluetooth Speaker  
Audio Pro Addon T10

RRP: £299.95  
SAVE: £100.00

**£199.95**



WHAT Hi-Fi? TEST WINNER  
APRIL 2015

DAB/FM WiFi Music System  
Ruark R2MkIII

OUR PRICE:  
**£199.95**

WHAT Hi-Fi? TEST WINNER  
APRIL 2015



Wireless Speaker  
with Airplay  
Audio Pro Allroom  
Air One

RRP: £499.00  
SAVE: £220.00

**£279.00**



WHAT Hi-Fi? TEST WINNER  
AUGUST 2013

Wireless Speaker with Airplay  
Monitor Audio Airstream S200

OUR PRICE:  
**£199.95**

WHAT Hi-Fi? TEST WINNER  
OCTOBER 2014



## In-store Promotion

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Buy any HiFi Separate and  
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### PRICE BEAT PROMISE

IF YOU FIND AN IDENTICAL ITEM CHEAPER FROM ONE OF OUR  
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**Stockport**  
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0161 429 9080

\*Open Sundays

## Headphones/Earphones

Over-ear Stereo Headphones  
Sennheiser Momentum M2

OUR PRICE:  
**£269.95**



Headphones  
AKG K451

WAS: £129.95  
SAVE: £82.00

**£47.95**

WHAT Hi-Fi? TEST WINNER  
OCTOBER 2012



Noise Cancelling  
Portable Headphones  
Goldring NS1000  
Expedition

WHAT Hi-Fi? TEST WINNER  
OCTOBER 2012



RRP: £139.95  
SAVE: £70.00  
**£69.95**

Mobile HiFi Headphones  
B&W P5 S2

OUR PRICE:  
**£249.00**

WHAT Hi-Fi? TEST WINNER  
FEBRUARY 2015



Earphones  
Sony MDR-EX650APT

OUR PRICE:  
**£59.95**

WHAT Hi-Fi? TEST WINNER  
NOVEMBER 2014



## Superfi Audio

Speaker Cable  
Superfi XT by QED

- Our price:  
£4.95 per metre
- Plugs not included



Superfi Audio  
by QED

- Our price:
- 0.6m: £39.95
- 1m: £44.95
- 2m: £59.95
- 3m: £74.95





## HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight (g)
<b>£70 and above</b>									
Shure SE425	200	04.13/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best in-ears £150-£300, Awards 2014</b>			●	Closed	32
Shure SE846	950	06.14/FT	★★★★★	The most capable in-ears we've heard			●	Closed	36
Shure SRH1540	430	10.14/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best home on-ears £300+, Awards 2014</b>			●	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
<b>Up to £500</b>											
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	★★★★★	<b>Best music system up to £400, Awards 2014</b>							
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

Aura Note Premier	1500	05.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine sounding all in one system							
Cabasse Stream3	850	07.13/FT	★★★★★	Hardware is great but the app needs developing							
Cambridge Audio Minx Xi	600	01.14/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best music system £400-£800, Awards 2014. Product of the Year</b>							
Cyrus Lyric 09	3000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best music system £1500+, Awards 2014</b>							
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							
Sony CMT-G2BNiP	500	04.12/FT	★★★★★	A solid performer in every respect							
TEAC CR-H700DAB	550	10.11/GT	★★★★★	Great - but not a total all-rounder							



## Surround systems

This category includes a wide variety of systems. Most include a disc drive and now tend to feature video and music streaming capabilities. The speakers supplied tend to either be small satellite designs, or towers that usually provide greater scale and sonic authority.

### Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Blu-ray	3D Blu-ray	DVD	Streaming	Optical in	HDMI in	Channels
<b>Up to £500</b>										
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
<b>£500-£1000</b>										
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	★★★★★	<b>Best cinema system, Awards 2014</b>	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
<b>£1000 and above</b>										
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)
<b>Up to £2000</b>											
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
Bowers & Wilkins Panorama 2	1650	09.13/GT	★★★★★	An improvement on the original	●		3	1	0		13x110x18
Cambridge Audio Minx TV	200	02.14/ST	★★★★★	A soundbase that delivers an exciting sound at a great price			0	1	0		8x43x38
Cambridge Audio TV2	200	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best soundbase up to £300, Awards 2014</b>			0	1	0	●	12x53x33
Cambridge Audio TV5	280	03.15/FT	★★★★★	Bigger than – and just as good as – its smaller brother			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	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best soundbase £300+, Awards 2014</b>			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
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



## SOUNDBARS | SOUNDBASES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Disc drive	Smart	Ext. subwoofer	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	RCA in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
<b>Up to £2000</b>											
JBL Cinema SB200	200	03.14/ST	★★★★★					0	1	0	12x90x10
JBL Cinema SB 350	350	12.14/ST	★★★★★				●	1	1	0	8x100x6
JBL Cinema SB400	450	06.13/ST	★★★★★				●	3	1	0	10x110x6
LG NB3520A	250	01.13/GT	★★★★★				●	0	2	0	8x100x5
LG NB3530A	190	03.14/ST	★★★★★				●	0	2	0	71x95x50
LG NB4530A	300	06.13/ST	★★★★★				●	1	1	0	8x104x4
Libratone Diva	650	01.15/ST	★★★★★				●	0	1	0	16x99x10
Maxell MXSP-SB3000	220	02.14/ST	★★★★★					3	1	1	8x94x39
Monitor Audio ASB-2	800	01.15/ST	★★★★★				●	3	1	1	101x19x17
Orbitsound M9	300	06.13/ST	★★★★★				●	0	1	0	9x30x10
Philips HTL5120	250	03.14/ST	★★★★★					2	1	0	15x101x8
Philips HTL5140	270	12.14/FT	★★★★★				●	1	1	0	5x105x7
Philips HTL9100	600	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★				●	2	1	1	7x103x16
Pioneer SBX-N700	250	12.14/GT	★★★★★				●	0	2	0	9x90x12
Polk Audio N1	200	12.14/GT	★★★★★					0	1	1	10x99x11
Q Acoustics Media 4	400	08.14/FT	★★★★★					0	1	0	11x14x100
Samsung HW-H550	310	12.14/ST	★★★★★				●	1	1	0	6x94x6
Sandström S42SWLH13	150	03.14/ST	★★★★★				●	2	1	0	11x90x5
Sonos Playbar	600	01.15/ST	★★★★★				●	0	1	0	9x90x14
Sony HT-XT1	300	09.14/GT	★★★★★					3	1	0	7x72x31
Tannoy BaseStation One	350	09.14/GT	★★★★★					1	0	●	12x64x36
Toshiba SB3950M1	190	12.14/ST	★★★★★				●	2	1	0	9x90x6
Yamaha YAS-201	350	06.13/ST	★★★★★				●	3	2	1	14x43x35
Yamaha YSP-1400	400	05.14/GT	★★★★★					0	1	1	10x100x13
Yamaha YSP-2200	800	10.11/GT	★★★★★				●	3	2	1	9x89x12
Yamaha YSP-2500	800	01.15/ST	★★★★★				●	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
<b>Up to £3000</b>														
Lacie Cinema Classic HD	190	04.10/GT	★★★★★	As good as Apple TV, this needs to be auditioned	1TB	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	24/92	●
Microsoft Xbox 360 (250GB)	200	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Now an appealing media hub as well	250GB	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	16/48	●
Netgear EVA9000	190	04.10/GT	★★★★★	Needs better sound and Apple TV-like usability	500GB	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	24/92	●
Olive 4HD	2150	02.10/FT	★★★★★	This is 21st-century hi-fi at its best	2TB	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	24/192	●
Raumfeld 3Raumfeld	1680	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	A fabulous product to make Sonos sweat	160GB	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	24/96	●

Wake up to streaming!

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www.soundgallery.co.uk  
65 Castle Street, High Wycombe, Bucks.



## Media streamers

These access the music or video files you have stored on your network. Check for file compatibility and decent control apps that improve usability.

### Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		HDMI out	Optical out	Co-axial out	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/kHz)	Video
<b>Up to £500</b>														
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	●
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	★★★★★	<b>Best streamer up to £600, Awards 2014</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	●	24/192	●
Cabasse Stream Source	300	05.15/GT	★★★★★	A decent streamer at a more-than-fair price, but the competition in this area is fierce	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	●	24/96	●
Google Chromecast	30	03.15/GT	★★★★★	A neat and effective media streamer that's an absolute bargain	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	●	16/48	●
Now TV	10	03.15/GT	★★★★★	Still offers great value for money but rivals have the edge over it	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	●	16/48	●
Pure Jongo T2	130	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Cheaper than Sonos but comes with a few niggles	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	●	16/48	●
QED uPlay Stream	150	03.14/FT	★★★★★	A handy device that boasts decent sound and good features	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	●	24/196	●
Roku 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	●
<b>£500-£1000</b>														
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	★★★★★	<b>Best streamer £600-£1000, Awards 2014. Product of the Year</b>	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	●
<b>£1000 and above</b>														
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	★★★★★	<b>Best streamer £1000 - £1500, Awards 2014</b>	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	★★★★★	<b>Best streaming system £1500+, Awards 2014</b>	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192	●
Linn Kiko	2500	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £1500+, Awards 2013	1	0	0	4	1	0	0	●	24/192	●
Linn Majik DS-I	2500	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Gives a glimpse of the music-streaming future	1	1	1	4	1	1	0	●	24/192	●
Naim NAC-N 172 XS	1650	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £1000-£2000, Awards 2013	0	2	0	0	2	2	1	●	24/192	●
Naim ND5 XS	1950	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A thrillingly musical music streamer	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	●	24/192	●
Naim NDS/555PS	12620	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Engaging sound, bags of detail and many features	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	●	24/192	●
Naim NDX	2995	07.11/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £2500+, Awards 2011	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	●	24/192	●
Naim Uniti	2670	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best streaming system £2000+, Awards 2011	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	●	24/192	●
Naim Uniti 2	2795	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Uniti continues to lead the market at this price	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	●	24/192	●
Naim UnitiLite	1650	12.12/FT	★★★★★	UnitiLite hits the streaming sweet spot	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	●	24/192	●
Naim UnitiQute 2	1195	09.13/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best music system £800-£1500, Awards 2014</b>	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	●

## Media servers: top tips

### Don't compress

If we're being honest, while 320kbps is fine for Spotify it's a less-than-desired bitrate if you're serious about your home hi-fi system. If you're streaming from a server (or a NAS drive) then look for a system with enough storage to keep all your music as uncompressed audio, or at least in lossless form.

### Easy access

Controlling your collection through a dedicated app on your smartphone or tablet is becoming the norm. But not all apps are created equal. Take into consideration an app's ease of use and speed of operation – searching for music should be effortless, not a chore.

### Accommodate online streaming

If you want to get the most out of your system, then augment your personal collection with streamed music from online providers such as Spotify, Qobuz and Tidal. Spotify's catalogue is famously huge, while the latter two offer lossless music, although their services cost more to use.





## Set-top boxes

<b>Freeview</b>	Large choice of digital TV channels via a rooftop aerial
<b>Freesat</b>	Much like Freeview, but takes signal from a satellite dish
<b>Subscription</b>	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
<b>Up to £500</b>												
Humax DTR-T2000	200	11.14/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best Freeview HD recorder, Awards 2014</b>				●	●	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 1TB	249	Aw.12/GT	★★★★★	Set-top boxes, Awards 2012				●	●	2	1TB	1
Sky+ HD 2TB	250	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best subscription service, Awards 2014. Product of the Year</b>				●	●	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

Our recommendations					Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Web browsing	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict						
Up to £1000									
Astell & Kern AK100 MkII	700	04.14/GT	★★★★★	A few design issues mar a very talented performer	2.5	320x240	32		79x59x15
Apple iPod Nano 16GB (2012)	130	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A simple, attractive, music-playing wonder	2.5	240x240	16		77x40x5
Apple iPod Shuffle 2GB	40	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Simple and brilliantly effective	n/a	n/a	2		30x30x10
Apple iPod Touch 64GB (2012)	330	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Best iPod Touch so far, but it's fast becoming niche	4	1136x640	64		123x59x6
Cowon Z2	200	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	A great music player with good sound and flexible storage	3.7	800x480	16		116x63x12
FiiO X5	290	08.14/GT	★★★★★	A bulky design gives way to a strong, if not outstanding music player	2.4	400x360	n/a		114x68x16
iBasso DX50	200	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Enjoyable and affordable. However it's not the last word in sound quality	1	96x96	8		60x40x20
SanDisk Sansa Clip+ 8GB	40	12.11/GT	★★★★★	A worthy Apple alternative	2.4	320x240	8		106x44x17
Sony NWZ-A15	170	12.14/FT	★★★★★	A good place to start if you're looking to get into hi-res	2.2	320x240	16		109x44x9
Sony NWZ-ZX1	550	04.14/GT	★★★★★	A seriously impressive first attempt at a premium high-res audio player	4	854x480	128		123x61x16



## Tablets

<b>Android</b>	Offers great flexibility and innovation
<b>Apple iOS</b>	Fantastic ease of use; massive choice of quality apps
<b>Windows</b>	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	Stor	Dim (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 One XL	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Great for mobile media fans but its poor battery life just takes the edge off it	Android	●	4.7	1280x720	32	135x70x9
HTC 8S	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Capable and fun, if feature-light	Windows	●	4.7	800x480	4	121x63x10
LG Optimus 4X HD	01.13/ST	★★★★★	Not outstanding, but a worthy alternative to the best	Android	●	4.7	1280x720	16	132x68x9
LG Optimus L5 II	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Not a thrilling phone but the user experience is good	Android	●	4.0	800x433	4	118x62x9
LG G2	07.14/GT	★★★★★	A little outdated but still a worthy contender	Android	●	5.2	1920x1080	16/32	139x71x9
LG G3	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Still an excellent phone even if newcomers have bettered it	Android	●	5.5	1440x2560	16/32	146x75x9
LG G Flex	05.14/FT	★★★★★	All the pros of the G2, but with a low-res screen	Android	●	6	1280x720	32	161x82x8
Motorola Moto X (2014)	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Little in the way of flashy features but one of the best phones of 2014	Android	●	5.2	1920x1080	16/32	141x72x10
Nokia Lumia 920	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A promising start for Nokia's flagship	Windows	●	4.5	1280x768	32	130x71x11
Nokia Lumia 925	09.13/FT	★★★★★	The best Windows Phone yet	Windows	●	4.5	1280x768	16/32	129x71x9
Nokia Lumia 930	11.14/FT	★★★★★	We'd like more apps but this is (again) the best Windows effort we've seen	Windows	●	5	1920x1080	32	137x71x10
Nokia Lumia 1520	05.14/ST	★★★★★	Apps still disappoint but this is the best Windows Phone yet	Windows	●	6	1920x1080	32	163x85x9
Oppo N1	05.14/ST	★★★★★	Quirky and flexible, this is a great effort from a promising brand	Android	●	5.9	1920x1080	16/32	171x83x9
Samsung Galaxy 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
Sony Xperia T	01.13/ST	★★★★★	A strong all-rounder for music and movie lovers	Android	●	4.55	1280x720	16	129x67x9
Sony Xperia Z	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A triumph for Sony – one capable of taking the fight to Google	Android	●	5	1920x1080	16	139x71x8
Sony Xperia Z1	03.14/FT	★★★★★	Sony fans will love it, a speedy, sleek and impressive smartphone	Android	●	5	1920x1080	16	144x74x9
Sony Xperia Z2	07.14/GT	★★★★★	The phone to beat in 2014. Outstanding	Android	●	5.2	1920x1080	16	147x73x8
Sony Xperia Z3	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Best phone 5in+, Awards 2014	Android	●	5.2	1920x1080	16	146x72x7



# Recorded music is at a crossroads

The format in which you listen to your music could be undermining the quality of your hi-fi system

For those of us that consider themselves a music lover, albeit to different degrees, we are part of a very fortunate generation. We now have access to an ever-growing wealth of recorded music of extraordinary range and depth, effectively accumulated over the last 60 years. With the introduction of the microgroove LP record in the early 1950's, playback quality took a quantum leap forward and this also coincided with a far higher standard of recording techniques. Although further improvements have been made over the years, this was a watershed time that first introduced hi-fi as a reality.

We now have literally millions of recorded music tracks available to us in all genres and many different formats. One trend over recent years, however, has been to deliberately downgrade the quality in order to offer quantity. The main culprits have been MP3 and AAC formats which were designed as a low cost form of delivery when download speeds were slow and computer chip memory was expensive. Neither now applies and both formats should be consigned to history.

## Quality vs quantity

Let us explain. The maximum resolution from MP3 and AAC file formats, which are both highly compressed, is 320 kbps (kilobytes per second) which compares with CD quality of 1411 kbps. This means the resolution quality is less than



a quarter of that provided by a standard CD. However, most MP3 or AAC files are downloaded over the internet and the most used download resolution is 128 kbps, which is around one-eleventh of CD quality. This should ring alarm bells. If you are only playing back these tracks on an iPod or mobile phone with a pair of earbuds, the quality may be irrelevant to you. But if these tracks are your primary source of music, perhaps with an iPod dock into a decent hi-fi system, you are only making a very poor quality sound louder. Information is irretrievably lost and the full dynamic range is lacking. The quality will be very poor in contrast with a full resolution version even if you are completely unaware of the loss you are inflicting upon yourself. This can even affect the type of music listened to

as most classical recordings downloaded as an MP3 or AAC file will have so much information missing, and all the complexities of the music lost, with the end result that the recording is reduced to just the essence of a tune.

## What is the future of recorded music?

There are now positive signs for the future of recorded music. Audiophiles, or hi-fi connoisseurs, have been very important to the music industry as they are generally avid music lovers who aim to maximise their enjoyment by listening to music at its best quality level, which

means the play-back of great recordings through hi-end hi-fi to achieve the most outstanding results. Without them, a main driver for quality would probably be removed from the music industry. They have always sought out quality but there is now an increasing awareness among the wider public of the serious deficiencies of the highly compressed formats. Full resolution audio streaming, as well as CD quality downloads, are already available and will surely become the eventual norm with this greater awareness of the tremendous quality benefit. Consumers will vote through their purchases and will seek out higher resolution recordings. Look at Qobuz for a new high-profile entry into this field who offer CD quality (16 bit/44.1 kHz FLAC) streaming for over 15 million tracks.

## The benefits of using a specialist dealer

Specialist hi-fi dealers are also a significant driver for maintaining high quality in the music industry. Hi-end hi-fi very soon exposes poor quality recordings and specialist hi-fi dealers are constantly assessing the relative merits of different brands from manufacturers for potential stocking. With specialist hi-fi dealers, achieving the best system performance and seeking out the most outstanding combinations is almost invariably both their hobby and their livelihood. Without them, hi-fi manufacturers and potential customers would have to rely on the opinion of magazine reviewers to assess levels of performance – a notoriously unreliable decision making process. For specialist hi-fi dealers, their relationship with audiophiles and hi-fi connoisseurs is also crucial to them for, if they are to stay in business, they must satisfy the most discerning customers in the industry. The reality is that audiophiles and specialist hi-fi retailers (and the ones listed on this page represent the UK's finest) are essential to each other.

Specialist dealers know how to choose the products that combine as a superb system and how to get the best out of it by expert installation in the home. They also appreciate how exciting and involving music can be and how it can deliver a powerful emotional experience. If there's a price premium over an internet purchase by choosing a specialist dealer, it's probably a small one, but it's unquestionably worth the difference.

“...there is now an increasing awareness among the wider public of the serious deficiencies of the highly compressed formats. Full resolution audio streaming, as well as CD quality downloads, are already available and will surely become the eventual norm.”

Listed below is our selection of **THE BEST HI-FI DEALERS IN THE UK**. They have been chosen because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards hi-fi that will give years of musical enjoyment and total satisfaction.

## Our Top 20 UK Hi-Fi Dealers

### SOUTH

**Ashford, Kent**  
**SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI**  
40 High Street.  
t: 01233 624441  
www.soundcraftifi.com

**Chelmsford**  
**RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION**

216 Moulsham Street.  
t: 01245 265245  
www.rayleighhifi.com

**Kingston-upon-Thames**  
**INFIDELITY**

9 High Street,  
Hampton Wick.  
t: 020 8943 3530  
www.infidelity.co.uk

**Maidenhead**  
**AUDIO VENUE**  
36 Queen Street.  
t: 01628 633995  
www.audiovenue.com

**Norwich**  
**MARTINS HI-FI**  
85-91 Ber Street.  
t: 01603 627134  
www.martinshifi.co.uk

**Rayleigh**  
**RAYLEIGH HI-FI**  
44a High Street.  
t: 01268 779762  
www.rayleighhifi.com

**Southend-on-Sea**  
**RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION**  
132/4 London Road.  
t: 01702 435255  
www.rayleighhifi.com

### LONDON

**Ealing**  
**AUDIO VENUE**  
27 Bond Street.  
t: 020 8567 8703  
www.audiovenue.com

**N1**  
**GRAHAMS HI-FI**  
190a New North Road.  
t: 020 7226 5500  
www.grahams.co.uk

**SW11**  
**ORANGES & LEMONS**  
61/63 Webbs Road.  
t: 020 7924 2040  
www.oandlhifi.co.uk

**SOUTH WEST**  
**Bath**  
**AUDIENCE**  
14 Broad Street.  
t: 01225 333310  
www.audience.org.uk

**Cinderford**  
**CERITECH AUDIO**  
1 Pavilion Business Park,  
Speculation Road.  
t: 01600 716362  
www.ceritech-audio.co.uk

**Exeter**  
**GULLIFORD HI-FI**  
97 Sidwell Street.  
t: 01392 491194  
www.gullifordhifi.co.uk

### MIDLANDS

**Banbury**  
**OVERTURE**  
3 Church Lane.  
t: 01295 272158  
www.overture.co.uk

**Coventry**  
**FRANK HARVEY**  
163 Spon Street.  
t: 024 7652 5200  
www.frankharvey.co.uk

**Leicester**  
**CYMBIOSIS**  
8 Brook Park,  
Gaddesby Lane.  
t: 0333 200 4475  
www.cymbiosis.com

**NORTH**  
**Chester**  
**ACOUSTICA**  
17 Hoole Road.  
t: 01244 344227  
www.acoustica.co.uk

**Gateshead**  
**LINTONE AUDIO**  
7-11 Park Lane.  
t: 0191 477 4167  
www.lintone.co.uk

**Hull**  
**THE AUDIO ROOM**  
Savile Street, Hull  
t: 01482 891375  
www.theaudiroom.co.uk

**York**  
**SOUND ORGANISATION**  
2 Gillygate.  
t: 01904 627108  
www.soundorg.co.uk

Visit [www.top20uk.com](http://www.top20uk.com)



### STAR QUALITIES

VALUE FOR MONEY .....	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
SERVICE .....	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
FACILITIES .....	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
VERDICT .....	★ ★ ★ ★ ★





## HDMI cables

Digital cables that carry both picture and sound. These carry control signals as well, so they can integrate the operation of components in your system.

### Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Length as tested (m)	HDMI type
<b>Up to £80</b>					
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
<b>£80 and above</b>					
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	★★★★★	Muscular-sounding and excellent in every regard	1.5 1.3
Chord Co. Supershield (5m)	90	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A punchy award winner that defies its low price tag	5 1.3a
Ecosse Picture Perfect Ultra	110	09.08/GT	★★★★★	This Ecosse gives a punchy, powerful performance with great detail levels	5 1.3
Ecosse Picture Perfect Ultra +	169	09.08/GT	★★★★★	With its punchy, powerful and composed production, this cable oozes dynamics	5 1.3
QED Reference	125	06.10/GT	★★★★★	An assured, but expensive, performer	5 1.3a
Supra HF100 HDMI (8m)	112	08.06/GT	★★★★★	Not just pretty but it delivers impressive performance over eight metres	8 1.0
van den Hul Flat 180	90	10.09/GT	★★★★★	Typical van den Hul quality from a hinged cable that doesn't fall out of its socket	2 1.3b
van den Hul Flat HDMI (3m)	105	03.09/GT	★★★★★	One of the best HDMI cables we've ever heard	3 1.3
van den Hul Ultimate	300	10.08/FT	★★★★★	It's pricey, but has good performance	1 1.3
Vivanco SHQ Ultra	80	06.10/FT	★★★★★	It's an enjoyable watch, although there's some reservation	1.2 1.4
Wireworld Chroma 5 HDMI (7m)	109	07.07/GT	★★★★★	Flexible cable that delivers pictures as good as any HDMI cable at this price	7 1.0



## 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)
<b>Up to £50</b>					
Audioquest Forest USB 1.5	25	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Got a budget laptop and a budget DAC? This cable is ideal for connecting them	USB 1.5
Atlas Fibre Optic	32	06.09/GT	★★★★★	Fine, substantial, budget cable choice	Optical 1
Profigold PROI2102	30	03.11/FT	★★★★★	Simple upgrade to the iPod/iPhone-to-USB cable - music sounds cleaner and clearer	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

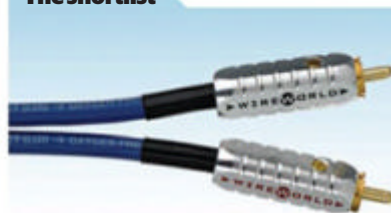
Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Length tested (m)
<b>Up to £50</b>					
QED Performance Coaxial	30	10.08/GT	★★★★★	Best coaxial digital cable, Awards 2012	Co-axial 1
QED Performance Graphite	40	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best optical digital cable, Awards 2012	Optical 1
Supra USB 2.0	29	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best USB cable, 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
<b>£50 and above</b>					
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 ★★★★★



## QED Reference Audio 40

06.14 Group Test ★★★★★



**AWARD WINNER**  
Atlas Element Integra

Awards 2014: Best Analogue Interconnect

## Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	RCA phono 3.5mm-to-RCA XLR (balanced)	Length tested (m)
<b>Up to £50</b>					
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
<b>£50 and above</b>					
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

## ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		RCA phono 3.5mm-to-RCA XLR (balanced) Length tested (m)
Chord Company Indigo Plus	995	05.09/FT	★★★★★	It's genius in an interconnect - but you need the right system	● 1
Chord Crimson Vee3	50	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A nice, easy-going cable that's a little too restrained	● 1
Ecosse The Baton Mk II	104	08.08/GT	★★★★★	Although there's much to admire, the Baton Mk II can struggle to gel sounds	● ● 0.8
Furutech Alpha Line-1	80	03.11/FT	★★★★★	A cable for owners of midrange systems to get very excited by - very good indeed	● 1
QED J2P	50	12.09/FT	★★★★★	Fast and agile 3.5mm-RCA cable	● 1.5
QED Reference Audio 40	85	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Reassuring build quality from a cable that brings fantastic depth and dimension	● 1
QED Reference Audio J2P	50	12.09/FT	★★★★★	Clean sounding and packed with detail	● 1.5
van den Hul The Bay C5	85	06.14/GT	★★★★★	For bright-sounding systems The Bay could be the antidote	● 1
van den Hul The Name	60	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Energy and fun trump ultimate precision	● 0.8
van den Hul The Wave	100	01.09/FT	★★★★★	The Wave has a formidable array of talents and is one of the best cables at this kind of money	● 1
van den Hul The Well	100	06.11/GT	★★★★★	An ideal booster for thin sounding kit	● ● 1
Wireworld Oasis 6	130	06.11/GT	★★★★★	A truly splendid cable for kit worth £800-£1000	● ● 1



## Mains products

**IEC** Usually a three-pin connector used in most hi-fi (and kettles)  
**Figure of 8** Small, two-pin connector. Tends to be used on lower-priced products  
**Blocks and conditioners** Multi-plug units, some of which attempt to filter noise out of the mains

## Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Cable Block Conditioner Figure of 8 (2-pin) IEC (3-pin) Number of sockets
<b>Up to £100</b>					
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
<b>£100 and above</b>					
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

Subscriptions 0844 848 8813 email: [whathifi@servicehelpline.co.uk](mailto:whathifi@servicehelpline.co.uk)



## Sound Fantastic

Olsons *Sound Fantastic* range of units are specifically designed for both the home and professional hi-fi audio markets.

Each unit is fitted with a 10A mains R.F.I. filter with earthline choke and transient suppressor, designed to filter mains-borne transients, switching surges, R.F. interference, intermittent spikes and other disturbances.

- Robust steel construction
- 13A Sockets
- 10A Panel Mount Fuse
- RFI 10A Mains Filter & Surge Suppressor
- External Earth Stud
- 2m x 1.5mm Screened Cable
- UK Plug - 10A Fuse Fitted
- Colour Black
- Specials to order

TYPE NO.	NO. OF SOCKETS	OVERALL LENGTH
HF 4	4	446mm
HF 6	6	557mm
HF 8	8	670mm

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## Speaker cables

These carry the audio signal from your amplifier to your speakers. Bi-wiring uses two runs of cables per speaker and can lead to improvements in the speakers' performance.

### The shortlist



**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	Biwire
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

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QED XT40 Speaker Cable



Wireworld Lluna 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		Biwire
QED Ruby Anniversary	6	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Rich and detailed but lacking in rhythm and dynamics	
QED Ruby Anniversary Evolution	6	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Rich, detailed, energetic and clean. A great cable	
QED X-TC	4	09.10/FT	★★★★★	A great budget cable that's able to hold its own	
Talk Electronics Talk 3	4	07.11/GT	★★★★★	An essential first cable upgrade	
Wireworld Luna 7	6.50	03.14/GT	★★★★★	The all-round ability of this cable means it should sit well with a wide range of systems	
Wireworld The Stream 16/2	5	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Still a cracking cable, but losing out to better competition	
Wireworld Stream 7	6	11.13/GT	★★★★★	If you're a fan of detail then you should definitely consider the Stream 7	

## £10/m and above

Atlas Hyper 2.0	15	07.08/GT	★★★★★	If your system warrants this kind of cable, you won't be disappointed	
Atlas Mavros (5m)	2290	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Pair with an extravagant system and get excellent performance	●
Chord Company Signature	125	01.07/GT	★★★★★	One of the most effective upgrades you will ever hear if you own expensive kit	
Ecosse MS2.4	50	01.08/FT	★★★★★	A massively detailed cable that reveals subtleties with refinement	
Kimber 4VS	12	04.10/GT	★★★★★	An accomplished performer with an expressive sound	
QED XT40	10	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	<b>Best speaker cable, Awards 2014. Product of the Year</b>	
QED Revelation	15	04.10/GT	★★★★★	A fine cable that should be on your audition list	
QED Silver Anniv. XT Biwire	10	10.06/GT	★★★★★	A clear class-leader with exceptional sonic transparency on display	●
van den Hul The Clearwater	10	03.14/GT	★★★★★	A cable with an impressive level of detail and clarity	



## Speaker stands

Many stands are hollow and can be filled with sand or other similar heavy materials. This is to increase mass and dampening and the sonic benefit is tighter bass – although too much of it can be counter-productive and end up deadening the sound.

## The shortlist



**Custom Design FS104 Signature**  
£200



**Q Acoustics Concept 20 speaker stands**  
£200



**AWARD WINNER**  
**Atacama Moseco 6**  
Awards 2014: Best speaker stands

## Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Fillable	Finishes
<b>Up to £500</b>							
Atacama Duo 6	65	02.13/GT	★★★★★	A very likable pair of speaker stands	60x31x31	●	1
Atacama Nexus 6	200	12.00/FT	★★★★★	Still fine performers despite their age	60x25x30	●	1
Atacama Moseco 6	120	09.14/GT	★★★★★	<b>Best speaker stands, Awards 2014</b>	60x24x28	●	4
Custom rc60 Deluxe	125	10.07/FT	★★★★★	This bespoke service has made a fine pair stands	60x20x25		5
Custom Design FS103	160	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A good pair of stands but rivals offer better overall performance	61x22x26	●	4
Custom Design FS104 Signature	200	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Best speaker stands, Awards 2013	62x16x18	●	4
Custom Design RS300	90	03.07/GT	★★★★★	Minimal design, a thoroughly appealing listen	61x22x26	●	2
Custom Design RS302	120	11.06/FT	★★★★★	Plenty of detail & clarity especially with vocals	61x22x26	●	3
Hi Fi Racks Podium Slimline	120	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A comfortable listening experience that's marred by some less than appealing fuzziness	60x15x21		5
Mission Stance	100	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Will do a fine job with £200-£400 speakers	58x21x28	●	3
Partington ANSA 60	150	09.11/GT	★★★★★	They remain fine stands - but no longer outstanding value	60x23x28	●	1
Part. D'nought Broadside	300	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Deliver wide ranging improvements to sound	60x23x28		1
Part. Super Dreadnought	180	03.07/GT	★★★★★	Best £100+ speaker stands in Awards 2007	60x16x17	●	1
Q Acoustics 20 speaker stands	200	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Clever construction and great performance makes these stands ideal support for all types of speakers	66.5x39x24		2
Soundstyle Z2	70	11.08/FT	★★★★★	Best sub-£100 speaker stand in Awards 2007	57x17x23	●	2

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## 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

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	Variable60x55	3
Atacama Evoque Eco 60-40	450	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Best equipment support, Awards 2014	3	Variable60x40	3
Atacama Eris Eco 5.0	460	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Best equipment support, Awards 2013	4	70x59x56	4
Audiophile Base Stratabase	360	01.08/FT	★★★★★	It isn't cheap but justifies the cost	1	0.4x43x36	2
Custom Design Concept AV	350	04.07/GT	★★★★★	Looks and sounds excellent, plus four colour options	3	60x101x40	4
Custom Design Milan 4	470	11.09/GT	★★★★★	Small and well made, but lacks subtlety	4	59x57x40	5
Custom Design Milan LCD3	350	09.08/FT	★★★★★	A stylish addition to Custom Design's catalogue	3	42x77x40	4
Hi Fi Racks Podium	460	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Best equipment support, Awards 2011	3	62x60x40	1
HiFi Racks Podium SL Ak. XL	260	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Easy to build and a very good deal for the good price	3	Variable79.5x40	5
Hi Fi Racks Podium Slimline	350	03.13/FT	★★★★★	A simple rack design with pretty decent results	4	Variable55x40	1
Quadraspire Q4evo	380	11.09/GT	★★★★★	A solid, cohesive and supremely affordable rack	4	Variable59x39.5	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	Variable115x32	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	Variable59x40	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	Variable163x52	8
Quadraspire Sunoko Vent T	800	11.09/GT	★★★★★	A first-rate rack, that highlights subtleties	4	Variable59x47	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	VariableVariable53	16

**"For an affordable phono stage, the Musical Fidelity V-LPS II produces admirable results, not least if you want a rich, bass-led sound"**

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## Headphone amps

The headphone outputs on most products are usually afterthoughts and have had little care taken in trying to make them sound good. A dedicated headphone amp is a must if you want the best headphone sound.

### Our recommendations

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Line level in Outputs	
Up to £1500					
Beyerdynamic A1	975	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Best headphone amplifier £500+, Awards 2010. A formidable combo when partnered with T1 headphones	2 1
Chord Electronics Toucan	800	10.10/FT	★★★★★	A headphone amp with built in DAC that's worth a punt	2 2
Creek OBH-21SE	280	04.09/GT	★★★★★	Perfectly pleasant but it could do with more bite	2 2
Edwards Audio HA1	280	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Packs a punch but not that refined	2 1
FiiO E7	65	03.11/FT	★★★★★	One of the most cost-effective ways to improve headphone sound from a computer	1 2
Lehmann Black Cube Linear	750	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Deeply impressive device given the right system	1 1
Lehmann Rhineland	400	04.09/GT	★★★★★	Best headphone amplifier £300-£500, Awards 2010. Its user-friendly sound makes this a very wise buy	2 2
Meridian Prime	1200	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A top-class headphone amp and a talented preamp to boot	2 4
Musical Fidelity V-CAN II	120	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Does enough right to be worth serious consideration	1 3
Pathos Aurium	850	08.13/FT	★★★★★	This amplifier is a top class choice	4 2



## Phono amps

Dedicated units tend to sound better than the circuits integrated into amplifiers. Higher priced options usually allow for electrical optimisation for your cartridge, thus producing better results.

### Our recommendations

Our recommendations								
Product	£	Tested	Verdict		MM	MC	Finishes	Dimensions (lwd, cm)
Up to £500								
Cambridge Audio 651P	120	06.13/GT	★★★★★	A phono stage that belies its budget price	●	●	1	2.5x8x11
Creek Audio OBH-15	240	02.09/GT	★★★★★	Decent phono amplifier for a relaxed listen	●	●	1	6x10x15
Graham Slee Gr- Amp 2 Comm.	160	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Low on frills, high on quality	●		1	7x10x25
Leema Elements	495	03.10/FT	★★★★★	Best phono stage, Awards 2011	●	●	2	5x11x10
Lehmann Black Cube	325	02.09/GT	★★★★★	Clarity and punchiness make this a great amp	●	●	1	5x11x11
Pro-Ject Phono Box S	120	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Just needs a little more excitement to trouble its rivals	●	●	2	7x10x14
Musical Fidelity V-LPS II	160	06.13/GT	★★★★★	For an affordable phono stage, the V-LPS II produces admirable results	●	●	1	5x11x11
Rega Fono Mini A2D	85	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Best phono stage, Awards 2012	●		1	6x18x25
Rega Fono MM MK2	200	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Best phono stage, Awards 2014	●	●	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)
<b>Up to £500</b>					
Goldring 2100	92	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.7
Goldring 2500	224	03.09/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.7
Grado Prestige Silver	115	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.5
Nagaoka MP110	89	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.8
Ortofon 2M Black	460	04.11/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.5
Ortofon 2M Bronze	275	03.09/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.5
Ortofon 2M Red	80	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.8
Rega Exact	195	03.09/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.75
Roksan Corus Silver	400	01.11/FT	★★★★★	MM	1.9





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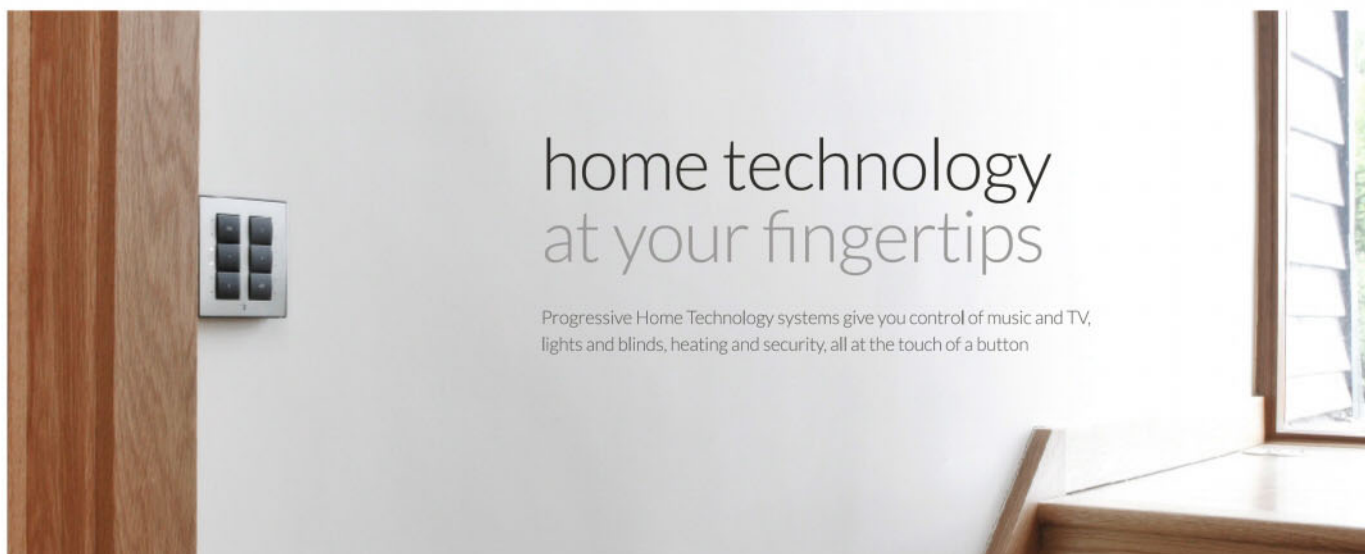
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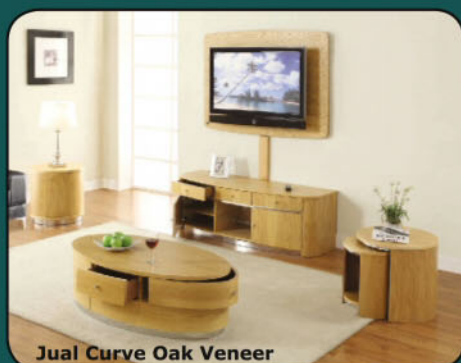
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- ✓ Three finishes
- ✓ Sturdy cabinet

Was: £229.95

**£99**

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## Performance Graphite 6.35mm 1.5m

- ✓ 99.999% oxygen free
- ✓ 24K gold plated
- ✓ Ergonomically sculpted
- ✓ QED lifetime guarantee

Was: £39.95

**£29.95**

QED



25% OFF

QUOTE ME 6514

## Vector V-W8 White Subwoofer

- ✓ 8" long throw woofer
- ✓ Forward firing driver
- ✓ 100Watt amplifier
- ✓ Auto-on-off facility

Was: £259.95

**£150**

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42% OFF

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## HTS Cherry Subwoofer

- ✓ Rigid Braced Cabinet
- ✓ 8in Bass Driver
- ✓ High Power Amplifier
- ✓ Flexible Controls

Was: £279.00

**£99**

TANNOY



65% OFF

QUOTE ME 13469

## CX-S Satellite Speakers

- ✓ Compact
- ✓ Stylish
- ✓ High performance
- ✓ Aluminium enclosure

Was: £299.00

**£149**

AUDICA



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## Performance 3.5mm Jack To Jack Cable 3m

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- ✓ 24K gold plated
- ✓ Ergonomically sculpted
- ✓ QED lifetime guarantee

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- ✓ With Black Plinth
- ✓ Adjustable shelves
- ✓ Good ventilation
- ✓ Media storage

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**£150**

alphason



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## Airstream A100 Airplay Amplifier

- ✓ 5\* Product
- ✓ Apple Airplay
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- ✓ Totally silent operation

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**£199**

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50% OFF

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- ✓ Multi-zone
- ✓ Apple Airplay
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- ✓ Fully adjustable
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- ✓ Paintable cover
- ✓ Easy to install

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- ✓ Ultra slim design
- ✓ Gamma Geometry

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**£12.99**

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- ✓ Lifetime warranty
- ✓ AC Noise Filtering

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- ✓ 30 AWG conductors
- ✓ Ideal For HD cameras

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- ✓ 1080p



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**£799**

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- ✓ Apple Airplay
- ✓ 1080p



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**£Call**

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10872

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- ✓ Dolby Atmos
- ✓ Spotify
- ✓ 3D Ready



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**£Call**

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11915

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SOUND AND VISION  
★★★★★



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**£1149**

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- ✓ High grade cable
- ✓ Save tangle and hassle



Apple Certified

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# THAT WAS THEN

## Audiolab 8000DAC

A digital landmark

Audiolab's £695 8000DAC uses Philips' BitStream technology, but this is no dedicated following of fashion – no way did Audiolab tread the single-bit path simply because everyone else was.

Rather the company did try using multibit converters, including dual and differential mode configurations. It decided, however, that in tandem with its choice of 20 bit 8x oversampling digital filtering and its master clock regeneration system (designed to eliminate distortion-inducing jitter), the BitStream system simply sounded better.

Four digital inputs are provided, two optical and two electrical. Of the latter, one has a con-

### Thrilling DAC is a sound investment for the future

ventional single phono socket, while the other uses the XLR connector found on some upmarket transports.

There's also a digital output, which produces a low-jitter feed for recording, and two sets of analogue outputs, so the DAC can feed an amp and a tape deck directly. The 8000 switches automatically for the different sampling frequencies of CD, DAT and other digital sources, and is also designed to

handle older sources which may not conform to the industry Class 1 standard. Finally, the unit is of a modular design, allowing it to be upgraded to take account of future developments.

The sound of the Audiolab is well up to the best of BitStream, making the 8000DAC a strong competitor against the likes of the less expensive, though less flexible, Meridian 203. On test it was fed from an Arcam Delta 170 transport as the main source, but was also connected to an elderly Philips CD160 multi-bit player, as well as Sony's DTC-P7 DAT deck.

The essential character of the Audiolab DAC, as with other products from this stable, was neutrality. Certainly the DAC tends to produce a full, weighty bass, but there's

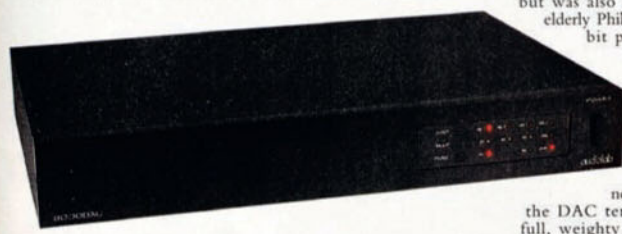
never any sense that the low notes are being overblown. Rather the effect is thrillingly natural.

Voices, similarly, are handled delicately, with no undue emphasis on natural sibilance, and plenty of space around them in minimal recordings, so you get a very real sense of the singer's presence. Of course, overprocessed recordings do suffer from this revealing nature, with the artifice ruthlessly revealed.

The 8000DAC also presents a detailed but stress-free treble, allowing strings to sing out without the sense that a nasty shriek is in the offing. The violins never sounded in the slightest bit steely or glassy, rather their natural bite came through while the fluidity of the music was retained.

The Audiolab isn't the least expensive Bitstream DAC on the market, but it is upgradeable. It can also handle a range of inputs. This should ensure the 8000DAC is a sound investment as the choice of digital formats grows.

- ✓ Neutral, with detailed, stress-free treble
- ✗ Revealing with over-processed recordings



**Audiolab 8000DAC (£695):** the modular design allows for future upgrades/developments

**T**his issue sees Audiolab's mighty M-DAC win yet another test. That's no great surprise to us considering the way this superb unit has dominated the mid-priced DAC segment for the best part of five years.

Yet this recent bout of success is not the first time Audiolab has produced a class-leading digital-to-analogue converter. We tested the company's original number-cruncher, the 8000DAC, back in our July 1992 issue and rated the unit enough to give it an Award later that year.

### Advanced for its time

The 8000DAC was a neatly made thing, finished with a professionalism few homegrown rivals could match. At the time its connectivity was considered extensive, having two optical and two electrical inputs. That sounds pretty limited by today's standards, right? But remember, the only readily available digital source was CD. Minidisc and DAT (Digital Audio Tape) existed, but had barely scratched the mass-market consciousness, while DAB was only in development and the whole Computer Audio thing was years in the future. In the 8000DAC's day even the ability to handle 44.1kHz and 48kHz sampling rates would be considered worthy of credit.

When it came to sound we noted its tonal neutrality and the impressive resolution on offer. The 8000DAC's dynamics were well developed and there was plenty of precision. These same traits are still very much apparent in the M-DAC.

Yes, the current DAC looks different, and adds greater technical sophistication, but compare the two and the common DNA is clear. We wonder which one will be more revered in decades to come? We think it'll be the M-DAC – it's that good.



Today's equivalent to the 8000DAC, the M-DAC, is a more-than-worthy modern successor

**Its connectivity was considered extensive at the time, having two optical and two electrical inputs**

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