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You gotta see the show – it's a dynamo, it's rock and roll

There's no immediate comparison to be drawn between Las Vegas (USA) and Bristol (UK). But although our boots have barely cooled after **CES 2015 (p24, and covered extensively at whathifi.com)**, later this month we're off to the **Sound and Vision Show (p28, and covered extensively etc)**. Bristol may arguably lack some of the Vegas glamour, but in quite a few ways it's the more enjoyable event.

It's on a more manageable scale, for starters. And there's a bit more of an emphasis on real-world products of interest to real-world consumers (like the **brilliantly affordable speakers tested on p32**, for example, or **p65's headphones test**). Plus it's a sight easier to have a proper natter with industry experts too. The more I think about it, in fact, the more I think you should come along. You'd enjoy it.



Simon

Simon Lucas, editor

My products of the month



Wharfedale Diamond 220

Supertest p40

There's little in life as pleasing as a thoroughly sorted and affordable speaker



Google Chromecast

Group test p51

It does loads, for next-to no money and is tiny. It's quite like witchcraft

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"A rare sequel that improves on the original: the specs alone offer everything a reasonable user requires"



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Subscribe to *What Hi-Fi?* Sound and Vision and get some fine free buds

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Temptation
"We can't think of an alternative system that delivers a sound with such detail and focus"

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

Revamped hi-fi guide!
1500 products rated **p87**
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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TEST WINNER

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FIRST TESTS

**MORE
FIRST TESTS**



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On top of limited compatibility, it's a flawed performance



Pioneer N-50A
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A superstar to begin with. It has now been improved



Triangle Esprit Titus
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One of the most enjoyable speakers below the £1000 mark

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EXCLUSIVE

An ambitious attempt by Arcam to raise the bar

Arcam Solo bar | Soundbar | £800

There's more than one way to skin a cat, or in the case of home cinema, use a soundbar. One way is to plug your sources into your TV and have just one digital cable running from the back of your set into the unit.

The other approach is one taken by Arcam and it's first ever entry into this market: the Solo bar. The British company has used its experience in home cinema to transplant some of the brains and features of a surround-sound receiver into its new creation.

Surprise package

So the Solo bar has a number features you expect to see in a home cinema amp and a couple of surprises thrown in too: four 4K-supporting HDMI inputs. The Arcam's HDMI output is also ARC (Audio Return Channel) enabled, so it can accept audio from compatible TVs.

Cycle through Arcam's menus and you'll find 'Auto Setup.' Like some surround-

sound amps, the Solo bar comes with a microphone and automatic-calibration software. Hit 'ok' on the remote, the bar fires out a few test tones and the levels of the speakers in the bar are adjusted accordingly. When it's connected, the bar does the same for the optional wireless Play subwoofer too (see panel).

There's no on-screen GUI (graphical user interface) for the Solo bar, everything's done through the display on the unit. It's reasonably large and fits in a decent amount of information, although the pale blue characters look dated compared to the dark green ones on other Arcam kit.

Once the soundbar has been calibrated you still have the option of switching the EQ off, and you might want to experiment to see what you prefer. With it on, we find the Arcam sounds more airy and open. Turn it off and you sacrifice some of the spaciousness but gain more solidity at the bottom end.

You also have three different sound modes to work with: 'Movie', 'Concert' and 'Stereo'. 'Movie' gives a broader spread of sound, while the other two give varying degrees of focus. Play music through the Arcam's Bluetooth receiver and the system defaults automatically to 'Stereo'.

Once the soundbar has been calibrated, you still have the option of switching the EQ off. With it on, we find that the Arcam Solo bar sounds more airy and open



Arcam supplies shaped feet that slot under the soundbar to angle it upwards, which is useful if it is much lower than where you are seated



In detail...

The Arcam Solo sub isn't cheap and costs an extra £500. It's a sealed-box design and uses a 10in driver together with a 300 watt amplifier. The most convenient way to connect is wirelessly, but there's always the wired option too.



A plus-point for the Arcam is its ability to decode the high-quality Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio soundtracks found on Blu-ray discs, something many rivals cannot do

Talking of Bluetooth, the Arcam allows you to go wireless, but with a significant twist. Not only can you beam music to the Solo bar the traditional way, but you can also transmit sound from it to a pair of Bluetooth headphones. It's a clever touch and something we haven't seen in a soundbar before. Bonus points to Arcam for thinking outside the box... or should that be outside the bar?

Bar any issues

The bar itself is quite a substantial unit, with a solid, aluminium chassis. To all intents and purposes it's a pair of speakers with 50-watts per channel. The tweeters at either end of the bar are angled out, at five degrees each, to enhance the width. There's a bracket for wall-mounting bundled in the box too. Since the first shipment went into stores, Arcam now supplies wedge-shaped-feet that slot under the soundbar and help angle it upwards, which is useful if it is at a much lower level than you are seated.

Besides the smart use of Bluetooth, another plus point for the Arcam is its ability to decode the high-quality Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio soundtracks found on Blu-ray discs. The majority of soundbars on the market tend to only take the core DTS and Dolby soundtracks off a disc so, theoretically, the Arcam is digging out more information than many of its rivals.

In reality, movie soundtracks beam out of the Arcam loud and clear, and there's an impressive level of transparency across the board. Soak up the action from the DTS-HD Master Audio soundtrack to *After Earth*, and you're aware of the bar's even tonal balance. Voices are just as audible and lucid as the action. Just before Kitai sky-jumps off the waterfall there's a ton of detail in the heated exchange between Jaden and Will Smith. As the young hero tries to avoid the giant bird of prey, there's a real sense of punch and precision, as bird and boy swoop and jostle.



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



In detail...



- 1** There are two 3.5mm inputs tucked away under the Arcam. The one on the left is an analogue input for hooking up a different source. The right input is for the Solo's set-up microphone – don't get the two confused!
- 2** You've got access to both optical and coaxial digital inputs. They sit alongside a subwoofer pre-out, should you want to connect to the Solo sub (or any other sub) via a wired connection.
- 3** Four HDMI inputs should be more than enough for a set-top box, games console, Blu-ray player and so on. If you suffer any lip-sync issues, you can manually adjust the delay in the Arcam's menus.



The remote that comes with the Solo bar is very similar to the stock remote that gets packaged with a lot of Arcam electronics. It's small, minimalist and feels quite cheap. It also seems to suffer from a split personality – sometimes we press buttons and get an instant response, other times we press the same button (mainly volume) three, or four times before it decides to respond. There is a solution: Arcam suggests



you download its dedicated Solo bar remote app for iOS and Android devices. It connects via Bluetooth, mirrors the soundbar's display on your phone, and also gives you access to the same assortment of buttons via your touchscreen. The Solo is quicker to respond to these prompts too.

Where the Arcam doesn't quite succeed is in drawing you into the film, as it doesn't really convey the dynamics or drama of the movie as well as it could. As the camera pans and streams merge into the waterfall, rival soundbars, like the Dali Kubik One or Focal Dimension, give more of a sense of the rushing water and the power of Mother Nature as it cascades over the edge. There's greater richness and finesse to the sound too. Dialogue sounds that bit more natural and emotional.

Fails to bring the funk

Playing Stevie Wonder's *Live At Last* Blu-ray, the Arcam shows it's able to deliver music with poise and precision. During *Superstition* percussion stops and starts in all the right places. The saxophone has a distinct tone, but it doesn't sound edgy or hard enough. It's easy enough to listen and isolate all the different elements of the

track. We just aren't excited enough, and the normal upbeat funk of this classic tune doesn't register as much as it does when heard through more capable rivals. They offer greater weight and richness in the bass and greater dynamic thrust.

In need of a little finesse

The story continues when you switch to simple streaming of music via Bluetooth. Complex rhythms don't present a problem and there's nothing wrong with how the Arcam organises music. But nonetheless you still yearn for greater finesse and sonic artistry.

Arcam has been very ambitious with the Solo bar, and in some ways it goes above and beyond what we've come to expect from this kind of product. But when it comes to sound quality, the Arcam doesn't quite cut it against the very best.

TECH SPECS

Inputs HDMI x4, optical, coaxial digital • **Outputs** HDMI (ARC) subwoofer • **Bluetooth** Yes • **Decodes** Dolby TrueHD, DTS-HD Master Audio • **Subwoofer** Wireless (optional) • **Dimensions (hwd)** 13 x 100 x 11cm • **Weight** 6.4kg

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Build; four HDMI inputs; receives and transmits audio over Bluetooth

AGAINST Struggles with dynamics and subtlety; lacks weight and finesse; poor remote

VERDICT An ambitious piece of kit which almost pulls it off

Also consider

Dali Kubik One £800 ★★★★★

Dali's entry into the soundbar market has a decent smattering of features and boasts excellent sound quality.

During Stevie Wonder's *Superstition*, percussion stops and starts in all the right places. Saxophone has a distinct tone, but it doesn't sound edgy or hard enough. We just aren't excited enough when we compare the Arcam with rivals



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- 1** Our seating position is slightly above the Solo bar, so we use the small plastic feet supplied to tilt it upwards a few degrees.
- 2** We experiment with the different sound modes and find we prefer the EQ off and either the 'Movie' or 'Stereo' modes.
- 3** The standard plastic remote can be frustrating so we switch to the iOS app, which is much better.
- 4** Once we've paired our iPhone 6 to the Arcam we open Spotify to stream some tunes over Bluetooth which...
- 5** ...turns into late-night listening, so we pair the Arcam to a set of Bose Bluetooth headphones – the set-up works a treat.

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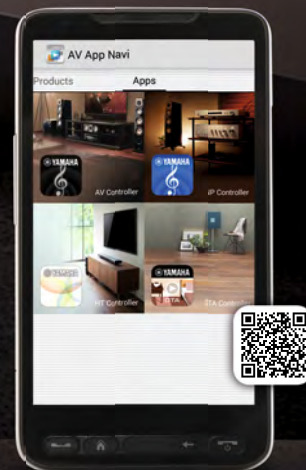
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Powered by music.

Pioneer N-50A | Musicstreamer | £500

A sequel offering you just can't refuse



In 2012, Pioneer released the N-50 and it proved so formidable that we gave it an Award – two years in a row. Now we have the Pioneer N-50A, a rare sequel that improves upon the original: the specs alone offer everything a reasonable user requires.

We are fans of the brushed aluminium faceplate and its minimalist design

Fully certified

The N-50A works with a number of sources. Its DLNA certification means it will traverse your network to shake hands with other connected devices, from NAS drives to smartphones. USB Type-A ports let you play from iPods and iPhones, as well as hard drives and memory sticks. A USB Type-B connection allows you hook up a computer.

You also get Spotify Connect and internet radio, while AirPlay brings in Apple devices. And if that's not enough, there are digital optical or coaxial inputs. Optional external adapters offer to add wi-fi or Bluetooth. File compatibility is extensive: MP3, LPCM, WAV, WMA, AAC, Apple lossless, FLAC, AIFF and DSD. Got high-res audio? This thing goes up to 32-bit/192kHz (or 5.6mHz with DSD). The N-50A can take pretty much anything you can throw at it.

But what really impresses us is how it sounds: the top end sparkles (it is confident

It's a toe-tapping performance, rhythmically adept and fluidly dynamic. Vocals are expressive. There's plenty of attack, too: punch and precision makes for an engaging listen

and controlled, but never sounds hard), while the midrange is poised and detailed. Bass notes are hefty but not heavy-handed. Tonal shifts are conveyed with ease.

It's a toe-tapping performance, rhythmically adept and fluidly dynamic. Vocals are expressive. There's plenty of attack, too: the combination of precision and punch makes for an engaging listen.

There's also plenty of insight thanks to good detail definition and a high level of clarity. Instruments and vocals are placed firmly on the soundstage, which is airy and spacious.

'Artificial high-resolution'

If you're the type to fiddle with the sound modes, then you're in luck. 'Hi-bit32 audio processing' expands the input bit signals in an attempt to create a more analogue-like waveform. 'Up-Sampling' increases the sampling frequency to 192kHz. Artificial high-resolution, in other words. The sound becomes more detailed, but it feels manicured and less dynamic.

There's also the 'Auto Sound Retriever' option for low-quality, high-compression files. We found it affected the quality of normal tracks too: the sound gets a bit cloudy, so we wouldn't recommend it.

We prefer listening on 'Direct' mode, which is the default setting. Here, audio signals bypass digital processing to reduce noise. The performance is clearer and more precise than standard, with tighter timing.

The N-50A is a well-built metal box, which looks and feels like a quality item. We are fans of the brushed aluminium faceplate and its modern, minimalist vibe.

The colour LCD screen, which felt cramped in the original N-50, has been bumped up to 3.5in and the finish options are in silver (the N-50A-S, for your information), or you can opt for the N-50A-K. Here the 'K' stands for 'kuro' (or black to the rest of us).

The remote control offers well-spaced, solid, responsive buttons. Smartphone fans can download the control app (imaginatively called 'ControlApp') for free on Android and iOS. This is great for track selection and viewing album artwork, but we wouldn't mind if it were a little slicker to use.

The Pioneer N-50A is a success. If you're in the market for a sensibly-priced network audio player, look no further. This is a talented performer, with plenty of tricks stuffed into its capacious sleeves. It's not easy to surpass a double Award-winner, but that's what Pioneer has done here. And we are absolutely delighted.

In detail

1 Go wireless

The N-50A doesn't have any built-in wireless goodies, but you can buy the AS-WL300, Pioneer's own wireless adapter, which plugs into the ethernet socket, and is powered by this USB output.

2 Take control

If you have Pioneer's other components (such as a CD player or amplifier) you can hook them up here and control everything centrally with the Pioneer ControlApp.



Rating ★★★★★

FOR Sounds great; looks great; impressive features list; decent remote app

AGAINST Wireless adapters come separately; that apart, not a lot

VERDICT A superstar, that has been improved. Pioneer has done it again

Also consider Bluesound Node £400 ★★★★★

A great way to stream your music without breaking the bank, and a good option if an extensive feature spec isn't on your list of priorities.



Philips SW750M | Wireless speaker | £130

Philips narrows it down

At face value the slim Philips SW750M may seem like a tempting multi-room option - for Spotify Premium users at least. The speaker can play music solely from Spotify through the streaming service's Connect feature, available only to subscribers of the £10-per-month version. Essentially, Connect lets you stream the service's 30 million-song catalogue to the speaker over a shared wi-fi connection, using its app as a remote control.

The Philips doesn't have Bluetooth or any physical inputs, so non-subscribers or those that listen to music from other sources too will need to look elsewhere.

Multi-room options

One speaker can be used on its own, or grouped with up to three others (of any combination in the Philips' range) to take advantage of its multi-room functionality. Getting started couldn't be easier - the simple set-up process via Philips' SpeakerSet app (free, iOS and Android) gets you up and running in a few minutes.

Spotify's app (extensively available across Windows, Android, iOS and even Blackberry platforms) will be your go-to controller for the most part, though. For those unfamiliar with it, its attractive and intuitive interface is easy to get along with.

If a smartphone is your device of choice you can still make or take calls and watch videos during playback as music streaming runs in the background. What you can't do is stream files stored on a device, so any songs not on Spotify's database aren't playable through the speaker.

A kind of versatility

While the Philips is hardly versatile when it comes to features, its attractive physical design is more so. Despite the twin rear-firing bass ports, it's as happy close to a wall as it is in the middle of a table.

If you've already cast your eyes to the star rating, you'll know there's a catch: poor performance. At this price, the benchmark

is set by Cambridge Audio's Bluetooth-based Go (our Award-winner), and plonked next to the SW750M it's easy to see why. Both stream at a reasonably low bitrate, but fed the same material the Go is a much more enjoyable listen.

Capable competition

The Philips' lack of body and richness in comparison is immediately clear, and it's only a few songs in that we realise insight comes up short too.

Select Barbra Streisand's *Don't Rain On My Parade* and while the Philips serves up a fair amount of detail in her vocals, the Go better expresses the dynamics and subtle accents in the theatrical delivery.

Supertramp's *The Logical Song* is a good track for showing off a piece of equipment's drive and musicality, but here it only reveals the Philips' lack of killer instinct. We'd like the bouncy keyboards to have

USE IT WITH

Spotify Premium

The pay-for version of Spotify features Connect, removes ads, boosts quality and allows offline and online streaming



Neat and discreet

The attractive aesthetics extend to the shiny silver oval top panel - home to basic playback buttons. The only other buttons (for initial set-up) are around the back, between the ports



more life about them, and the lead edge of notes more impact.

It's not all bad news. The Philips' presentation is pleasingly open and big enough to fill a medium-sized living room happily, and the bass has decent weight.

It's clean and well detailed, too, and the soundstage gives instruments stacks of space to work in - even if the SW750M's less than perfect organisation means they don't all tie together as they should.

There's no doubting that Spotify Connect is a worthy feature on a wireless speaker's spec sheet but, with competition getting more feature-packed by the minute, we find the Philips' narrow-minded attitude odd.

If the sound quality were good enough, a multi-room speaker at this price would turn plenty of heads. Unfortunately for the SW750M, its performance is not competitive enough to capitalise on any favourable first impressions created by its affordability, multiroom functionality or stylish design.

Rating ★★☆☆☆

FOR Affordable multi-room option; easy set-up; good app; build; stylish finish; clean, open sound

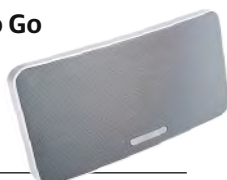
AGAINST Lacks the punch, dynamics and organisation of rivals; very limited compatibility

VERDICT Aside from limited compatibility, its primary downfall is flawed performance

Also consider

Cambridge Audio Go £120 ★★★★★

This Bluetooth-equipped Award-winner sounds great - and costs less



Despite its twin rear-firing bass ports, the SW750M is not fussy over positioning



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Dali Rubicon 5 | Stereo speakers | £2400

Rubicon clearly sparkles

Dali has long had a knack of making likeable speakers. All it takes is a short listen to confirm that the Rubicon 5 is yet another. These floorstanders might not be flawless, but they have a sparkle about their performance we can't help but enjoy.

That extra half-way

Dali tends to do things a little differently. While the 5s are a two-and-a-half-way design, there's a twist: that extra half-way refers to an additional tweeter rather than the more usual dedicated bass driver.

The extra tweeter is a 17 x 45mm ribbon design - it takes over from the conventional soft-dome unit at around 14kHz, with the dual aims of maintaining dispersion at the highest frequencies and improving resolution.

have a fluid way with dynamics, and their energetic presentation makes them happy to belt out Bruce Springsteen's *Radio Nowhere* - even at high volumes.

There's an infectious sense of drive here, combined with plenty of punch. Despite a bit of excess richness in the bass, it's agile enough not to slow things down. Overall resolution is good, making it easy to follow instrumental strands, even though the production is pretty dense. We like the Rubicon's way with voices too. Springsteen's voice is rendered with convincing texture and nuance.

Moving on to Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* shows off the Dalis' fine stereo imaging. It's wide, nicely layered and well focused. If your kit is talented enough, the 5s won't disappoint

Moving down the frequencies, the midrange and bass are delivered by a 16.5cm-unit tuned by a rear-firing port. The driver uses Dali's trademark wood-fibre cone material, which is claimed to give a good balance of low weight, rigidity and damping.

The Rubicon 5s are well built, though they feel a little lighter than expected. The white-gloss finish on our review samples is nicely applied and looks classy. Other finish options include gloss-black, rosso-veneer and walnut.

We're happy with the level of fit and finish - it's clear that the company has put in a great deal of effort to ensure the speakers' quality is right. Positioning is easy: just give the Rubicon 5s space to breathe and fire them straight ahead, rather than angling towards the listening position. The speaker's wide dispersion makes this positioning preferable.

Once set up these towers certainly deliver. These are lively performers that

Moving on to Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* shows off the Dalis' fine stereo imaging - it's wide, nicely layered and well focused. Provided the rest of your kit is talented enough the 5s won't disappoint in this respect.

Flawed, but with appeal

What flaws do we find during our test? There are better options if tonal purity is a priority, and the very best rivals have a transparency the Dalis can't quite match. Neither of these things is enough to upset us too much, however.

There's no shortage of competition at this level, with models from Spendor, ProAc and PMC setting very high standards. Yet the Rubicons have enough appeal to be worth a serious listen. We doubt you'll be disappointed if you pick up a pair.



It's clear the company has put effort into the Dali Rubicon 5s' classy build and finish

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Fast, agile sound; enthusiastic delivery; good bass weight and authority; fine build

AGAINST Tonal balance isn't particularly even; no shortage of top-class rivals

VERDICT These are fine speakers, but they're up against some mighty competition

Also consider

Spendor A6Rs £2500 ★★★★★

For agility and insight, little at this price can match this Award-winner.



System builder total build £8500

CD player

Roksan Caspian M2 CD player £1900 ★★★★★

In our opinion the finest CD player available at this price. A 2014 Award-winner for Best CD Player £1500+.



Streamer

Cyrus Stream XP2-Qx £2300 ★★★★★

This superb streamer has an absolutely fantastic sound and won our Best Streamer Award last year.



Stereo amplifier

Roksan Caspian M2 £1900 ★★★★★

Remains a top-class amplifier despite its advanced years. It has just the right combination of refinement and drive.



Yamaha R-N500 | Music system | £350

Musical prodigy can play anything

The **Yamaha R-N500** is almost the ideal streaming system. Whether your music collection consists of CDs, vinyl, high-resolution audio files stored on a NAS device or just a Spotify Premium subscription (or all of the above), the R-N500 can play it all.

For an astonishingly wallet-friendly £350, this one-box system has an impressive list of features. All you need to do is connect it to the internet, add speakers, and you're ready to start streaming.

Spacious sound

With alt-J's *Breezblocks* streaming from our server, we're immediately struck by how big and spacious the R-N500 sounds. Instruments and voices are easy to place on the airy soundstage.

It has that warm, full-bodied presentation characteristic of Yamaha's sound, combined with a squeaky-clean, smooth quality that's lovely to listen to. There are rich layers of detail here, while the smooth quality to the treble ensures you won't hear any bright or sharp edges. It's an easy-going approach that suits all kinds of music files, whether a 24-bit/96kHz Tom Waits album or the *Guardians Of The Galaxy* soundtrack streamed over Spotify.

We just wish it would sound a little more energetic. The R-N500 knows exactly how to deliver all the right notes at the right time - it just doesn't have quite the drive to do it. The lively, sprightly tune of Pink Martini's *Donde Estas, Yolanda?* sounds laid-back when it should be bubbling over with nimble-footed excitement.

Get the right speakers

The system does need careful speaker matching. B&W's 685 S2 speakers show off the large scale and refined detail of the R-N500's sound, but the Wharfedale Diamiond 220s (£180 - see below) are a better fit because the system sounds perkier and more upbeat.

When it comes to features this Yamaha covers most bases. Plug it into your home network (via ethernet only, there's no wi-fi)



Stacked with features
- and useful ones too - the
R-N500 is deeply versatile.
It sounds good as well

The R-N500 is good value for a product of its kind, and is a fine system for anyone with a sprawling collection of music files

and you can stream all your music files stored across laptops, smartphones, tablets and NAS devices. File compatibility is extensive: you can play anything from standard MP3s to hi-res 24-bit/192kHz FLAC and WAV files.

Music from many sources

AirPlay and DLNA support are also available, and with Spotify Connect, vTuner internet radio, and FM and AM tuners on board, you have access to more music than you can shake a glowstick at. Streaming quality is stable and we don't experience any drop-outs during testing.

There are multiple digital and analogue inputs if you prefer a wired connection, and even a moving-magnet phono stage for plugging in your trusty old turntable. There are two things the R-N500 can't do: wi-fi and Bluetooth, but we didn't miss either. If you want them, you can buy separate modules from Yamaha for around £50 each.

We like using the neatly designed and intuitively laid out NP Controller free app

more than the old-fashioned remote handset thanks to its logical, organised layout. It can be a little unresponsive at times though. The physical remote may be old hat, but it is at least reliable.

We're puzzled every time we look at the R-N500's relatively budget price tag, as it looks and feels every inch a premium piece of kit. Those beautifully machined controls are wonderful to use.

The R-N500 is good value for a product of its kind, and is a fine system for anyone with a sprawling collection of music files, or someone wanting to take their first steps into hi-fi. All it needs is a fresh dose of energy, and a touch more precision and punch.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Huge, spacious sound; clear and richly detailed; smooth presentation; features; price

AGAINST Lacks attack; could be more agile, precise and dynamic; no Bluetooth or wi-fi

VERDICT A pleasing all-in-one system that might win you over - especially at this price

Also consider

Bluesound Powernode £600

★★★★★

Double the price, but punchier and more fun. It's a great buy.



System builder Total build £760

Stereo speakers

Wharfedale Diamond 220
£180 ★★★★★

A recent price drop has made this astonishingly capable, entertaining pair of speakers even better value.



Tablet

Apple iPad mini 3
£230 ★★★★★

A sleek, intuitive interface for using the Yamaha's app and controlling all your music.



Music streaming service

Spotify Premium
£10/month ★★★★★

A vast catalogue of uninterrupted music at your fingertips that will keep you entertained for hours.



Technics ST-C700 | Musicstreamer | £850

Technics' streamer ebbs, not flows

Core asset

The Technics' Music App is one of the smartest and most intuitive we've used. Design and feel is reminiscent of Apple's own music player. It's currently available only on the iTunes store.



We weren't sure what to expect with the Technics ST-C700 streamer. When we reviewed the hi-fi brand's comeback products (a stereo amplifier and a pair of speakers) in the last issue, they received two stars each, which was very disappointing. The Technics ST-C700, happily, hasn't followed suit. This multi-featured streamer offers a more competitive performance, even if the price is quite steep.

A good first impression

Clean, balanced and agile, the Technics streamer makes a good first impression. The funky, electronic vibe of Public Service Broadcasting's *Gagarin* is delivered with a decent amount of detail, and the ST-C700's clean presentation helps deliver a toe-tapping rhythm. It could do with more punch and pizzazz, though.

Tonally, the ST-C700 is evenly balanced. Yes, the top end could be more open and have more bite, but we like how there's no hint of brightness. Piano keys have impact in *The Imitation Game*'s soundtrack, while cellos add weight convincingly. However, we'd like notes to hit those dynamic peaks and troughs better.

Play a track with crunch and low-end grunt, such as Alice in Chains' *Rooster*; and the Technics' restrained presentation doesn't agree with the heavy guitars. More muscle in

the bassline would give a richer sound, too. Voices are clear, but again, they could do with more subtlety and warmth. Regina Spektor's *Blue Lips* is light and airy, but the breathy quality of her voice and her intonation don't quite come across from the ST-C700.

We like how the streamer isn't fussy with file types - we use a mix of high-res, CD-ripped files and Spotify streams, and the character remains consistent. The ST-C700 packs in plenty of streaming features, with a wired-ethernet connection and DLNA support being the main method of accessing all your music stored on NAS boxes, laptops and smart devices. There's no wi-fi option, but the wired connection is stable. It also features AirPlay streaming from Apple devices, Bluetooth aptX and NFC pairing.

All the right connections

Pairing is mostly fast and simple - making a Bluetooth connection needed one too many clicks though. As for connections, the ST-C700 is straightforward: two USB inputs, one for plugging in Apple devices for playback and charging, the other for plugging in your laptop to play stored files (MP3s, CD-ripped WAVs, hi-res 24-bit/192kHz FLAC files). The Type-B input also supports DSD files. Single outputs for coaxial, optical and line level are on the back panel, and you also get DAB+, DAB and FM tuners on board.

We like the sturdy metal-and-glass build, although expect a better finish for £850



USE IT WITH Spotify premium

The vast collection of music, endless playlist-making options and the scope for discovering new artists make Spotify a must-have subscription.

We like the build of the Technics (the display is crisp and clean), although we think it could be a more impressive finish, considering the price. Bizarrely, the backlit touch-sensitive icons on the front panel don't control playback, but are for menu selection.

The big stumbling block for the Technics ST-C700, though, is that there are more capable rivals out there and at hundreds of pounds less. In comparison to some of these, the Technics sounds lacklustre.

There's plenty we like about the Technics ST-C700 streamer's performance, but it really needs to offer more in terms of insight and dynamics to be a truly engaging

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Clean and solid sound; even tonal balance; streaming features; excellent control app

AGAINST Could have more insight, punch and dynamic subtlety; rivals offer more clarity

VERDICT There's lots to like about this streamer, but not enough to win us over

Also consider

Cambridge Audio Stream Magic 6 £700 ★★★★★

Our Award winner is cheaper than the Technics - and it sounds better too



System builder total build £2580

Stereo amplifier

Rega Elex-R £900 ★★★★★

A hugely capable amp that deftly combines power and punch with a lively sense of timing that never falters, even with huge dynamic shifts.



Stereo speakers

Triangle Esprit Titus EZ £600 ★★★★★

If you want speakers that sound like they're having fun, these rhythmically agile Triangles are ideal for the Technics ST-C700.



Tablet

Apple iPad mini 3 £230 ★★★★★

The Technics' Apple-influenced control app will feel right at home on the mini 3's powerful, intuitive screen.



FULL OF COLOURS FULL OF SOUND

Libratone wireless speakers are probably the only speakers in the world with their own wardrobe. Changeable wool covers are available in 11 colours to match any style or décor.



LIBRATONE ZIPP

WIFI/BT Pepper Black or Salty Grey

£299.95 SRP

Portable speaker with
up to 8 hours battery

EXTRA ZIPP COVER

£39.95 SRP

LIBRATONE LOOP

WIFI/BT Pepper Black

£349.95 SRP

Flexible sound system with
replaceable covers

EXTRA LOOP COVER

£49.95 SRP

LIBRATONE DIVA

Pepper Black

£649.95 SRP

All-in-one soundbar
and music system

EXTRA DIVA COVER

£69.95 SRP

COLOUR UP WITH A FREE COVER!

Buy a Libratone DIVA, ZIPP or LOOP and get a free extra wool cover from our vast colour range with online registration. Go to libratone.com and see our full range of colours.

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"Get up and drive your funky soul!"

James Brown

The heart and soul of music

Precision; a luxury loudspeaker range from Tannoy, built to deliver music as it was meant to be heard. With audiophile features such as double-magnet drivers, hand-built crossovers and mass-load cabinet tuning, Precision has music at its heart and soul. Across two stunning floorstanding models, a compact stand-mount and matching centre channel speaker, Precision delivers breath-taking detail and musical dynamics. Built around a brand new 6 inch (150 mm) version of Tannoy's world renowned Dual Concentric™ driver, the contemporary cabinets boast premium fit and finish in a choice of colours. Powerful, passionate and incredibly precise, Precision gets to the heart and soul of music like no other speaker in its class.



tannoy.com



October 2013 - Precision 6.2



Precision 6.2



Precision 6.4



Precision 6.2 / 6.1 / 6C /
TS2.12 system



Precision 6.2 / 6.1 / 6C /
TS2.12 system

Cambridge Audio TV5 | Soundbase | £280

An affordable 'base hits the big time

It's not much to look at, granted, but start listening and this twin-subbed 'base is revealed as a gem



Soundbases may not come in different shapes, but sizes they do. Cambridge Audio is now the second manufacturer (after Canton) to produce a giant version of its debut soundbase specifically for 'larger' TVs. It's a sensible move: bigger soundbases can take the weight of bigger tellies and accommodate their bigger stands.

If you haven't already guessed, the TV5 is a larger version of the Award-winning TV2, 18cm wider than its forerunner (bringing its width to 73cm) and housing a second 16.5cm subwoofer underneath the unit for a bigger, bassier sound.

Worth the extra

It might cost £80 more than the TV2, but it wasn't long into our viewing of time-loop thriller *Edge Of Tomorrow* we decided this was a reasonable extra spend, for the TV5 not only embraces the TV2's rich, full-bodied and balanced character, but builds on its level of clarity, subtlety and dynamic ability too.

Sure enough, it has a bigger sound. Though matching the TV2's level of amplification (100W), the TV5's bigger enclosure and extra woofer help it achieve greater scale and an increased sense of power. Skip to Cruise's combat-training scene and, as the machinery swings across the screen from all angles, there's no doubting the soundfield is as immersive as you're going to get at this price. It certainly had no trouble spanning the 55in screen we tested it with.

There's no questioning the upshot of the extra woofer elsewhere, too. Bass is laid on thick as Cruise is given his first taste of battle: compared with the TV2, there's much more rumble from the aircraft, and a harder thud as it falls to the ground. Explosions (the film's time-loop style

ensures there are plenty) have punch and definition, too. The bold, rich bass presence gives the entire presentation a solid backing, meaning that everything from gunfire to dialogue sounds solid, but never over-egged. It's this grasp of balance and weight that makes the TV5 comfortable at high volumes.

This soundbase's muscular delivery isn't without control and subtlety, either. It might not be natural to listen out for the finer details behind the high-energy action, but that subtle information adds to the whole experience.

The TV5's flair for dynamics is the highlight: it laps up the soundtrack's crescendo when our heroes prepare for war, and it ably communicates the drama and intensity of the battlefield.

It's a case of *déjà vu* viewing the unembellished black chassis and cloth grille front (hiding the same dual 57mm drivers as the TV2). The minimalist design isn't in the least eye-catching, but it's functional at least. Build is reassuringly sturdy so you won't be afraid to mount a hefty TV on top of it. Our only gripe: while a single, colour-changing LED indicates sources well enough, we'd prefer everything spelled out with a text display.

Digital and analogue

The TV5 (like the TV2) is analogue-friendly, with both 3.5mm and RCA sockets, and an optical input too. It supports Bluetooth aptX and, while there's no sign of NFC, it has its own neat trick for making Bluetooth pairing quick and convenient by remembering up to eight paired devices and connecting to them automatically when in range.

Also handy (and in this case, environmentally friendly) is the Cambridge

Remote synchronisation

Gently peel away the clothed front panel and you'll see that between the two BMR drivers is a control panel. This allows you to set up the TV5 so that it can 'learn' your TV or Sky remote's functions and so obey their volume-level commands. Note that you'll still need the TV5's own remote handy for changing source input and sound modes.



Audio's ability to automatically power down when sound isn't detected after what the company quotes as "several seconds" and switch back on when it does. Those who covet convenience might also prefer to set up the base so a TV or Sky remote can control its volume.

A "step up in size and sound", promises Cambridge Audio. Tick, tick. The TV5 does exactly what it sets out to do, and is a sensible addition to the company's range at a time when good budget soundbases are few and far between.

Should you buy the TV5 over the TV2? If you have the space and extra cash, then sure. It's a great budget option for anyone looking to take their first step to improve their TV's thin, tinny sound - and not just for those of us with large tellies. And what's £80 between friends?

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Big, powerful sound; punchy bass; dynamic and detailed; digital and analogue inputs; reasonable price

AGAINST Nothing of note

VERDICT A sensible move for Cambridge Audio - the TV5 is yet another success

System builder total build £1260

Television

Sony KDL-50W829B
£900 ★★★★★☆

Not the crispest with detail, but bright and punchy with good smarts and an attractive price.



Blu-ray player

Sony BDP-S5200 £80 ★★★★★

The basics done well. This strikingly styled player delivers an impressive picture both with Blu-rays and DVDs.



Also consider

Cambridge Audio TV2
£200 ★★★★★

Got less space or a tighter budget? The award-winning TV2 is exceptional value.



Our SuperUniti all-in-one player will unleash your digital music, from high-resolution audio files to Spotify playlists. Its analogue heart is an integrated amplifier backed by over 40 years of engineering knowledge to offer countless years of musical enjoyment. Just add speakers.



Next-generation music systems,
hand-built in Salisbury, England.

Discover more at naimaudio.com



Go Deeper

Triangle Esprit Titus EZ | Stereo speakers | £600

Titus delivers an imperial performance

We've long been fans of Triangle's approach to music replay. The company may not always produce the most rounded speakers, but in our experience its products rarely lack entertainment value. The Titus EZs, the only standmounters in the French company's new Esprit range, are a fine example.

Listen to these standmounters straight out of the box and you might well wonder what the fuss is about. They sound tonally uneven and have a peaky treble that needs little encouragement to sound harsh and aggressive. Triangle has long promoted horn-loaded tweeters so it's no surprise to find one here. It's a titanium dome fronted by a distinctive and rather aggressive looking phase plug.

Give the Titus EZs a couple of days of use and things improve considerably. The speakers' high frequencies gain in smoothness and integration improves. We would still recommend taking care in partnering electronics (avoiding brighter-sounding kit). The result, when you do take care, is excellent. We tried a range of amplifiers - from NAD's D 3020 and Arcam's A19, right through to our reference Bryston BP26/4B SST2 - and at each stage these Triangle speakers have the transparency to take a notable step up in performance.

A powerful reckoning

They're small, standing just over 30cm, so really deep bass isn't on the menu. Accept this innate shortcoming and you have one of the most articulate and expressive speakers we've heard below the £1000 mark.

Positioned around 30cm from a rear wall on some solid stands, the Tituses sound fast, responding to leading edges and dynamic shifts with admirable precision. Play a complex piece of music such as Hans Zimmer's *Gotham's Reckoning* and they take it all in stride, keeping a multitude of instrumental strands under control and refusing to blur things even when the music becomes demanding. Both large-scale and low-level dynamics are delivered with

Cellulose hero

The mid/bass driver is a new development. It uses a cellulose cone, with plenty of attention put into optimising the balance between rigidity and low weight.



infectious enthusiasm and no sense of the rounding-off of which many rivals are guilty. The result is an involving sound that pulls you in and holds you until the music ends.

Moving on to Tracy Chapman's *Goodbye* shows the Titus's subtler side. There's finesse here, with a nuanced rendering of Chapman's distinctive voice leaving us spellbound. We're impressed by the way these speakers deliver rhythms and the way they portray changes of pace. All the energy and drive, particularly in upbeat tracks like Bruce Springsteen's *Radio Nowhere*, is delivered with determined skill.

Finishing touch

They're well made and nicely finish. Finish hasn't always been Triangle's strength in its more affordable ranges, so it's nice to see progress here. If you don't like the walnut of our review sample, white- or black-gloss alternatives are available for a £100 premium.

We rate the Triangle Esprit Titus EZs very highly (even if they are harder to track down

Finishes come in walnut or, for a premium of £100, white- or black-gloss

than alternatives from better-known brands, it's well worth the effort). In a suitably-talented system, these classy standmounters will excel.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Articulate and agile presentation; excellent rhythmic drive and strong dynamics; fine-detail resolution

AGAINST Need care in system matching

VERDICT One of most enjoyable speakers we've heard below the £1000 mark

Also consider

B&W 685

£500 ★★★★★

Our current Product of the Year delivers more authority and bass reach than the Triangles, but lacks the Tituses' agility and rhythmic precision.



System builder total build £3485

Digital-to-analogue converter

Chord Chordette QuteEX £990 ★★★★★

Chord has won rave reviews for its latest range of DACs, and this 2014 Award-winner is another class act.



CD player

Naim CD5si CD player £995 ★★★★★

Its features might be minimal, but this Naim CD5si CD player is as musical as they come at this price.



Stereo amplifier

Rega Elex-R amplifier £900 ★★★★★

One of the most talented sub-£1000 stereo amplifiers we've heard, this Rega Elex-R features a built-in phono stage.



Google Nexus 6 | Smartphone | free with contract

Big 6 pushes the boundary

It's almost impossible to pick up the Nexus 6 and not make a comment on its size. Packing a 6in display, it's one of the largest smartphone screens on the market, and not that long ago would have been considered a small tablet rather than a take-everywhere phone.

How times change. While there's no denying it's big, it doesn't feel quite as ridiculous in the hand as perhaps it once would have. Samsung's successful Note range can take a lot of credit for that, while handsets from manufacturers like Apple have only helped cement the big-screen trend as here to stay.

The Nexus 6 is Google's reply, but does it prove that anything Apple can do, it can do better... or just bigger?

The Nexus 6 itself is made by Motorola, which puts it in good hands if the most recent Moto X is anything to go by. In fact, it bears more than a passing resemblance to its stablemate, with the same curved back panel and indented M logo that provides the perfect place for your finger to rest in when you hold it. It's a wholly plastic design, but feels well-built and sturdy, available in blue or white.

It doesn't have the premium design of the iPhone 6 Plus then, but many will find its gently rounded back panel and flat edges easier to hold, particularly at this size.

Speaking of the iPhone 6 Plus, there's really not much between it and the Nexus 6 in terms of physical size, despite the iPhone's screen being 0.5in smaller. The Nexus 6 is a touch wider, but height-wise there's hardly anything in it.

Controls kept to a minimum

There are very few physical controls on the Nexus 6, save for the ridged power button and volume rocker on the right-hand side. The 3.5mm headphone jack is placed in the middle along the top of the handset, with the nano SIM card slot next to it. There's no microSD card slot here though, which is a shame - you'll need to choose wisely between 32GB and 64GB when you buy it to ensure it sees you through.

Under the hood the Nexus 6 packs one of the most powerful chipsets currently available in mobile phones, comprising Qualcomm's 2.7GHz Snapdragon 805 quad-core processor, the Adreno 420 GPU and 3GB of RAM.

It's a plastic design but well-built. The combination of flat sides and a gently rounded back make the Nexus 6 easy to hold too

It certainly seems to do its bit, and the Nexus 6 feels quick and responsive when zipping around menus, multitasking or playing games. Even with really graphic-intensive apps, like Gameloft's *Asphalt 8: Airborne*, we don't suffer from stutters or long load-times at any point.

The power behind the phone

Such a big screen needs a decent-sized battery to power it, and fortunately the Nexus 6 carries a 3220mAh power pack. It includes Qualcomm's QuickCharge 2.0, which gives you up to six hours of charge from a depleted battery in just 15 minutes.

Its performance is a reasonable one too. Our battery rundown test, running a 720p video with wi-fi on at half brightness, saw it lasting 10 hours and two minutes, and with everyday use we still managed to get around a full day's usage out of it.

And so to that screen. At 5.96in it's just screaming to be used for watching films, with a Quad HD 1440 x 2560 resolution and 493ppi putting it up there with the best phone screens around, on paper at least.

In use, it can't quite match the Samsung Note 4 or iPhone 6 Plus's video performance, despite its resolution advantage over the latter. But it gives it a good go. Watch a Full HD clip and the screen looks plenty sharp enough with both text and images - it's not until it's compared with Apple's handset that you notice some of the finer details are a little soft. Landscape scenes don't have the same depth to them



USE IT WITH

Tidal

Streaming has never sounded better - Tidal is a smart-looking, content-packed service for streaming hi-fi quality music.

and textures, like the fur on Paddington Bear, aren't quite as well realised.

The Nexus 6's colour palette certainly has a warmer tone to it than the iPhone too, but which you prefer will be down to personal choice. We'd say the iPhone probably just pips it when it comes to absolute balance, but the richer, more vibrant tone looks punchy and engaging rather than hugely unnatural.

We watch a couple of movies on this phone and it doesn't feel strange to do so - the 6in screen is somewhat of a sweet-spot for great mobile movie marathons, and means we don't even feel the need to cast it to our TV once we get home.

Aside from its large screen, one of the biggest talking points of the Nexus 6 is its inclusion of Android 5.0 Lollipop out of the box. This is the first time we've seen it on a phone, following its debut on the Nexus 9 tablet, and it's not an insignificant upgrade. Icons are simpler, colours are bolder and the overall appearance of it is flatter, stripped back and fuss-free. Folders now appear as round circles, there are subtle new animations for opening and closing menus and the three main soft keys for navigation have been given a makeover too.

Strengths inherent in the system

Without a doubt, the pure Android experience has always surpassed that of any manufacturer-tweaked offering, and this, alongside the Lollipop update, serves as a big selling point for the Nexus 6.

When it comes to music, Google's all-accepting nature means there's wider file compatibility than on an iPhone, with FLAC playback up to 24-bit/96kHz supported.

We watch a couple of movies on this phone and it doesn't feel strange to do so - the 6in screen is somewhat of a sweet-spot for great mobile movie marathons, and means we don't feel the need to cast it to our TV once we get home

More handy than before

Yes, you may well find yourself using two hands to text – only the biggest hands will be able comfortably to stretch across the screen, but then that's a given with a device this size.

Even so, its music capabilities fall short of that on the iPhone 6, lacking the same level of dynamics and timing that we love in its rival. There's drive to its character, but the organisation isn't as tight and notes don't deliver the same level of depth or dynamic subtlety.

Listening to a Tidal stream of D'Angelo's *Sugah Daddy*, it's also clear that its presentation isn't as precise as the iPhone, with leading edges of the notes in the piano intro a little soft.

Try a movie without headphones and the Nexus 6's front-facing stereo speakers project a fairly solid, full-bodied sound directly at you, which the iPhone's sideways-firing speaker can't compete with. We'd argue the iPhone offers a little more clarity though.

A new focus

The Nexus 6 packs a 13MP camera, which has seen some improvements to the one on the Moto X, with a better sensor, image stabilisation and a wider aperture. However, despite it being a huge improvement on the poor camera of the Nexus 5, its performance still underwhelms when compared with the best at this level. On a bright day it will produce sharp, clean and largely well-balanced shots with plenty of detail, but the autofocus can take some time, particularly in tricky or low lighting.

For video, the Nexus 6 includes 4K filming at 30fps alongside its 1080p mode. There are no slo-mo or hyperlapse features, but there are always apps you can download if it's a feature you'll really miss.

Google's Nexus range has always been competitively priced. The 32GB version is available SIM free for £500, with the 64GB costing £50 more at £550. Compare that to the Samsung Note 4 32GB at £600 and the iPhone 6 Plus 64GB (no 32GB option) at £700, and the Nexus 6 seems a good deal.

Google's Nexus phones have always been a refreshing change from the norm, and the

Equipped with one of the most powerful processors available in phones, the Nexus 6 is responsive and smooth in operation

Nexus 6 undoubtedly continues that trend. Its screen is sure to divide opinion, while its vanilla Android experience remains unbeatable and alone makes a strong case for buying the Nexus 6.

However, with video and audio performance that can't match the iPhone 6 Plus or Samsung Galaxy Note 4, we have to dock it a star from the full five. If you can get to grips with its size, this is a hugely likeable phone where simplicity is king. But when it comes to performance, the Nexus 6 is bigger but unfortunately not better.

In detail

Operating system The fuss-free, visually appealing quality of Android 5.0 Lollipop is a real boon for the Nexus 6



Manufacturer's logo The '6' is made by Motorola and has the good fortune to resemble the impressive Moto X



Charging bonus Qualcomm's QuickCharge 2.0 technology on the Nexus will give you six hours' use from a 15-minute charge

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Great screen; fast performance; vanilla Android; front-facing speakers; well priced

AGAINST Video lacks fine detail; camera could be better; music a little soft; no microSD slot

VERDICT Bigger may not be better, but the Nexus 6 is still a compelling smartphone

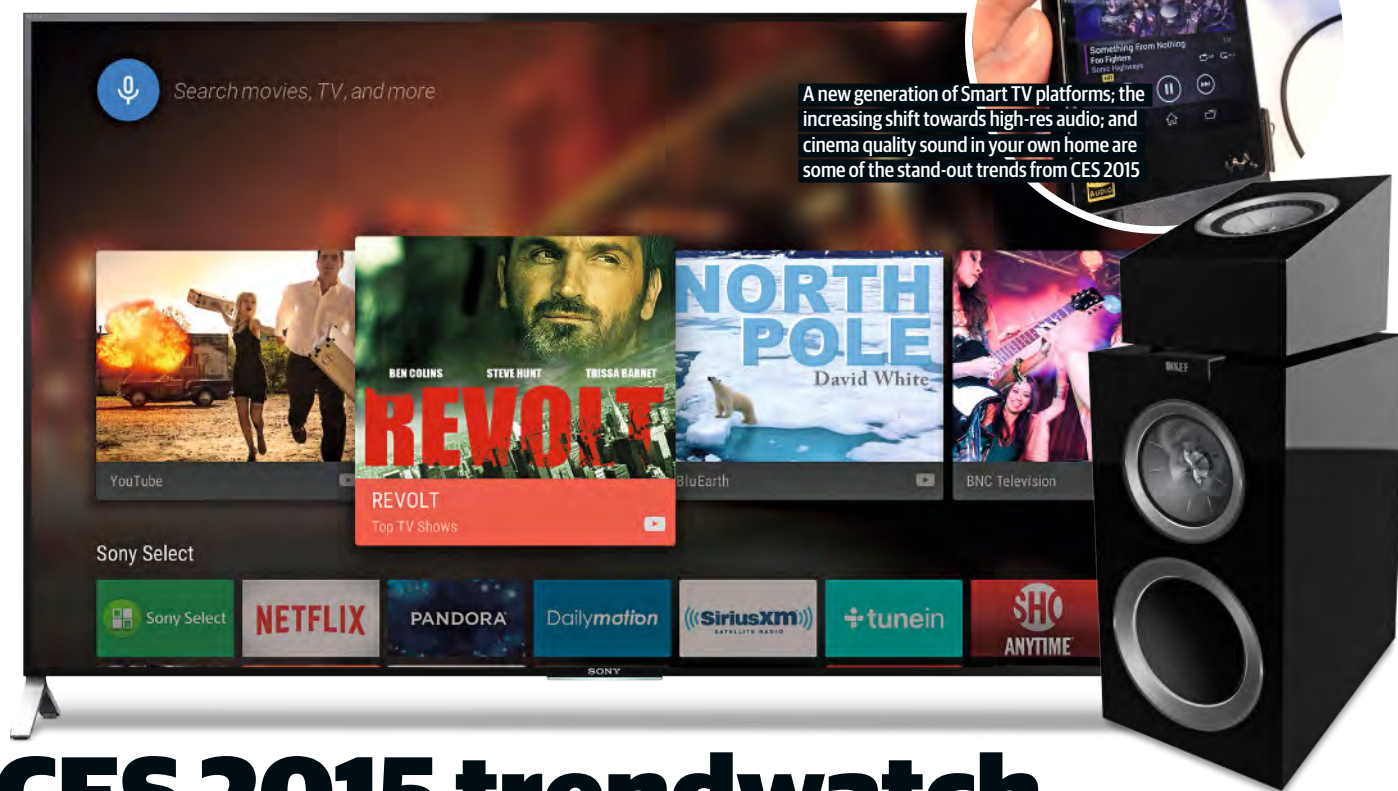
Also consider Samsung Galaxy Note 4

★★★★★

This is a multi-talented marvel, with a superb screen, fast performance, excellent camera and hi-res music



CES 2015



CES 2015 trendwatch

The tech expected to rule the hi-fi and home cinema roost this year

Each January, the focus of the tech industry is on Las Vegas, as the annual International Consumer Electronics Show (CES) kick-starts the year with a showcase of new products and technologies.

What Hi-Fi? was on the showfloor all week to figure out what we should be looking out for in 2015, whether it's in the world of TV, home cinema, hi-fi or portables.

Small screens, big deals

TVs often grab the headlines at CES and this year was no exception, with manufacturers aplenty introducing new sets they hope will create waves in the months ahead.

It was no surprise to find Ultra HD 4K screens even more prevalent, but screen technology has diversified. LG has put its faith in OLED, Panasonic has developed a new Wide Colour Phosphor technology, Samsung unveiled 'SUHD' screens, and there were new TVs featuring Quantum Dot and High Dynamic Range technology, too. From offering better-than-ever pictures to making 4K screens more affordable, there is plenty promised in the TV market in 2015.

It's not just TV hardware that made a real impression at CES 2015. Smart TV platforms will clearly be a key battleground in 2015, with LG's webOS, Samsung's Tizen and Sony's Android operating systems set to shake-up how our television's interfaces look and perform, not least in terms of greater integration with mobile devices.

The new year's resolution

If 4K is the next step forward in TV, in hi-fi circles it's all about high-resolution audio. Sony unveiled its latest high-res, DSD-supporting NWZ-ZX2 Walkman. Neil Young, meanwhile, was extolling the virtues of his Pono Player - now on sale in the US.

And again - as TVs proved - it won't all be about the hardware. Meridian Audio used the show as a stage on which to demonstrate the potential of MQA, a new format that aims to package more efficiently studio master quality files for downloading and, potentially, streaming. Tidal, which runs a CD-quality streaming service, confirmed to *What Hi-Fi?* that it is working with Meridian on a high-res streaming service.

A cinema experience... at home

Dolby Atmos has been labelled "the most significant development in cinema audio since surround sound" (by Dolby, admittedly) but it's not alone in wanting to shake up the home cinema market.

DTS:X is an "object-based codec technology" that made its debut at CES, with 90 per cent of major home AV companies set to launch products this year that support the codec. A rival to Atmos? Sounds like it.

There was much more to see at CES 2015, not least our interviews from the International News Stage with the likes of Meridian, Sony and Tidal. Watch the videos and catch up on all the show highlights by visiting: <http://whf.cm/CES2015News>.



***Lindy headphone amp**
Lindy has introduced its new Mini Headphone Amp and Splitter for your portable device
<http://whfcm/LindyMini>



***Classics Online HD-LL**
A new lossless streaming and download service specialising in classical music has arrived
<http://whfcm/ClassicsOnline>



CES 2015 FACTS & FIGURES

2.2 million net square feet of exhibition space

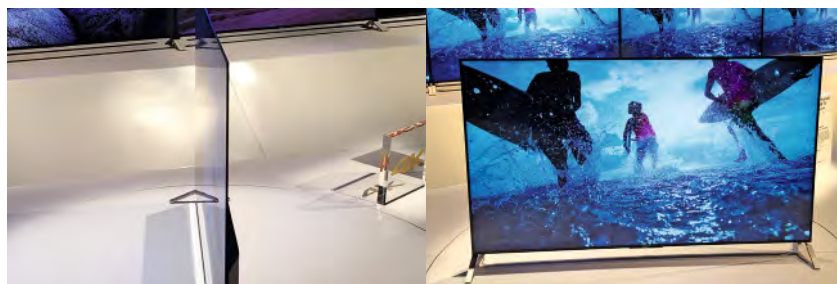
More than 3600 exhibitors and 170,000 attendees

20,000+ products launched at CES 2015

US\$223.2bn - consumer electronics predicted revenues

50+ interviews on our International News Stage

Three of the best 2015 TVs



Sony X90C

You'll need to take a good look at the image above to make sure you don't miss this TV. At just 4.9mm at its thinnest point, this new 4K TV from the Japanese tech giant is said to be the thinnest Ultra HD screen hitting shelves in 2015. It's one of six 4K models coming to the market this year from Sony, with 55in and 65in variants of the X90C set to be available. No pricing has been confirmed as yet, but we do know that, like all Sony 2015 TVs, they'll sport a new Android TV platform.

LG EG9600

OLED is the way forward for LG this year, and the EG9600 (below) is among its Ultra HD 4K OLED line-up for 2015. It will be available in 55in and 65in screen sizes and, as you'll have noticed, comes with a curved design. However, LG will also have flat and even flexible OLEDs going on sale this year, with all the new TVs running WebOS 2.0 - the latest version of LG's smart interface that promises to be faster and more customisable.

Samsung SUHD TVs

Samsung is claiming to redefine what TV is capable of in terms of brightness, contrast, detail and colour reproduction with its three-strong range of SUHD TVs. The series ranges from 48in to 88in with the JS9500 (below), JS9000 (below right) and JS8500. One of the innovations involved is the SUHD re-mastering engine that analyses how bright an image is to minimise additional power consumption, without sacrificing contrast levels. The curved design has also been refined by Samsung for 2015.



2015 TV tech explained

Dolby Vision is billed as an end-to-end solution from the creation of content to distribution and playback. Philips, Hisense, Toshiba and TCL have said they will produce Dolby Vision TVs.

High Dynamic Range (HDR) promises more dynamic pictures, with deeper black levels and brighter colours. HDR content will be available to stream via Netflix and the Dolby Vision platform, while LG, Samsung and Sony have plans for HDR-ready TVs.

Quantum Dot adds a film in front of an LCD backlight to improve the reproduction rate of picture colour and overall brightness. LG, TCL and other brands have announced Quantum Dot TVs.

SUHD is Samsung's marketing term for the company's Quantum Dot TVs. We await LG rapidly devising of a similar rebranding exercise for the company's sets.

Stars of CES...

...the most exciting new specialist hi-fi and home cinema products



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

1 B&O BeoSound Moment £1795

The Moment is a streaming music system that's full of interesting features, not least PatternPlay 'mood control' technology that can learn what you want to hear and when. <http://whf.cm/BandOMoment>



2 Chord 2 Quite

£995 The Chord 2 Quite DAC combines the power of the Hugo with the size of a Chordette product. It supports 32-bit/382kHz audio via coaxial and USB, and 24-bit/192kHz over optical. <http://whf.cm/Chord2Quite>

3 Meridian MQA

Meridian MQA is a new format for streaming and downloading music. The main claim is the ability to deliver studio-master quality files in smaller, easier-to-handle file sizes. Music service Tidal is already looking into a high-resolution streaming service using the format. <http://whf.cm/MeridianMQA>



4 Dan D'Agostino MLife

US\$48,000 The MLife will turn heads with its looks and its specs: Apple AirPlay, aptX Bluetooth and 200W per channel into 8 ohms. And that's just scratching the surface. <http://whf.cm/MLifeAmp>

Stars of CES 2015

Ten of the most exciting specialist hi-fi and home cinema products from CES 2015



5 AudioQuest Nighthawk £tbc

These headphones from AudioQuest use 'Liquid Wood'. Don't worry if you haven't heard of it before – neither had we. But AudioQuest has made liberal use of the substance in constructing the earcups. They also incorporate 3D-printing tech and a semi-open configuration. <http://whf.cm/NighthawkHeadphones>

6 ATC SCM40A

£6280 ATC has taken everything that was great about the SCM40 speakers and added its Tri-Amplifier pack to create an active version. Sounds good to us. <http://whf.cm/ATCSCM40A>



7 GamuT RS7 £tbc

While details of these striking-looking speakers remain thin on the ground, based on GamuT's recent pedigree, we'd like to highlight them as a product to watch out for from CES. They aim to deliver an accurate, dynamic and full-range performance. We shall see. <http://whf.cm/GamuTRS7>



8 Astell & Kern AK500N £9000

One-click CD-ripping, DLNA streaming and PCM-to-DSD conversion are all present here. Add to that a huge amount of memory and a wealth of inputs, and you've got yourself a highly capable desktop network audio player. It's the first such system from Astell & Kern. <http://whf.cm/AK500N>



9 Cambridge Audio 851N £tbc

This new flagship network music player features 24-bit/384kHz upscaling from all sources, plus Spotify Connect, AirPlay and Bluetooth, while high-grade components ensure the 'purest signal path'. <http://whf.cm/Cambridge851N>



10 Arcam Solo Movie £2000

The Solo Movie is an all-in-one cinema solution that can handle Blu-ray, DVD-Audio, DVD-Video, CD and SACD discs. It has 5 x 60W of Class G amplification and can support streaming via Bluetooth or UPnP. <http://whf.cm/SoloMovie>



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The world's largest hi-res music store is now open in the UK.

Save **20%** on your first order: **WHATHIFIHD20***

www.hdtracks.co.uk



* Code valid for one time purchase on HDiracks.co.uk only. Content restrictions may apply. Expires 3/31/2015

Bristol Show

2015 **Bristol** **Show** Guide

B&W CM6 S2 speakers



Chord Hugo TT



Wilson Benesch Endeavour



Meet the
team and get up
close and personal
with all the latest AV
products from over
180 exhibitors at the
Bristol Show

Creek Evolution 100A



Technics C700 system



Epos K3 floorstander



Naim mu-so



PMC Twenty



* Focus XD loudspeakers

Dynaudio's Focus XD range will be on show, with the speakers including a digital amp capable of supporting high-res audio



* Ruark's new product

We're able to show you what Ruark Audio is unveiling at the Bristol Show, but that's it. All we know is that it's "very exciting"



The UK's largest and longest-running AV show - Sound and Vision: The Bristol Show - which runs from Friday 20th to Sunday 22nd February, is your chance to get up close and personal with the latest hi-fi and home cinema products. Now into its 28th year, there will be more than 180 exhibitors taking up residence at the Marriott City Centre Hotel on Lower Castle Street for this year's AV extravaganza.

The details

Thinking of coming along? Well, you can buy an adult ticket for £12 on the door and it's £10 if you're a student or over 65. Accompanied children under 16 are admitted to the show free of charge.

There is still time, however, to save over 15 per cent on the price of an adult ticket (more than 20 per cent for students/over-65s) by going online to buy your ticket in advance. Simply visit www.bristolshow.co.uk for further details and info on how your ticket gets you more than just entry to the show.

For the time being, read on and take a look at some of the highlights that you can expect to see at Sound and Vision: The Bristol Show 2015...

Bowers & Wilkins

Bowers & Wilkins will be showing off its new **CM Series** of loudspeakers, a six-strong range that comprises a compact bookshelf model and room-filling floorstanders, with two speakers - the CM10 S2 and the all-new CM6 S2 - also featuring tweeter-on-top technology.

Chord Electronics

At the Bristol Show 2014 we were introduced to the Hugo portable DAC/headphone amp. This year, we'll be given the chance to meet the **Hugo TT**, a desktop version of the Award-winning product. A Star of CES, in the form of the **2 Quite**, will also be on show.

Creek Audio

Creek Audio will be giving a debut to two products at this year's show. First there's the **Evolution 100A** Class G integrated amplifier, which contains all the upgrade paths of its smaller brother (the 50A) but comes with over 120W into 8 ohm loads. You'll also get a chance to see the **Ruby** multi-input DAC too.

Epos Acoustics

The new **K3** floorstanding passive speaker and the Active-K upgrade solution for the full **K-Series** will be demonstrated by Epos Acoustics. The K3 is the largest floorstanding model in the K-Series.

Naim

Last year's Bristol Show saw Naim wow the crowds with its **Statement** - comprising the NAC S1 preamp and NAP S1 mono power amp. If you didn't have the chance to see this powerful combo in 2014, Naim is bringing it back for another demo in 2015. Not only that, but you'll also be able to hear the Award-winning **Mu-so** wireless speaker.

PMC

PMC's **Twenty series** of loudspeakers is no stranger to receiving the full five stars from *What Hi-Fi?* and that makes us very excited to learn a brand-new addition to the family is being unveiled at Bristol.

Tannoy

Tannoy's "most exciting new product line-up in recent years" will be unveiled at the Bristol Show, with its new **Revolution XT** loudspeaker range sure to be well worth seeing and hearing.

Technics

It has been a long-awaited and eagerly anticipated return, but the Technics brand is back. Products from the premium-class **C700 series** and **R1 reference-class system** will be given an airing at Sound and Vision: The Bristol Show 2015.

Wilson Benesch

After marking its 25th anniversary in 2014 with the launch of its Circle 25 turntable, Wilson Benesch is coming to the Bristol showfloor in 2015 with a trio of products that launched last year. That includes the **Endeavour** loudspeaker, which is said to be making a "very special" UK exhibition debut.



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



WHF? at Bristol

If you have a hi-fi or home cinema query and need some expert advice, here's your chance. The *What Hi-Fi?* team will once again be on hand at the Bristol Show to take your questions and offer expert advice on anything we cover.

The What Hi-Fi? demo

This year we'll be giving you the chance to hear a Dolby Atmos surround-sound cinema system in action. You'll also be able to hear the new Meridian MQA streaming format. We'll be in our usual place in the **Bristol Suite** on the **Ground Floor** - so why not come along and say hello?

BRISTOL SHOW: THE DETAILS

Friday 20th-Sunday 22nd February, 10am-5pm
Lower Castle Street, Bristol, BS1 3AD

SOUND & VISION

THE BRISTOL SHOW

Acoustic Energy	Icon Audio
Air Audio	iFi Audio
Anthem	IsoAcoustics
Apollo	JL Audio
Arcam	JVC
Art Vinyl	KEF
Astell & Kern	Keith Monks
Atacama Audio	Kudos Audio
Atlas Cables	Leema Acoustics
Audeze	Lehmann
Audio Note	LH Labs
Audio Technica	Mass Fidelity
Audiolab	Melco
Audioquest	Ming Da Valve
Bedini	Monitor Audio
Belles	Musical Fidelity
Blue Horizon	Naim Audio
Bowers & Wilkins	Neat Acoustics
Box-design	Novafidelity
Bricasti Designs	Onkyo
Bryston	Optoma
Canor Audio	Ortofon
Canton	Paradigm
CEntrance	Peachtree Audio
CH Precision	Pioneer
Chord Company	PMC
Chord Electronics	Pristine Vinyl
Clearaudio	Pro-Ject
Cocktail Audio	ProAc
Computer Audio Design	PSB
Creek Audio	Q Acoustics
Cyrus	QED
Dali	Qobuz
Devialet	Quad
Dynaudique	Rega
Audio	Renaissance
Dynaudio	Rohde & Schwarz
Eclipse	Roksan
Elac	Ruark Audio
Entotem	Select Audio
Epos	Sonic Concept
Epson	Sony
Exposure	Spendor
Flamingo Audio	Supra Cables
Focal	Sygnifi
Furutech	TAD
GamuT	Tannoy
Grado	TEAC
Harbeth Audio	Technics
Heed Audio	Unison Research
Henley Designs	Wharfedale
IAG	Wilson Benesch
	Yamaha

DON'T JUST LISTEN TO IT. EXPERIENCE IT.

The top-of-the-range Pioneer SC-LX88 AV receiver bristles with tech so your movies are seen and heard exactly as they were meant to be

Watching a film should be an immersive experience. For a couple of hours, you can uncouple yourself from the outside world, suspend your disbelief and simply let yourself be entertained.

It's a big responsibility for product designers – which is why the experts at Pioneer have poured every ounce of their knowledge, technical experience and love of all things audio-visual into the range-topping SC-LX88 AV receiver.

Inside, the Direct Energy HD (High fidelity class-D) amplifier powers the show. And what a show it is: a massive 260W for each of the nine surround-sound channels; Dolby Atmos

compatibility for the most immersive sound you've ever heard; stunning quality and improved bass thanks to MCACC Pro calibration, independent dual subwoofer pre-outs and SABRE³² Ultra DACs; high-res audio; 4K/60p/4:4:4 video signal capability; network audio...

There's something for pure audio too in the high-quality SABRE DAC stage. The SC-LX88 supports DSD, WAV, FLAC, AIFF and ALAC high-res stereo files, as well as multichannel FLAC, WAV 5.0 and 5.1-channel 24-bit/96kHz content.

It all comes together to bring to your living room the kind of cinema sound you'd only expect in... well, the cinema. The SC-LX88 is, quite simply, a triumph.



TOTALLY IMMERSIVE

The SC-LX88 is upgradeable to Dolby Atmos spec. Never heard of Atmos? You're in for a treat: it allows for overhead speakers in addition to a standard surround set-up – so you get height elements and object-oriented sound for an amazing three-dimensional experience. It means when something passes overhead in the film, it does the same in your cinema room.



PIONEER'S THREE-STEP TECHNOLOGY FOR REPRODUCING STUDIO MASTER SOUND

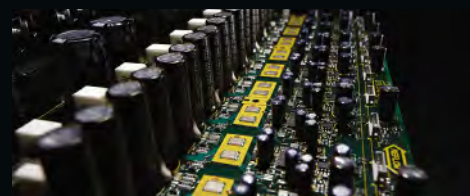
STEP 1

SUPERIOR DESIGN TECHNOLOGY

How the Direct Energy HD amplifier's highly efficient multi-channel output far surpasses the limits of analogue sound

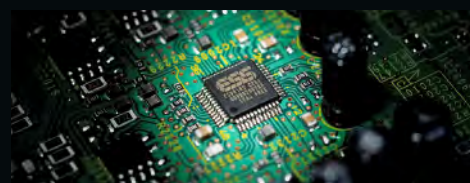
DIRECT ENERGY HD AMPLIFIER

The Direct Energy HD amplifier has further evolved to meet the needs of the latest HD content. It allows for high-power simultaneous multi-channel drive for huge dynamic punch. The Direct Power FET is directly connected to the circuit board, which maximises audio performance by reducing noise and improved switching. It's perfect for digital music.



SABRE³² DAC ■ ESS SABRE³² ULTRA DAC

The highly acclaimed 192 kHz/32-bit ESS SABRE³² Ultra DAC (ES9016S) delivers exceptional sound with ultra-low distortion and a high signal-to-noise ratio. It offers jitter-free performance for an astounding performance that's packed with rich, deep bass. If you want to exploit the full potential of the Direct Energy HD amplifier, this is the way to do it.





JANUARY 2015



STEP 2

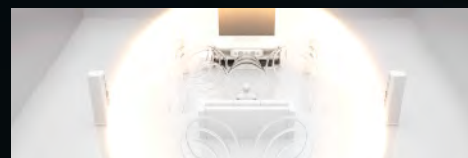
IDEAL REPRODUCTION ENVIRONMENT

Pioneer has developed advanced sound-field correction technology that reproduces sound as true to the original as possible



■ MCACC PRO ROOM TUNING

With the latest MCACC Pro room calibration technology, the Pioneer SC-LX88 compensates for the speakers' size and distance from each other and the listener – as well as levels, tones and any phase differences. This allows it to take great advantage of Dolby Atmos by placing object effects incredibly accurately.



STEP 3

SOUND TUNING

Professional sound tuning by London's AIR Studios means the maestro's message comes across loud and clear



■ AIR STUDIOS SOUND TUNING

Pioneer has collaborated with AIR Studios in London on numerous occasions. Applying the studio's monitoring methods to the SC-LX88 pays dividends when it comes to conveying emotion and excitement in home-theatre sound. So much so, in fact, that the SC-LX88 has attained AIR Studios Monitor certification.



STEREO SPEAKERS £150-£200

SUPERTEST

ON TEST

Cambridge Audio **Aero 2**, p34

Dali **Zensor 1**, p35

Monitor Audio **MR2**, p36

Polk **TSx220B**, p37

Q Acoustics **2020i**, p38

Teufel **Ultima 20 mk2**, p39

Wharfedale **Diamond 220**, p40



Giant steps

If you've just bought a new budget hi-fi system, the chances are you can improve it hugely from the get-go by upgrading the speakers. And there are some stunning options out there...



Whether you're starting out on your hi-fi odyssey or just looking for another pair of speakers, the budget speaker market is in fine shape right now. For two years the much-loved Q Acoustics 2020i battled away all newcomers. But the arrival of Wharfedale's Diamond 220 just before last year's Awards season raised the bar - and put a halt to the winning streak of the 2020is.

Both return here, alongside an array of new contenders from Cambridge Audio, Monitor Audio, Polk and Teufel, all of them jostling for pole position. The brilliant Dali Zensor 1 also returns - aiming to keep their five stars for yet another year.

This test shows that if you've already got decent electronics, then a good pair of standmounters that cost no more than £200 can really make your system shine. The question is, which speakers will make it shine the brightest? The answer is only a few pages away...



Cambridge Audio Aero 2 £150 ★★★★★

At first glance, the speaker looks unassumingly traditional - but look closer and you'll see that the 'tweeter' is actually a BMR driver

We know the Aero range fairly well. Some of its speakers make up the Aero 5.1 home cinema speaker package that's been our Award-winner in the sub-£2000 category for two years on the bounce.

The range's Aero 2 standmounts are not part of that particular bundle, but they are now in the budget speaker market at £150 following a £50 price drop. You certainly get a lot of cabinet for your money: 37cm tall and similarly deep, the Aeros are chunky, which is not ideal for those short on space. But there are benefits to their size.

Cabinet discussion

These Aero 2s are not the most distinctive speakers to look at: the standard MDF cabinets are rather bland and straight-edged. Still, the vinyl-wrap finish (in dark walnut or black) is tidy, well applied, and gives a classic look.

Something to note, both aesthetically and technically, is the speaker face - at first glance the baffle looks unassumingly traditional, but a closer look above the 16.5cm woofer reveals a BMR driver.

A clean handover

The BMRs cover a wider frequency range than a conventional tweeter (250Hz to 2kHz) which moves the crossover point to an area where our ears are less sensitive to the distortions inherent in any driver handover. The result is a cleaner, well-integrated and widely dispersed sound. The soundstage is spacious and involving, filling our largest test room with precision.

The Aero's solidity and sure-footed delivery are impressive too, and the speakers don't need to be placed near a wall for this. If anything, the Aeros benefit from being pulled out slightly for better balance and tighter stereo imaging (30cm or so should do it). Play an epic orchestral track like John Williams's *Duel of the Fates* and the Aeros soar: choral vocals, frenzied strings and dominating French horns are given all the scale, authority and dynamics they require. They also render enough punch and rhythmic drive to get you on your feet during Michael Jackson's *Bad*.

They aren't the be-all and end-all in vocal expression, however, struggling to match the Wharfedale Diamond 220s' level of insight into Jackson's emotional delivery during *I Just Can't Stop Loving You*. That said, vocals are clear and solid, and projected with such stunning focus and directness that you almost forget about the track's instrumentals.

The large cabinet facilitates the Aero's big bass, which is deep and controlled, if not as articulate as with the Wharfedales. The Wharfedales give more detail across the spectrum, too. So while you don't get the best sound from your music at this price, what you do get is an entertaining listen, especially when paired with big-sounding kit. The Aero 2s can hold their head high in a tough field.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Vast soundstage; good scale, authority and dynamics; competitive price

AGAINST Some rivals have more detail and subtlety; not the classiest-looking speaker

VERDICT A competitive performer, but not quite special enough to sit with the top rank

Play an epic orchestral track like John Williams's *Duel of the Fates* and the Aeros soar. Voices, horns and strings have scale and authority



Dali Zensor 1 £200 ★★★★★☆

The partially-glossy cabinet of the Dali Zensor 1 is small and sturdy, while its design is clean and unfussy

The superb Zensor 1s are never far from our thoughts when recommending budget speakers - even now when, after basking in five stars for the past four years, they lose one due to the arrival of even more talented newcomers.

The Dalis remained a front-runner even after the Q Acoustic 2020s claimed their crown in 2012, but now the bar has been raised again courtesy of Wharfedale's Diamond 220s. They no longer have quite the level of subtlety, refinement or dynamics to remain in the top tier. Still, one thing tough competition can't take away from the Dalis is the fact that they're simply a joy to listen to.

Magic within

There's no questioning their listenability: lively and musical, they make the most of Daft Punk's *Random Access Memories*. The Zensor 1s effortlessly belt out its

funky tunes, firing energy into catchy beats with a potent sense of attack and rhythmic drive. Play one of the album's downtempo tracks, *Within*, and notes emerge with definition and weight. The Dalis sound more solid and sure-footed close to a rear wall (whether stood on stands or wall-mounted) and deliver greater low-end presence when positioned there.

Wide-open space

Considering the small size of the speakers, the openness of the soundstage takes you by surprise. You'll hear detail and balance, too. Bass is taut, and clean, sparkly highs meet a clear and communicative midrange. Dynamic insight usually makes or breaks speakers at this level, but the Dalis do not stumble. They're slick and agile enough for the piano of *Within* to come through fluidly. However, dynamics need a touch more expression (particularly in the quieter sections) and greater scale to match the Q Acoustics and Wharfedales of the budget speaker world.

The Zensor 1s, though, still have the talent to sit at the front of your system even after you've upgraded the rest of it.

Paired with kit one or two price points above - the Arcam A19 FMJ amp (£650) and Marantz CD6005 CD player (£350) combo, for example - they still shine.

Thankfully, build proves as strong as performance: their partially glossy cabinets are small and sturdy, meeting (rather than perhaps exceeding) expectations at this price. Design is clean and unfussy, although you'll have to look to Monitor Audio or Q Acoustics for something flashier.

However, the big selling point of the Zensor 1 is sound quality. And despite going down the pecking order a touch, they have certainly not fallen from grace. Overall, if you're after versatile, energetic little speakers that will entertain for years on end, then you need look no further.

Rating ★★★★★☆

FOR Lively, agile sound; musical: good rhythmic drive; open, spacious soundstage

AGAINST Not as dynamically subtle as class leaders

VERDICT Although finally outclassed, the Dalis are good all-rounders - very entertaining

Dynamic insight usually makes or breaks speakers at this level, but the Dalis do not stumble. They're slick and agile as we spin *Within*



Monitor Audio MR2 £160 ★★★★★☆

As with all 'bookshelf' speakers, the MR2s should really be placed on stands to sound at their best. They're not too fussy about room position, though

It's music to shoppers' ears when an established hi-fi brand brings out an affordable speaker range. The BR (Bronze Reference) series was Monitor Audio's budget offering until it was replaced in 2010 by the slightly-pricier BX series. A year later, the company decided to redefine its 'meaning of entry-level' by introducing its most affordable range yet: the MR (Monitor Reference) series.

Back to the future

Essentially, the MR series is based (given a few tweaks here and there) on the old BR range, but at a lower price. We have the larger set of standmounters here and the MR2 packs a lot of technology in for its £160 price tag. Peeping out from underneath a protective metal-mesh grille is the company's long-utilised C-CAM (ceramic-coated aluminium/magnesium) tweeter: a rigid, yet light, composite design

gold-anodised to a specific thickness for improved rigidity and damping, while the MR2s also feature Monitor Audio's patented MMP II mid/bass driver.

Despite being at the affordable end of the company's offering, the MR2s have all the class and style we've come to expect from the brand. Beautifully finished in black oak or walnut vinyl, the front-ported cabinet has nicely rounded-off edges and a smart, yet traditional, fascia. The MR2s should be set on decent speaker stands (something like Atacama's Moseco 6s), but they aren't too picky about placement – sat close to a wall or pulled out slightly, they're nicely balanced, detailed and as precise as they come at this price. They do sound a little less substantial out in the middle of a room, but not disastrously so.

Delicate notes

There's a maturity to the sound that is rare at this level. As we play Michael Simone's *Any Other Name*, the MR2s shine with insightful delicacy on the intimate piano notes. The sequence is full of variation, and each key is meticulously placed within the soundstage. The MR2s are just as pleasing with vocals too, as Kate Bush proves on *50 Words For Snow*.

The Monitor Audios reveal her unique delivery and emotional nuances well – and this deftness isn't without vigour, either. It's hard to sit still during Michael Giacchino's *Married Life* (from the *Up* soundtrack): the playful, buoyant nature of the track is relayed to a T, delivering the orchestration with gusto and sufficient dynamism to accentuate its drama. Elsewhere, bass is tuneful and controlled. We find these speakers need around a 100-hour run-in for the treble to adequately integrate itself with the frequencies below, but even then they lack the refinement of some of their rivals.

Our new Award-winning Wharfedale Diamonds 220s set the bar for detail and dynamic subtlety the MR2s can't reach. And although this brings them down a level, they still do budget hi-fi very well.

Rating ★★★★★☆

FOR Precise and punctual; enthusiastic delivery; well built; classic design

AGAINST Lack of refinement in treble; more subtle competition

VERDICT Not class leaders, but a tempting buy if you like precise and detailed sound

There's a maturity to the sound that is rare at this level. When we play Michael Simone's *Any Other Name*, the Monitor Audio MR2s shine



Polk TSx220B £150 ★★★★★

The Polks are probably best in a larger room: not only are they big units, but they also sound better-balanced when placed away from a rear wall

The TSx speaker range is Polk's new, revamped budget offering, which replaces its long-standing TSi range. Most entry-level ranges offer one speaker under £200, but the TSx range has two: these TSx220B standmounters, and a smaller version retailing at £100. Three floorstanders are also in the line-up, as are two centre speakers for anyone looking to use the range for a home-cinema set-up.

Crossover to the other side

The journey from 'i' to 'x' sees bigger drivers (16.5cm, up from 13cm) in most of the models - the layered construction used in the cones mixes pulp and polymer compounds to deliver rigidity without adding mass. Above this is the same 25mm silk/polymer dome tweeter. The crossover uses more advanced components, such as Mylar bypass capacitors (Polk says this helps produce a

detailed treble). This range also sees curved cabinets being introduced. The company claims this makes for a more rigid structure, and also helps reduce undesirable standing waves inside the box, leading to a clearer sound.

The 220Bs look nice - the box's distinct shape and tasteful 'cherry' vinyl wrap on our sample gives an imposing air for a sub-£200 speaker (they're also available in black oak).

Too edgy

The Polks are big: 37cm tall and 32cm deep. They might pose a problem for those short on space, especially considering they sound better balanced away from a rear wall. They're as solid and heavy as they look - we'd like the sharp corners and edges rounded-off slightly.

Move on to sound and we're amazed (though not hugely surprised, considering their size) at how big and powerful-sounding the 220Bs are.

The Polks blast out the boisterous instrumental in the Philharmonic Wind Orchestra's *Theme from Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian* with power and scale and, given a bit of room, the speakers deliver a tonally balanced sound that's

clean and clear. Flutes soar, and the instrument has just enough separation to prevent the presentation sounding congested.

There's ample bass and good low-end extension too: drums rumble and trombones are deep-seated. Lots of bass can often mean a trade-off for speed and agility, and that's the case here, with the Polks lacking. We want them to gallop through Prince's *I Wanna Be Your Lover*, but they deliver a slow and stodgy canter. Dynamics require more punch and subtlety, too. Vocals have good clarity and focus, but the TSx220Bs can't relay Prince's snappiness.

Ultimately, the Polks rely on first impressions, muscle and scale to impress. Unfortunately for them, class rivals offer a more polished performance all round.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Big, powerful sound; hearty delivery; clear and well projected; sturdy build

AGAINST Lack subtlety; rivals more revealing; sluggish delivery

VERDICT With more subtlety and verve, the Polks could be worthy contenders

There's ample bass and good low-end extension. But lots of bass can mean a trade-off in agility and that's the case here with the Polks



Q Acoustics 2020i £150 ★★★★★

Q Acoustics' Concept 20 stands are a match made in heaven for the 2020is. The cheaper, Award-winning Atacama Moseco 6s are well suited too

If Q Acoustics wants to make sure its Award-winning 2020is retain their five stars after being usurped by the new-kid-in-town Wharfedale Diamond 220s, it's going the right way about it. After a price drop, they can now be yours for a tempting £150, as long as you want them in graphite or walnut finishes (the glossy black or white versions still carry a £50 premium).

Product placement

Either choice of vinyl wrap makes for gorgeous aesthetics thanks to the solid, curved-cornered cabinet, which is one of the most attractive and well built in the budget market. Compact, and unfussy with placement too, the 2020is should be easy to house. You'll get the best from them if they have a little room to breathe, but despite the rear-firing port they sound quite comfortable close to a

rear wall. Q Acoustics' own Concept 20 speaker stands (actually designed for the more expensive Concept 20s) are a match made in heaven, both performance-wise and aesthetically (though the cheaper, Award-winning Atacama Moseco 6s are more price-compatible). If you're upgrading your other components as well, or building a system from scratch, the Marantz CD6005 CD player (£350) and PM6005 amp duo (£280) will fit the bill nicely - and all for under four figures.

With bells on

It's always a treat pressing play with the 2020is at the end of a system - and a quick spin of Broken Bells' eponymous album reminds us why. Their presentation is well balanced and exquisitely musical, demonstrating dynamic punch and agility that's usually only found in pricier speakers. There's plenty of resolution here too.

The wide-open and explicit soundstage is all-encompassing, multi-layered and precise. We play Pink Floyd's *Louder Than Words* and the 2020is deliver the song with aplomb. They give instruments body and texture, and

deliver vocals with a wealth of insight. The speakers' midrange is sandwiched by clear and refined highs, and a full, solid bass. Not afraid to reveal an attacking edge, the 2020is dig into the meaty guitar riffs. But where there's authority and verve, there's also control and poise. Guitars soar through the choir, and instrument differentiation is precise.

It's only in a direct head-to-head with the new Wharfedale Diamond 220s that we realise the Q Acoustics no longer sit at the head of the table. The Wharfedales are a touch more dynamic and subtle, and slightly tighter when it comes to timing and delivering rhythms.

Still, sonically and aesthetically the Q Acoustics are a triumph. Though trumped by slightly more talented competition, they remain exceptional speakers.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Punchy, musical, open; plenty of verve and attack; solid, compact build; beautifully finished cabinets

AGAINST Tough new competition

VERDICT The Q Acoustics remain brilliant, beautifully put-together speakers

It's always a treat pressing play with the 2020is at the end of a system and a spin of Broken Bells' eponymous album reminds us why



Teufel Ultima 20 mk2 £150 ★★☆☆☆

The gloss baffle will split opinions with its exposed screws and striking mid/bass driver. The bullet-shaped phase plug at its centre to aid integration

Teufel might not be a brand that springs to mind when thinking of hi-fi speakers, but the German company planted its roots in the speaker market more than three decades ago. Its budget Ultima range has been around a while - we reviewed Teufel's floorstanders in 2009. They made an impression for their affordability, and we're pleased to report that same affordability is present in the standmounts too.

Punching above their price

The quality of build and finish on the Ultima 20 mk2s makes you think they belong in a higher bracket than this. Sturdy and built to last, the curvy cabinets are wrapped in a smart black finish that's clearly been applied with care. As design goes, the busy gloss baffle will surely split opinion with its exposed screws and striking mid/bass driver - its

orange-coloured cone has a bullet-shaped phase plug at its centre to help sound integration.

It's a more familiar affair around the back though: a bass reflex port sits above a single set of speaker terminals.

But are the Ultima 20s the bargain we hope they are? In short, no - but they do get the basics right. There's decent body to their sound, and presentation is fairly balanced. The Teufels happily run through everything, from Pink Floyd to Prince, with decent solidity and clarity.

Off the wall

Their talents really stand out with bassy songs. Although bass isn't the tightest or most controlled we've heard at this price, the Teufels are generous. Don't put them too close to a rear wall, though - the presentation becomes a bit bottom heavy. We would put them 45cm or so away from a rear wall for best balance.

Toeing them in slightly gives vocals more focus too: Norah Jones's voice is rich and clear, although we find expression in short supply. The vocal doesn't have the trademark nuance revealed by the best sub-£200 speakers. It seems the Ultima 20s opt for

substance over transparency and, ultimately, a lack of detail across the frequencies is their undoing - they don't possess the subtlety or dynamic insight to challenge the very best.

Trouble at the top

We'd like more refinement in the midrange and top end, too. The midrange can feel shouty, making the presentation sound uncomfortably edgy, while treble can sound scratchy. Couple that with a lack of spaciousness in the soundstage and you have a presentation that is at times troubled by higher volumes, and messy during playback of dense music.

So while the Ultima 20 mk2s show promising foundations (good build, fair clarity and balance) they fall well short of being a product we'd happily recommend.

Rating ★★☆☆☆

FOR Rugged build; neat finish; decent bass levels; clear and direct

AGAINST More talented competition; lack detail and refinement; not very dynamic

VERDICT Good build and striking design can't make up for performance flaws

The quality of build and finish on the Teufel Ultima 20 mk2s gives the impression they belong in a higher price-bracket than this



Wharfedale Diamond 220 £180 ★★★★★

The solidity and authority of the Diamond 220s relies on them being placed near a wall. Pulled too far out in the open, and that sure-footedness is diluted somewhat

Wharfedale took our one grumble (a poor finish) about the mainly superb Diamond 121s on the chin and rectified it in their replacement, the Diamond 220s. The result? A brilliant-sounding speaker with a neat design that also became an Award-winner, ending the two-year reign of the Q Acoustic 2020is. They've come down £20 since our first review, too.

Smooth finish

The composite cabinet of chipboard and MDF remains from the 121s, but now the smoother MDF panels have been moved to the outside, so the vinyl glues on better. The blackwood vinyl on our sample is ripple-free (walnut pearl, rosewood quilted or white finishes are the other options) and there are other improvements too: below the same 25mm soft dome tweeter is a 13cm woven Kevlar mid/bass driver, now with a bigger

magnet, said to make it easier to drive and improve responsiveness. There's also an improved crossover for better integration.

Whole lotta Led

Also, the unusual slot-loaded port, first seen on the 100 series, has been tweaked to reduce distortion. Rather than the popular bass-reflex design, this port fires downwards into a small air gap between the cabinet and plinth below, helping port efficiency and making the speakers less fussy about placement. The arrangement pays off: surprisingly for their size, the Wharfedales have the low-end ability to eat up even the thickest basslines (Led Zeppelin's *Dazed and Confused*, for example). Bass is deep and agile too.

There's a sense of power and scale we'd normally expect from a much larger box than the 32cm-tall Diamonds. Their solidity and authority throughout the frequency range relies on placement near or against a rear wall: pull them out too far in the open and that sure-footedness is diluted slightly - bass notes are looser and vocals lose a bit of substance. Talking of vocals, the 220s' clear and candid delivery is very expressive - run through Eminem's *Relapse* album and his choppy raps are

communicated effortlessly. The good news continues where integration is concerned, with everything tying together nicely.

It's the Diamonds' level of insight and dynamic aptitude that really lifts them above their peers. In Grieg's *Piano Concerto*, instruments are packed with variation and subtlety - piano sequences are fluid and telling, violins textured. Dynamic presence in even the quietest sections helps convey the gradual build of the piece. The 220s seem as happy delivering drama - as the orchestration gains impetus, they simply go along with the ride.

The talented Diamond 220s will likely be the jewel in the crown of any budget - or even mid-range - set-up. Would we go as far as saying they're one of the best hi-fi products you can buy below £200? Without a doubt.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Agile, far-reaching dynamics; overflowing with detail; deep, controlled bass; balanced; huge scale and authority; neatly finished

AGAINST Nothing

VERDICT Having ironed out the creases of predecessors, the 220s really are hard to fault

Surprisingly for their size, the Wharfedale Diamond 220s have the low-end ability to eat up even the thickest basslines



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WHAT HI-FI?
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October 2014

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TEST VERDICT

THE WINNER

Wharfedale Diamond 220

£180 ★★★★★



In a highly competitive field, the **Wharfedale Diamond 220s** manage to retain their title by offering verve, value and plenty of versatility

The budget speaker market is so competitive and dynamic right now that revisiting our favourite models on a regular basis has become imperative. The revised status of the Dali Zensor 1s in this test shows why. Although their five-star standing managed to survive the arrival of the more talented Q Acoustics 2020i in 2012, the Zensor 1s have finally conceded a star - and all due to the even more remarkable Wharfedale Diamond 220s. We still like the Dalis immensely, even if they are £20 pricier than the test-winning Wharfedales. The Zensor 1s are bags of fun to listen to: fast, musical, and with a good grasp of rhythms. They're great if you need speakers that must sit against a wall too.

Esteemed colleague

The esteemed Q Acoustics, on the other hand, preserve their five stars. For £150, you won't find better. Would we spend £30 more to buy the Wharfedales? Sure, but that doesn't detract from the fact the 2020is are fantastic little speakers - open, punchy, dynamic, and happy to perform wherever they're placed in a room.

Now for the test victor. The Wharfedales keep the title they battled so hard for in last year's Awards season. The Diamond 220s are budget hi-fi at its very best - the speakers have a wonderfully informative, measured, yet musical sound that will make them enjoyable additions for your microsystem or hi-fi separates for years to come. The Wharfedales are comfortable partners with electronics double (even three times) their price, too. Put them to use with transparent speaker cables and decent stands, and they won't disappoint.

Best of the rest

Of the speakers that are new to our test rooms, there are good and not-so-good performances. The Monitor Audio MR2 and Cambridge Audio Aero 2 are the best of the rest, with four stars apiece. The MR2s are yet another solid entry from the British company, flying the flag for precision and scale, but lacking absolute refinement in the treble. The Aero 2s, meanwhile, meet our expectations for the company's successful Aero range, and appeal with a big and dynamic presentation.

As with the Dalis, though, neither can quite muster enough detail, nor render the dynamic subtlety needed, to compete with the very best in this group.

A lack of get-up-and-go

Moving down the pecking order, we have the Polk TSx220Bs. Demonstrating as much solidity in their rugged build as in their performance, the TSx220Bs are hearty performers. Decent scale and bass are the big plus points, but ultimately they lack enough insight, or the get-up-and-go needed for our music. A low entertainment factor leaves the Polks languishing behind the rest of the field.

Handing out two stars isn't something we take joy in, but the Teufel Ultima 20 mk2s leave us with little choice. Their solid build and big, bassy sound (in a positive way) is outweighed by a dynamically flat, and not particularly detailed or refined, delivery.

In most tests, there will be products we'd give a wide berth to (the Teufels being the case this time) and others we cannot praise highly enough. The Wharfedales earn that distinction.



Cambridge Audio Aero 2

£150 ★★★★★

Sensitivity 90dB • Impedance 8 ohms
 • Max power handling 120W •
 Bi-wirable no • Finishes 2
 • Powered no • Dimensions (hwd)
 37 x 20 x 31cm

Sound	■	■	■	■	■
Build	■	■	■	■	■
Compatibility	■	■	■	■	■



Dali Zensor 1

£200 ★★★★★

Sensitivity 87dB • Impedance 6 ohms
 • Max power handling 100W •
 Bi-wirable no • Finishes 2
 • Powered no • Dimensions (hwd)
 27 x 16 x 22cm

Sound	■	■	■	■	■
Build	■	■	■	■	■
Compatibility	■	■	■	■	■



Monitor Audio

£160 ★★★★★

Sensitivity 90dB • Impedance 6 ohms
 • Max power handling 100W •
 Bi-wirable yes • Finishes 2
 • Powered no • Dimensions (hwd)
 35 x 19 x 25cm

Sound	■	■	■	■	■
Build	■	■	■	■	■
Compatibility	■	■	■	■	■



Polk TSx220B

£150 ★★★★★

Sensitivity 90dB Impedance 8 ohms •
 Max power handling 125W •
 Bi-wirable no • Finishes 2
 • Powered no • Dimensions (hwd)
 36 x 20 x 30cm

Sound	■	■	■	■	■
Build	■	■	■	■	■
Compatibility	■	■	■	■	■



Q Acoustics 2020i

£150 ★★★★★

Sensitivity 88dB • Impedance 6 ohms
 • Max power handling 75W •
 Bi-wirable yes • Finishes 4
 • Powered no • Dimensions (hwd)
 27 x 17 x 28cm

Sound	■	■	■	■	■
Build	■	■	■	■	■
Compatibility	■	■	■	■	■



Teufel Ultima 20 mk2

£150 ★★★★★

Sensitivity 84dB • Impedance 8 ohms
 Max power handling 80W
 • Bi-wirable no • Powered no •
 Finishes 1 • Dimensions (hwd)
 34 x 22 x 24cm

Sound	■	■	■	■	■
Build	■	■	■	■	■
Compatibility	■	■	■	■	■



Wharfedale Diamond 220

£180 ★★★★★

Sensitivity 86dB • Impedance 8 ohms
 • Max power handling 100W •
 Bi-wirable yes • Finishes 4
 • Powered no • Dimensions (hwd)
 32 x 18 x 26cm

Sound	■	■	■	■	■
Build	■	■	■	■	■
Compatibility	■	■	■	■	■

How to buy a pair of speakers

There's more to buying speakers than meets the eye. It's not all about picking the best performer, or the size of speaker that best fits your room and suits your decor.

Not all speakers are fussy about placement, but some sound better against a wall or out in the open – something worth considering if space restricts them to a certain position in your room.

While taking care over system-matching goes without saying, accessorising is just as important. So decent cables, and (in the case of standmounters) speaker stands, should be figured into your budget. Although it may be tempting to call them 'bookshelf' speakers, they will always perform better on dedicated stands.

SYSTEM BUILDER



Amplifier

Rega Brio-R £480 ★★★★★

Miniature amp that's very entertaining. It's agile, rhythmic and detailed too.

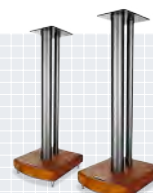


CD Player

Marantz CD6005 £280 ★★★★★

A top-rank spinner in every aspect, from its solid build to musical sound.

Total build £1060



Speaker stands

Atacama Moseco 6 £120 ★★★★★

Solid stands that will help you get the very most from your speakers.



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HEAD TO HEAD

Found in translation

The business of converting digital to analogue should be taken seriously. These two do just that, and the benefits are plain to hear

Digital music has transformed our listening habits, but to take advantage of it we need to convert that digital signal into an analogue version we can play. Most digital devices - phones, laptops, CD players - have their own built-in DAC, but they're of varying quality and can strip your music of more than you realise.

Upgrade your DAC and you'll hear your music transformed in terms of detail, dynamics, organisation and timing. And once you've got that far, well, there's really no going back.

Two hi-fi heavyweights go head to head for your affections here - read on to find out where your money is best spent.



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STYLE

Aesthetics haven't been forgotten - two 'windows' in the aluminium casework glow various colours depending on volume, source and sample rate.

Chord Hugo

£1400 ★★★★★

We've made no secret of our love for the Chord Hugo. How it has managed to squeeze so much into such a compact box, without sacrificing an ounce of sound quality, is nothing short of astounding - we can't remember a time we enjoyed digital music more.

Ample connectivity

Let's just recap what's on offer here an impressive range of connections, including optical, coax and twin USB inputs, with aptX Bluetooth for wireless signals. It can't quite top the choice of the Oppo HA-1 - there's no analogue inputs or balanced options here - but it should still suit most circumstances.

Alongside these inputs there's a 6.3mm headphone output and a pair of 3.5mm alternatives, plus a pair of line-level outs for using the Hugo as a digital pre-amplifier.

Sound good? Add to that portability and a 12-hour battery life, and the flexibility of the Hugo (which can go anywhere 'you go' - geddit?) adds to its charm. All this before you even listen to it, and that's where it really impresses.

The Hugo accepts input signals up to 32-bit/384kHz, but only through one USB input. The other is saved for use with tablets and phones, and is limited to 16-bit/48kHz. Despite its high-res capabilities, the Hugo is as at home with a 320kbps Spotify stream as it is with a meaty PCM or DSD file (up to DSD128).

There's stacks of detail up for grabs, the Chord delivering much more insight to the finer nuances of a track than the HA-1. This, in turn, gives way to a greater level of dynamic subtlety, timing and organisation that we've not heard from any other DAC at this price.

This more transparent nature means it's not as smooth a listen as the HA-1, and not as forgiving at lower-bitrate tracks, but even then you tend not to focus on a recording's shortcomings, thanks to the Hugo's inherently musical approach.

You get out what you put in

Of course, it really shines when fed the best of signals, and a DSD file of Stevie Wonder's *Higher Ground* powers forward with the heart and energy we found lacking on the HA-1. It's a masterclass in timing and rhythmic know-how, and is dynamically hard to fault - the bouncing bassline is delivered with absolute precision without sounding uptight.

The intimacy and expression with which it delivers vocals is obvious in a playthrough of Ladysmith Black Mambazo's *Lord's Work*. Harmonies are textured, fluid and beautifully presented.

Tonally it's wonderfully natural and a little more even-handed than the Oppo, making it easy to fit into any system.

When placed into our reference system, hooked up to our Bryston 4BSST2 power amp and ATC SCM50 speakers, it doesn't drop a beat, delivering an entertaining and insightful sound, even squeezing out a touch more clarity in the process that we would normally get. Consider its ability to fill in for a £5000 pre-amp without a worry and the Hugo's £1400 price tag starts to look like quite the bargain.

None better at the price

There's no doubt the Hugo is the best-sounding DAC and headphone amp we've heard at this price, and when you add in its portability it becomes a quite superb proposition.

The Chord Hugo is nothing less than a stunning achievement - a multi-talented device that will transform your music listening so much you'll wonder what you ever did without it.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Detailed, dynamic performance; superb timing and organisation; portability; genuine pre-amp replacement; great level of insight

AGAINST Not always the most forgiving

VERDICT The Hugo delivers hard-to-beat sound quality in an unbelievably small and versatile package



**DESIGN**

Everything about the Oppo feels well considered, from the responsive volume and source knobs to the quality connections. It's built for true audiophiles.

Oppo HA-1

£1200 ★★★★★☆

Oppo is a name more traditionally associated with high-end Blu-ray players, but more recently it's been making moves in new territories. Last year saw us dishing out five stars to its first pair of headphones, the excellent PM1s, not to mention a commendable four stars to one of its first smartphones.

New territory

This portfolio expansion continues with the HA-1, its first DAC and headphone amp. Presented in a sturdy, well-built aluminium chassis in a choice of black or silver, it certainly knows how to make a good first impression, with a bright 4.3in colour display and equally smart remote control to back it up (there's also a control app if you prefer).

The screen on the front offers a simple graphical interface when it comes to choosing your source, and offers technical information on the audio signal – as a digital VU meter or a more modern spectrum display (you choose).

Inside the HA-1 you'll find the same ESS 9018 Sabre32 Reference DAC and output driving stage used in Oppo's high-end Blu-ray players, alongside a

Class A amplifier, meaning the HA-1 runs quite warm as a result.

When it comes to connections, the HA-1 is no slouch, offering users the choice of both RCA or XLR balanced analogue inputs and outputs, with its digital inputs including coaxial, optical, AES/EBU, and an asynchronous USB. Add to this an Apple-compatible USB-A input on the front of the device, along with Bluetooth aptX functionality, plus the ability to double up as a stereo pre-amp, and there's not much the HA-1 is missing on paper.

We plug in a pair of Beyerdynamic T1s and fire up our music library. The HA-1 is capable of playing back PCM files up to 24-bit/384kHz and both DSD64 and DSD128 (via USB-B).

It's a big, open and refined sound that's decently detailed and offers a richer, weightier presentation than the Chord Hugo. It also has a smoother character, making it a forgiving listen with lesser-quality tracks, but one that sacrifices a layer of detail and dynamics in the process, rounding off drive and attack a little and making it sound altogether more restrained.

Energy levels

Play Run The Jewels' *Oh My Darling Don't Cry* and while the rumbling bass line has a real presence, the high-pace lyrics and impatient instrumental lack the same level of energy you'll hear if you play the same track through the Hugo.

It ultimately comes down to timing and dynamics. The Oppo is simply not as rhythmically adept as the Hugo, and isn't capable of injecting the same level of excitement and fluidity to a track.

Plugging the HA-1 into our main system and taking audio from our MacBook Pro shows similar traits. The lively intro to Stevie Wonder's *Higher Ground* lacks the same level of bounce and dynamism that the Hugo offers, and vocals sound less expressive and direct.

Revealing reference point

We test the HA-1's claimed pre-amplifier prowess and, as often with products of this type, we found it to be no substitute for our reference preamp, sounding overall weaker and less dynamic.

There's a lot to like about the HA-1. It's well built, excellently specified and has a refined, weighty sound. Many will love the choice it offers, but for the full five stars we want levels of drive, excitement and dynamics to challenge the Hugo. The Oppo falls short by a margin.

Rating ★★★★★☆

FOR Well built; extensive connectivity; big, weighty sound; refined; forgiving with lesser quality recordings

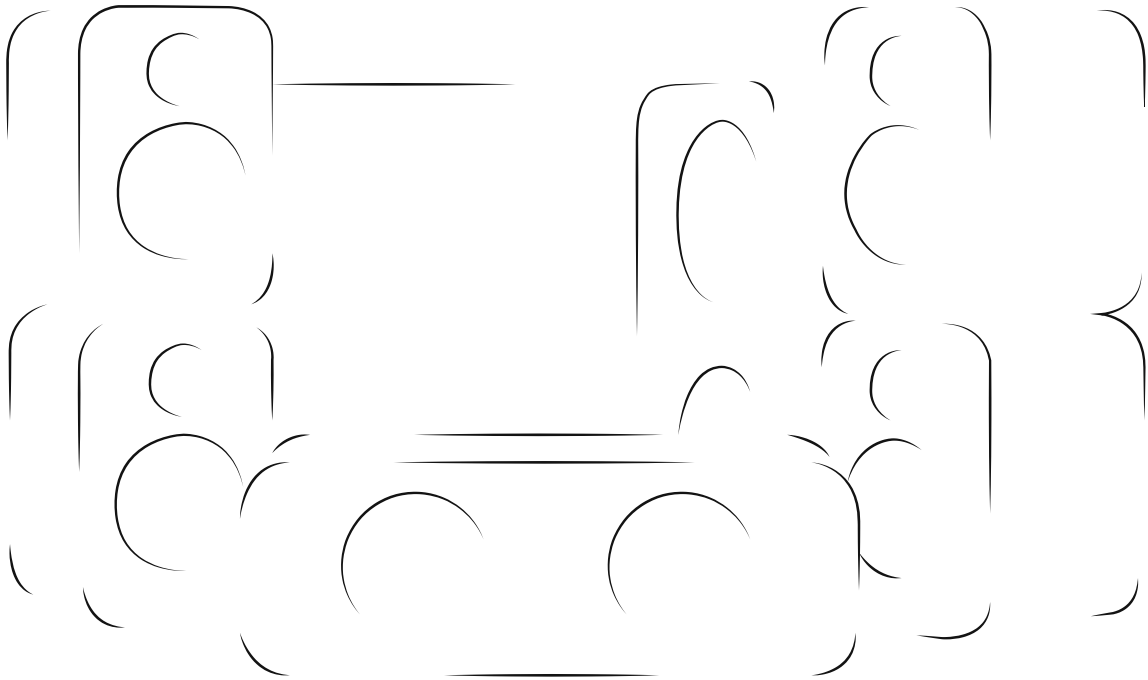
AGAINST Lacks the level of drive and dynamism found in the best

VERDICT Worth auditioning at this price, but it needs to deliver more energy for the full five





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Q Acoustics 2050i

**WHAT HI-FI?
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Stereo speakers
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Q Acoustics Concept 20

**WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014**

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
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Best soundbar £300-600
Q Acoustics Media 4

**WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014**

Speaker packages
Best traditional package up to £700
Q Acoustics 2000i 5.1

**WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014**

Speaker packages
Best style package £700-£1000
Q Acoustics Q7000i

TV

ON A STICK

Televisions are changing.

They're getting alarmingly smart. On-demand content, catch-up services and mobile integration have all become standard features. Soon, TVs might even gain sentience.

But what if you have an old, dumb TV that is still going strong and not in urgent need of replacement? That doesn't mean you deserve to miss out on all the streaming fun. And you don't have to. We've assembled a handful of streamers for you, each offering varying features and price tags. Go on, row your boat this way...

What's on test

- Apple TV, p50
- Google Chromecast, p51
- Now TV, p52
- Roku 3, p53
- Roku Streaming stick, p54



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

Apple TV £80 ★★★★★☆



It is a truth universally acknowledged that Apple will always do its own thing. Take media streamers, for example. This sector has changed a great deal in the last year alone, but the folks at Cupertino have done little to the Apple TV.

The company simply calls this the Apple TV. Its real name is the Apple TV (3rd generation) Rev A. That is to say, this is a slightly tweaked version of the Apple TV released in 2012.

Its chipset has been redesigned to use less power. It costs less to produce, and the retail price has come down a little. Essentially, this is a device launched about three years ago. Is it a fossil, or a timeless design?

Members only

First, some ground rules. This is Apple, so things inevitably fall a certain way. The priority is iTunes and Apple devices. If you don't have an account, or a Mac computer, or an iOS device, you will not get the most out of the Apple TV.

This is Apple's way, which contrasts with the Google Chromecast's welcoming approach to iOS and Android devices alike. It's frustrating, but not surprising.

It's beautifully made, and a dream for Apple devotees. Others will find little to enjoy

If you've joined the club, you're in for VIP treatment. The Apple TV can play anything and everything you've bought through iTunes. You can also mirror the screen of your Mac or iOS device using Apple AirPlay over your home's network.

Bypass your network

The latest firmware allows direct AirPlay between the Apple TV and devices running either iOS8 or OSX Yosemite - with no need for a network.

If that's not enough for you, you can buy or rent films, shows and music right there on the Apple TV. The shop front is right at the top of the screen, in a carousel. You have access to Apple's entire library right there, so you can watch until you dry out your eyes (or bank account). Video quality is good, going up to 1080p. You also get Dolby Digital 5.1 passthrough, where applicable.

Tired of iTunes? There is... not much else. The app offering is meagre compared with others here. The only stars are Netflix, Now TV and YouTube.

We are well familiar with Apple's 'walled garden' approach, but it's hard not to be frustrated in this age of choice.

And it's not like you can bring your own bottle to the party, either: you can't stream from your networked computer or NAS drive, nor add a USB stick.

The device has the following ports: power, HDMI out, microUSB (for service only), optical out, and ethernet. There's wi-fi too. Naturally build quality is faultless, and it gets better still when we caress the remote control, a minimalist wand of aluminium. Operation is typical of Apple: super-slick (although set-up and firmware updates are fiddly).

The Apple TV is a gorgeous piece of kit, and for those who have bought into Apple's way everything is lovely. But we don't think that's enough anymore, especially when similar money buys the versatile Roku 3. Loosen up, eh, Apple?

Rating ★★★★★☆

FOR Smooth operation; excellent integration (for Apple devices)

AGAINST Limited app options; too closed for non-Apple users

VERDICT The ideal streaming partner for Apple users, but not much choice for anybody else

Google Chromecast **£30** ★★★★★



TV on a stick! That's what Google promised with the Chromecast. And while it has made waves in the US in the past year, it is fairly new to UK shores.

Cast away your preconceptions

The first thing you need to know is that this is not a streamer in the traditional sense. You do not boot it up and choose from a content menu. Instead, you 'cast'.

Casting is Google's funky new way of streaming, built around the notion that most people have wi-fi at home and smartphones in hand. You begin with a mobile app. Find content you like, tap the 'cast' button, and it pings up on your TV. You don't actually send anything directly from your phone (or tablet) to the screen. It conspires with the Chromecast over your wi-fi network. The phone merely acts as a remote control, while the Chromecast plucks content directly from the internet.

The idea is to do away with boxes under the TV, along with the fight for the remote. Just find what you like on your phone, and push it to the big screen. Easy.

If there is a catch, it is the matter of compatibility: not all apps can cast.

One small stick for mankind: a new way of accessing all kinds of web-based content

Chromecast was launched with just Netflix, YouTube and Google Play in mind. Thankfully, Google has an open approach, and more are springing up all the time. Now there is a long list, which includes Now TV, Blinkbox, BT Sport and BBC iPlayer. There's no sign of 4oD, ITV Player or Amazon Instant Video yet, but already the Chromecast offers more choice than the Apple TV.

The Chromecast is also hospitable. It doesn't seem to care whether you use Android or iOS. We managed to control it using both an LG G3 and an iPhone 5 with similar levels of performance.

Web pages on the telly

Another trick is the ability to cast webpages. Download a free extension on the Chrome browser and you'll be able to mirror individual tabs on your TV. This feature is still officially in beta testing, however - dropouts are not unusual.

The device outputs a crisp, stable picture that goes up to 1080p. It's also capable of Dolby Digital Plus 5.1 sound.

Overall, Chromecast works very well. Casting may seem an odd idea, but it feels perfectly natural - not to mention cool.

Ideally, you'll want a good wi-fi connection. This ensures quality of performance, but also lets your phone or tablet maintain control. If your broadband is a bit sketchy, you'll be treated to adaptive streaming. Picture quality will adjust itself, downscaling to keep moving and avoid buffering.

The real wonder is how Google has crammed it all into a device barely larger than a memory stick. The sole output is an HDMI plug. Power comes by a bundled USB cable, and if you don't have a spare port in your TV you can use the adaptor.

We really like the Google Chromecast. It's a novel idea that works very well, and only promises to get better as developer support increases. For £30 - or even less online - you cannot go wrong.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Innovative; takes up next-to-no space; simple and intuitive; slick operation; app support is increasing

AGAINST Could do with more apps

VERDICT An absolute bargain, and a neat and effective way to make your TV smarter

Now TV Box **£10** ★★★★★☆



Yes, it really is only £10. Back in 2013, Sky's Now TV box was a game changer. It provided a cheap way to make any HDMI-equipped TV a smart TV.

But since then streaming has taken off, with new devices now promising more features than the last. And so it is time to revisit this budget wonder.

Generation game

What you're getting is really a last-generation Roku LT, subsidised and rebadged by Sky. The company isn't shy about this, either: the shape, remote control and menus are all unashamedly Roku. But regardless of the manufacturer, this is Sky's show. The Now TV branding is everywhere. It is the top app in the menu, and there's even a dedicated Now TV-button on the remote.

So what is Now TV? It is a stripped-down Sky service, divided into three sections: Movies, Entertainment, and Sports. You buy passes for each of these. A Movies pass gives you unlimited access to Sky Movies for £10-per-month. There are over 1000 titles, with an emphasis on newer releases (there are classics too). The Entertainment pass gives you TV

The Now TV Box is, unsurprisingly, stripped-back when it comes to hardware

content for £7 per month - programmes are from 13 major channels, including Sky 1, Arts, Living and Atlantic as well as ABC and Comedy Central. Alongside big hitters (*24*, *Futurama*, *Modern Family*), you get some of the latest shows before they're even on disc. Sports passes are a different deal. You get day passes and week passes (£7 and £11 respectively), with access to all six Sky Sports channels.

Sky without the dish

Each of these passes let you catch up TV you've missed, or tune into live broadcasts. So essentially, you get most of the benefits of Sky, without hefty subscription fees and satellite dishes. A recent development is the availability of box packages: £20 gets you a box and a three-month Movies or Entertainment pass (or two-day Sports passes).

The Roku Channel Store has a decent choice of free apps: the UK's four main catch-up services, as well as BBC News, Sky News, Spotify and YouTube. However, Netflix, for example, is nowhere to be seen. Nor Amazon Instant Video. On the hardware side, the Now TV box is unsurprisingly stripped-back - the

back features an HDMI output, mini-jack AV-out for analogue audio and video, and a power connection. Internet connection is strictly wi-fi - there's no ethernet port.

There's a maximum resolution of 720p, with 5.1 surround sound capability. However, many rivals offer Full HD 1080p to further outgun the Now TV box. Then there's the ubiquity of the Now TV app, which transfers the Now TV Box's presence to just about any other smart device (including newer TVs and consoles), making this kit less essential.

But despite all this, we still have a soft spot for this miniature hero. It is still a decent, smart offering for people with older TVs, and that price has yet to be beaten. Even after a year-and-a-half, Sky still offers great value for money.

Rating ★★★★★☆

FOR Price; ease of use

AGAINST Video only goes up to 720p; limited app offering

VERDICT Still a great, affordable way into smart TV, but the Now TV Box is outgunned by the competition

Roku 3 **£100** ★★★★★



If **Darth Vader** had a hockey puck, it would be a little like the Roku 3. It's a tiny device that does a lot more than its appearance suggests.

Roku has made several streaming devices, but this is easily the best one we've seen. For starters, it is seriously fast. Whatever command you enter, the Roku 3 will comply with full thrusters.

We manage to wake the device, load up Netflix and start playing something in the time it took for the Roku Streaming Stick to merely wake up. If you have little patience and want your content right now, this will bring a smile to your face.

Speed and simplicity

It's a good performance, too. Videos load to 100 per cent and Full HD 1080p with little buffering. You can also pass through Dolby Digital 7.1 surround sound if you have an appropriate set-up. It's a very simple device in terms of hardware: there's no power button, because it uses less than 3.5W in standby mode (less than a typical nightlight). It also means the device can update its own firmware when you're not around. The only sign of life is a tiny white LED in the corner.

The 'Private Listening' feature transfers the TV sound to the remote control

There is a surprising number of connections, considering the size of the Roku 3 - an ethernet socket makes us happy; wi-fi is handy, but hard-wiring will ensure a more secure connection.

Remote access

A microSD card slot lets you expand the device's storage, in case you download too many apps and games. A USB port lets you play your own files. File compatibility could be better (MP4, MKV, AAC, MP3, JPG, PNG) but apps like 'Plex' let you stream your own content from a networked computer. Video output is via HDMI. If you have an older TV with only analogue connections, you'll have to look at another streamer in Roku's range.

The remote control is worth mentioning: it communicates wirelessly with the Roku 3, so you can tuck the box away. More impressive, though, is the 'Private Listening' feature. Plug headphones into the remote and the TV will mute, transferring its sound to the remote. Sound quality won't amaze you, but it's better than turning the sound down and switching on subtitles (don't bother with the bundled buds, though).

The remote control also doubles up as a games controller, with extra buttons and motion sensors for simple games.

On to content, and Roku has a good offering: all the big names, Netflix, Now TV, YouTube and Spotify, as well as the UK's four catch-up services. There are more, but they are very niche offerings.

Oh, and one final bonus. The Roku 3 allows basic casting - you can use your phone to send Netflix and YouTube videos to the TV. It's not quite the Google Chromecast's library, but it works well.

We are very happy with the Roku 3. It is pricey compared with rivals, but its list of features is impressive, and leaves the similarly priced Apple TV far behind. Factor in the super-slick operational speeds and Roku is on to a winner.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Speedy operation; an extensive features list; remote control

AGAINST USB-file compatibility could be better

VERDICT A small box that's big on features. And it's fast

Roku Streaming Stick **£40** ★★★★★☆



It's all in the name: it's a stick, and it streams. That's about as literal as it gets. We'll start with the 'stick' bit. The size and shape is comparable to that of the Google Chromecast. Think of a chunky memory stick, with an HDMI plug at the end of it, that goes directly into your TV or AV receiver.

Right end of the stick

At the other end of the stick is a microUSB port for power. The bundled cable goes into a spare USB port on your TV; if you don't have one you can use the bundled mains adaptor. It's not very neat, but you're unlikely to notice it tucked behind your screen. You also get a remote control, which communicates with the Streaming Stick wirelessly.

Now let's get ready to Roku. Fire it up and you're invited to connect to your wi-fi network. You then go to the Roku website and open a free account. Here you choose the apps you want, which are then placed on the stick (don't worry, you can add individual apps too).

The Roku way is straightforward, and is similar across the company's devices, including the Roku 3. The menu opens

A big plus with the Roku Streaming Service is its ability to 'cast'

up with three choices: settings, an app market (free and paid for) and your chosen apps (or 'channels', as Roku insists in calling them). You'll find a good selection: Netflix, Now TV, YouTube, Spotify and the UK's main four catch-up services along with hundreds of niche, pointless ones. Sadly, there's no sign of Amazon Prime Instant Video.

Casting call

There's also 'casting', which is the Google Chromecast's party trick (choosing content on a compatible mobile app and shooting it to your TV screen). The stick fetches the content from the internet, while your phone or tablet acts as the remote control. Video output goes up to a crisp 1080p, but what you actually get depends on the app you use and, most importantly, the strength of your wi-fi. Sound-wise, the Stick supports Dolby Digital Plus 7.1.

All good so far. But things begin to unravel when we compare the Roku Streaming Stick with its big brother the Roku 3, and with the Google Chromecast. These other options highlight a number of flaws here.

Operation is fine, but next to the Roku 3, the Streaming Stick is slower and more hesitant. Try to scroll through 10 titles on Netflix and the Streaming Stick struggles. Its loading times are longer too, both on start-up and when booting up an app.

The disparity between the two Roku devices is due to a difference in processing power, and yes, the Roku 3 is pricier, but it also offers more features. As for casting, the Google Chromecast's expanding library of apps leaves the Streaming Stick well behind. It's also not unusual for the Stick to choke on a cast, while the Chromecast casts effortlessly.

When we first reviewed the Roku Streaming Stick, we gave it five stars. It's still an impressive little package for the money, but there are better alternatives.

Rating ★★★★★☆

FOR Features are plentiful and versatile

AGAINST Operation is not nearly as slick as its best rivals

VERDICT Not the smoothest operator around, but the Roku Streaming Service has a good bag of tricks

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TEST VERDICT**THE WINNER****Roku 3****£100 ★★★★★**

Affordable options for smartening up your telly are growing all the time but, for the time being, the **Roku 3** tops our list

We just watched a lot of TV. By the end, it was clear that one device had stayed plugged in the longest, by far.

That's the Roku 3. We love it the most for many reasons. Its speed. Its connections. Its laundry-list of features, including the ability to connect headphones into the controller and listen, erm, remotely.

These reasons, combined with a generous selection of apps, make the Roku 3 the most versatile and pleasant box in this selection.

Sure, it's on the pricey side. But so is the Apple TV, which has a weighty price tag despite offering nowhere near as much freedom as the Roku 3. It does

offer excellent build quality, and for Apple users product integration is unparalleled. We only wish Apple would play better with others.

On the other end of the spectrum is the Now TV Box: cheap as two portions of chips but limited in features and specs. It's been outgunned, but remains a good first step into streaming.

Then we have the sticks. We love the Google Chromecast's innovative and intuitive mobile-based antics. It's great to use, with a good number of compatible apps, and that number is only growing. We'd take that over the Roku Streaming Stick, which offers more apps, but costs more and doesn't perform anywhere near as seamlessly.

SYSTEM BUILDER

These three – with your existing TV – will help the Roku 3 really shine

**Home cinema amplifier****Yamaha RX-V377 £260 ★★★★★**

Features. Power. Connections. Confidence and punch. Truly a great way to get into surround sound.

**Speaker package****QAcoustics 2000i5.1 £650 ★★★★★**

Still a firm favourite at this price three years after its debut. A must-hear for those looking for affordability and style in spades.

NETFLIX**Video streaming service****Netflix from £6 per month ★★★★★**

If you subscribe to one streaming service, make it this. Good balance of old and new films and TV shows, and near-universal compatibility.

Total build from £1010

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

Facts & figures**Apple TV****£80 ★★★★★**

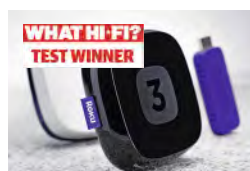
Output HDMI, optical • **Max Resolution** 1080p • **Sound** Dolby Digital 5.1 Passthrough • **USB** No • **Expandable** Memory No • **Ethernet** Yes • **Size (hwd)** 9.8 x 9.8 x 2.3cm

**Google Chromecast****£30 ★★★★★**

Output HDMI • **Max resolution** 1080p • **Sound** Dolby Digital Plus 5.1 P'through • **USB** No • **Expandable** memory No • **Ethernet** No • **Size (hwd)** 7.2 x 3.5 x 1.2cm

**Now TV****£10 ★★★★★**

Output HDMI • **Max resolution** 720p • **Sound** Dolby Digital 5.1 • **UBS** No • **Expandable memory** No • **Ethernet** No • **Size (hwd)** 8.4 x 8.4 x 2.4cm

**Roku 3****£100 ★★★★★**

Output HDMI **Max resolution** 1080p • **Sound** Dolby Digital Plus 7.1 Passthrough • **USB** Yes • **Expandable memory** Yes, micro SD • **Ethernet** Yes • **Size (hwd)** 8.9 x 8.9 x 2.5cm

**Roku Streaming Stick****£40 ★★★★★**

Output HDMI • **Max resolution** 1080p • **Sound** Dolby Digital 7.1 Passthrough • **USB** No • **Expandable** memory No • **Ethernet** No • **Size (hwd)** 7.8 x 2.7 x 1.2cm

SMARTPHONE BUDDIES

We run through some of the best Bluetooth speakers to find the ideal match for your music on-the-move

Damson Vulcan



Pure Voca



Bayan Audio Soundbook Go



Roberts Travel Pad

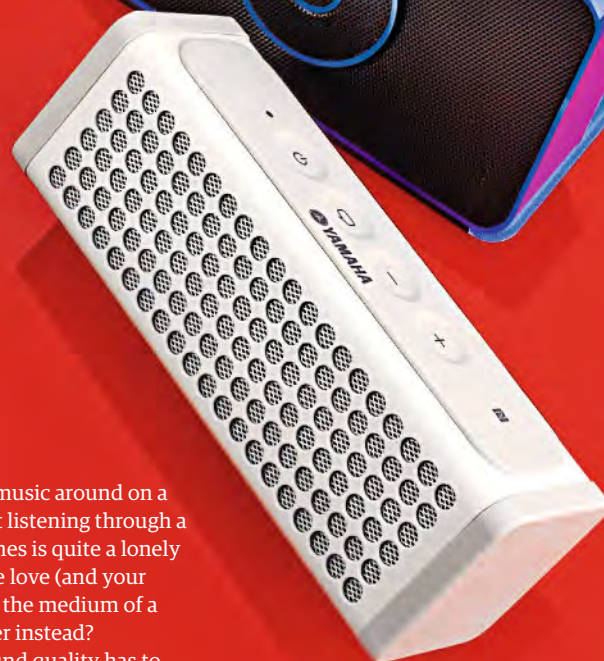


Philips BT3500B

Many of us carry music around on a smartphone, but listening through a pair of headphones is quite a lonely pursuit. Why not share the love (and your music collection) through the medium of a portable Bluetooth speaker instead?

If you start thinking sound quality has to take a hit, think again. You can still get great audio from a small, affordable and mobile package. In this test we present a handful of options, so let us put you on the path to finding the one you will want nestling in your pocket.

Yamaha NX-P100



BAYAN AUDIO SOUNDBOOK GO

£72 ★★★★★

Scan the market and you will quickly discover that Bluetooth speaker design tends to involve a rectangle of some sort.

Bayan has opted for a sloping rectangle with just enough tilt to fire music up and towards the listener. Available in three different colours (blue, red or white), each speaker comes with its own Apple-esque magnetic cover. It lies across and protects the speaker when not in use, and provides a firm base when flipped underneath.

Take care with sticky fingers

The colourful glossy finish stands out, but there's a price to pay: it easily shows up greasy paw prints and it didn't take long for the speaker to become a bit grubby. In terms of features the Bayan is fairly competitive against the rest of the pack: there's an integrated mic, a 3.5mm auxiliary input for connecting alternative sources, and near-field communication (NFC) pairing. But there's no battery indicator – Bayan claims it lasts seven hours, so the built-in battery falls short of the Pure Voca and Roberts Travel Pad.

However it's sound quality that is crucial for this type of kit, and the Bayan's overall balance is nicely judged. Highs don't jar as especially harsh or uncomfortable. There's decent weight to low-frequency rumblings, yet it avoids sounding thick or woolly. Play OK Go's *Here It Goes Again* and the snappy mids are nicely taut and firm.

Where the Soundbook Go falls down is when it comes to musicality. Tracks don't sing with enough rhythm. The Bayan doesn't communicate the swing and enthusiasm of Sam and Dave's *Soul Man*, and it struggles to accommodate the more subtle dynamic demands of Stephen Fretwell's *Run*. A speaker such as the Philips BT3500B has a better grasp of the music and shows greater versatility across the range. The Bayan puts in a decent shift, but you couldn't place it among the top performers. Class leaders at this level deliver superior sound quality and features.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Decent looks; relatively taut and solid bass; focused sound

AGAINST Glossy finish attracts marks; sound lacks rhythm and versatility; sounds a touch closed-in

VERDICT The Soundbook Go is by no means a bad effort, but it's just a bit out of its depth when put up against the best in class



The Damson Vulcan resembles a small rugby ball with the ends lopped off

DAMSON VULCAN

£100 ★★★★★

For small, portable Bluetooth speakers, it isn't easy overcoming the laws of physics. Trying to create large-scale audio from a small box is a tricky undertaking. Damson hopes to create a big, bold sound and spread it further and wider than its competitors by having more drive units and being smarter with their positioning. Besides a subwoofer, there are four drivers inside the Vulcan: two fire towards you, while the other two launch sound of out the sides.

And, to its credit, the Vulcan dispenses its sound reasonably well – there isn't the localised feel apparent through the Bayan Audio Soundbook Go. The Vulcan can be pushed relatively hard for a speaker of its type, and there's decent weight and body to the sound at high and low volumes. Play The Strokes' *Under Cover Of Darkness* and you can follow the trail of the bass guitar without issue. Highs sound a tad brash and lack some finesse, but they don't annoy or sound offensive.

The Damson seems to do something strange to vocals. Compared with the rest of the way music is delivered, voices sound compressed and recessed, as if they're coming from a separate speaker altogether. On Sam Smith's *Stay With Me*, there's good weight as piano keys are struck, but there's a lack of freedom and expression in his voice.

There's decent weight and body to the sound at high and low volumes

A touch of the Curate's Egg?

The Vulcan's an interesting shape: think along the lines of a small rugby ball, with the ends sliced off. The black grilles are magnetic and can be interchanged with red or white options (£20 each). The buttons on top feel a bit cheap, while a light inside the Damson logo shows if you're paired, and indicates when the built-in battery has reached full capacity (battery life is an impressive 12 hours). There's NFC pairing, a 3.5mm input, plus a built-in mic for hands-free calling. A carry-bag is also included for extra protection.

For the money, the Damson isn't a disappointment, but on the other hand it doesn't really set our world on fire. The way it handles vocals is particularly strange, and you'll find better all-round options elsewhere.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Goes loud; solid enough bass

AGAINST Top end lacks refinement; vocals sound recessed and compressed

VERDICT The Damson does what it sets out to do – but we'd like it to do it better



The finish on the Bayan Songbook Go is striking, but it is easily marked by fingerprints

PHILIPS BT3500B

£70 ★★★★★

WHAT HI-FI?
TEST WINNER

We wouldn't normally accuse a product of lying down on the job, but we're making an exception with the Philips. The BT3500B can stand either on its edge, or you can flip out its kickstand and lay it down in a shallow recline. This way it fires up into the air and encourages a bigger spread of sound, while also removing the fear that it could topple over. The only slight downside when it is in a near-horizontal position is that music loses a little precision and focus, but if you're more intent on filling a room with sound, then it'll do the job just fine.

Dial up the sound

Other aspects of the speaker's appearances are pretty unspectacular. The only real accent of note is the silver dial tucked in the upper right-hand corner of the unit: you rotate this dial clockwise or anti-clockwise to change volume. On the top edge of the Philips is a slider switch, which flicks between Bluetooth mode and the 3.5mm auxiliary input. There's a button next door, which either starts the pairing process or ends any phone-call taken through the built-in mic. Another step along is an NFC logo, for an alternative way to pair a smartphone.

The built-in battery is charged using a micro-USB cable, which comes supplied in the box. Battery life is only five hours, which is disappointing considering some rivals can offer double this.

Stream a few bars of The Clash's *I Fought The Law* and the Philips rocks along enthusiastically. Drums and handclaps have pep and vigour, electric guitars have just the right amount of edge. There isn't quite the clarity or outright detail in the mids and highs compared with the Roberts Travel Pad, but the Philips offers a slightly fuller, more rounded sound. Play Kanye West's *Black Skinhead* and the bassline is tight and well behaved. There's much more control in the lows here compared with playing the same track on the Pure Voca.

We'd like more from the built-in battery, but the BT3500B hits the spot with the time it has got, thanks to its all-round sonic ability.

Rating ★★★★★

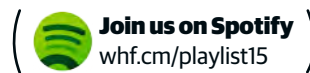
FOR Excellent sense of rhythm; open, expressive sound; good detail

AGAINST Battery life is limited; not the most refined top end

VERDICT For the money, the Philips is a great, affordable way to go wireless. Sound quality is excellent



The Philips can stand either on its edge or you can flip out its kickstand underneath



Listen to our favourite tracks every month!



The wrap-around aluminium case, with its brushed effect, sets the Pure Voca apart

PURE VOCA

£65 ★★★★★☆

Pure's Voca looks and feels like a quality product. The wrap-around aluminium case, complete with brushed-metal effect, sets it apart from the 'plastic-fantastic brigade' at this money. Even the matt-finish buttons on top feel pleasant and respond with a satisfying click. The speaker has a decent-sized footprint so it's stable and doesn't skid across a desktop (no balancing act needed here).

Our only disappointment lies with the rubber base stuck on the underside of the speaker. On our sample it was fitted skew-whiff and this small detail just took the shine off our otherwise pleasant introduction. We hope other samples do not have the same problem.

Fairly standard for features

The Voca has a pretty ordinary features list. There's a 3.5mm input and an integrated mic for taking calls. It's charged using a normal power supply instead of micro-USB. Bluetooth support doesn't include aptX (but that isn't necessarily the end of the world), and there's no NFC for pairing devices. Battery life comes in at a claimed 10 hours.

Play 50 Cent's *Winners Circle* and the Voca starts on the front foot. Highs sound relatively sweet and refined for a product of this type, while Fiddy's vocal shows decent texture and detail. There's

a clear step up in finesse and refinement compared with the likes of the Yamaha NX-P100 and Damson Vulcan. The built-in subwoofer brings fullness and richness to the bass, but it does have a bad habit of stepping over the line.

Spin Iggy Azalea's *My World*, where the bass notes come thick and fast, and the Pure trips itself up. Each note is over-egged and as the track tries to move forward you find the bass lags behind the rest of the music. If you are willing to sacrifice bass weight, you will find greater clarity listening to the Roberts Travel Pad and more cohesiveness through the Philips BT3500B.

The Voca does a lot of things right, but in the end that troublesome bass dampens some of our initial enthusiasm.

Rating ★★★★★☆

FOR Impressive looks; nice design; good battery life; refined highs; rich midrange

AGAINST Limited features; rubber base not applied well; overpowering bass

VERDICT One of the more attractive designs for the money, hindered only by that over-confident bass

The built-in subwoofer brings fullness to the bass but it can step over the line

ROBERTS TRAVEL PAD

£80 ★★★★★

A **Travel Pad** sounds like it should come with a free ballpoint pen. But this British purveyor of radios hasn't delved into the stationery world. Instead, it's looking for a slice of the Bluetooth speaker market, and this slender offering looks rather fetching. The smooth finish of the rubber surround feels nice in-hand, and the fact you can just see the speaker drive-units beneath the main grille keeps your interest up.

Green is for go

The front of the speaker features a battery-level indicator, in the shape of three green lights. There's also a Bluetooth indicator, which glows blue when the speaker is connected, and a flash of red from the maximum volume indicator should you hit the ceiling. There are also buttons for power, volume and going hands-free through the integrated mic. Besides a USB charging-port and an auxiliary input, the Travel Pad also features a lock-switch, a bit like on a mobile phone, so you don't accidentally turn it on.

The Travel Pad supports standard Bluetooth and aptX, should your handset handle both, and you can tap compatible smartphones on its NFC logo for speedy pairing.

Given the Roberts' slender stature, it's not surprising to discover that bass weight isn't the Travel Pad's forte. There is a lack of body and richness, even compared to the similarly slim Philips BT3500B. On the plus side, the Travel Pad actually sounds wonderfully clear and open all the way up the frequency range. Play Hozier's *Work Song* and his soulful vocal shines through with a fine sense of spaciousness.

Switch to Royal Blood's *Figure It Out* and there's texture and detail throughout. The speaker keeps its composure despite the distortion in the main vocal and it keeps a good sense of rhythm for the duration of the track. Roberts is branching out from radios in style.

The Travel Pad has nice touches where features are concerned and although not the most bombastic of sounds, it offers enough to hold your interest.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Neat design; thoughtful features; clean and open sound; loads of detail

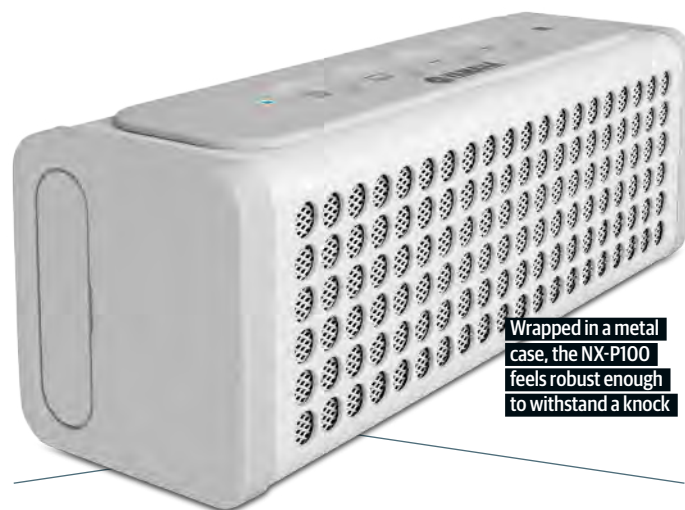
AGAINST Not the most generous when it comes to bass weight

VERDICT The Roberts Travel Pad delivers a portable Bluetooth pick-me-up, with fine sound from a well-designed package



The slender Travel Pad by Roberts is rather fetching with its rubber surround

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Wrapped in a metal case, the NX-P100 feels robust enough to withstand a knock

YAMAHA NX-P100

£86 ★★★★★

Just when you thought you couldn't squeeze any more features into a budget Bluetooth speaker, enter stage left the Yamaha NX-P100. AptX Bluetooth? Check. Built-in mic? Check. NFC? Check. A friendly voice telling you when you're paired and how much battery life is left? Check. And the Yamaha isn't finished there.

Charge the light brigade

The NX-P100 can come to your rescue and charge portable devices using its Type-A USB socket. You can even play music through the speaker from a laptop - all you need to do is run a cable from your computer to its micro-USB socket. A wired connection isn't the most practical, but it does allow you to enjoy the sound-quality benefits that come with it: music sounds more solid and refined.

All these features are wrapped up in a solid package. The edges and top controls of the speaker are rubberised and Yamaha claims it can also withstand the odd splash of water. Wrapped in a metal case, the speaker feels robust enough to withstand a few knocks (it's perforated at the front to let sound out. The P100's rechargeable battery should hold out for around eight hours, which is about average. But then all these niceties are pointless if the Yamaha proves to be all show and no go.

Play alt-J's *Breezblocks* and you're waiting for an explosion of energy and life, but it never really arrives. The Yamaha doesn't express itself as easily as rival speakers. There's more substance to bass notes than from the Roberts Travel Pad, but it doesn't sound particularly punchy or solid. Nor is there the same level of the texture or detail in the treble compared to the Pure Voca. There's a half-decent level of detail across the board, but the Philips BT3500B is a better option here. It provides a sense of rhythm and togetherness for all the different elements of the track that the Yamaha doesn't quite get.

It's nice to have all the features the Yamaha provides, but we'd prefer the sonic side of things being brought up to scratch.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Rugged design; can charge your smartphone; solid midrange

AGAINST Struggles for excitement and rhythm; bass lacks solidity and firmness

VERDICT A rugged little box of tricks, but requires better sound quality if it's going to trouble the class leaders

THE LAST PICTURE SHOW?

HEAD TO HEAD

With movie streaming so widespread, Blu-ray's days could be numbered. But these premium players have other ideas



FACTS & FIGURES

	Oppo BDP-105D	Pioneer BDP-LX88
HDMI out	2	2
Optical out	1	1
Coaxial out	1	1
Multichannel out	Yes	No
Compatibility	Blu-ray, DVD, CD, SA CD, DVD-Audio	Blu-ray, DVD, CD, SA CD, DVD-Audio
Dimensions (hwd)	12 x 43 x 31cm	13 x 44 x 34cm
Weight	7.9kg	13.4kg

Oppo BDP-105D

£1100 ★★★★★

Oppo's flagship BDP-105D really won us over at the back end of last year, justifying its high price tag with an admirable can-do attitude.

We gave it five stars for combining a wide range of features with excellent performance, offering plenty of format compatibility to keep connoisseurs happy.

Four months on and little has changed - this is still a hugely accomplished player, and then some. Alongside the standard disc trio of Blu-ray, DVD and CD, the BDP-105D will also play SACDs and DVD-Audio discs, plus it can stream high-res music files (up to 24-bit/192kHz) over your home network.

Smart functionality hasn't been forgotten either, with Netflix, BBC iPlayer, YouTube and BBC News services built in. If that's not enough for you, the player's front-mounted HDMI/MHL port allows for the

Noise levels are undetectable, shadow detail provides plenty of insight in darker scenes, and skin tones are reproduced with wonderful subtlety.

This carries across into DVD performance, which, despite the small increases in motion artefacts and noise levels, offers a superb level of detail and insight.

Sonic strength

Movie sound is handled with similar confidence, with a bold, full-bodied presentation that delivers big action scenes with power and authority. Our only criticism is that the bass could be a little tauter - it's weighty but doesn't always tell you as much as the precise Pioneer BDP-LX88. It doesn't take away from a wholly immersive, engaging presentation, though, with stacks of detail

The Blu-ray picture here is absolutely superb. We love its crisp edges, strong handling of motion and rich colour palette. Noise levels are undetectable

addition of a Roku streaming stick or similar. Other inputs include three type A USBs for portable devices and USB keys, plus a further HDMI in on the back panel.

Digital audio provision

There's also a selection of digital audio ins, including optical, coaxial and type B USB, so you can take advantage of the player's reference-level ESS Sabre 32 ES9018 DAC.

Outputs are largely dealt with by the dual HDMI, but analogue outs are accounted for too - single-ended and balanced XLR connections plus rarer multi-channel audio outputs.

The Blu-ray picture here is absolutely superb. We love its crisp edges, strong handling of motion and rich colour palette, so much so we found the DARBEE picture processing functionality largely surplus to requirements.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Excellent picture quality; authoritative, powerful sound through stereo and multi-channel; good connectivity; well featured

AGAINST Bass could be tauter

VERDICT If you want a source that does it all - brilliantly - the Oppo is hard to fault

Pioneer BDP-LX88

£1300 ★★★★★☆

It's been a few years since we've seen a reference-grade Blu-ray player from Pioneer - seven, in fact - but finally we have a successor to 2008's five-star BDP-LX91 with the new BDP-LX88. Can it justify the extra £200 over the Oppo?

Universal disc play

The LX88 is a universal disc player, so alongside Blu-ray, DVD and CD playback, it will play music from SACDs and DVD-Audio discs.

It can't, however, challenge the Oppo on connectivity. There are two HDMI outs, coaxial and optical outs, both RCA and balanced analogue stereo outputs and two USB ins, but no headphone jack nor any other digital inputs aside from USB. That seems a bit of a shame when the on-board DAC chip is such a good one - the same ESS Sabre 32 ES9018 DAC the Oppo uses.

Once it gets going, it's hard to fault the Blu-ray performance here. Lines are precisely etched, textures nicely detailed, and colours and skin tones natural - just on the cooler side of neutral. Motion is handled with confidence and noise levels are very low.

DVD performance shows up similar results. We try a DVD of 2014's *Robocop* and find edges to be crisp, colours natural and enough detail offered for one team member to question whether we are watching Blu-ray or not.

Detail and heft in abundance

When it comes to movie sound, the Pioneer continues to impress, with a precise and detailed presentation (if a slightly smaller-scale, more focused soundfield than found on the Oppo.) Fight scenes are backed with a tauter, more detailed bass

A DVD of *Robocop* offers crisp edges, natural colours and enough detail for one team member to question whether we were watching Blu-ray or not

Built-in network services are limited to Picasa for photos and YouTube for video, with no Netflix or BBC iPlayer in sight. While it's likely your amp or TV will offer these services now, it's still a shame not to see them included.

Music-wise, it supports all the popular file formats and includes compatibility for DSD 2.8MHz and PCM files up to 24-bit/192kHz.

As you'd expect at this level, the LX88 is fully capable of 3D playback and packs an Ultra HD 4K reference converter for upsampling content.

The unit itself is well built and sturdy. The front panel is neat, while on-screen menus, if a little basic and uninspiring, are easily navigated and simple to understand. The remote, though, is still a little too cluttered for our liking, but at least it's backlit so you can see the buttons during dark movie sessions.

response, and there's a good sense of impact and solidity to explosions, where the Oppo can sound just a touch soft in comparison.

CD uncertainty

We can't help but be a little disappointed by the unit's stereo music sound. There's plenty of detail, but it's not a performance we'd recommend swapping out for your standalone CD player. Debussy's *Clair De Lune* sounds rather hard and bright, while Stevie Wonder's *Pastime Paradise* lacks the refinement and dynamic handling we crave.

With movies, there's little to separate this from the Oppo other than personal preference, but its stereo performance needs to be better to garner the full five. The BDP-105D offers a better all-round performance and feature set.

Rating ★★★★★☆

FOR Crisp, detailed picture; well built; good remote app; precise movie sound performance; solid, taut bass

AGAINST Minimal streaming services; sound on the lean side; stereo performance

VERDICT Stellar with movies, but its stereo performance lets it down

Spendor D7

Technology or Music?

Hi-Fi Choice



hi-fi+

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION



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Hi-Fi Choice issue 370 2013

Spendor's approach is the most radical I've seen, going where no hi-fi manufacturer has gone before. D7 is extremely capable and very neutral, but most importantly it puts the music first *Hi-Fi + Dec 2013*

However it's been achieved, we can't help but marvel at the sound. Spendor D7's set the standard for speakers at this price *What Hi-Fi Oct 2013*

Among the finest speakers I've heard at any price
Sam Tellig, Stereophile Nov 2014



The A6Rs truly are a stunning achievement
What Hi-Fi Awards 2014

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We can hear hints of just how good the Y40 headphones can be. The punchy, snappy rhythm that AKG delivers so well is intact

CABLE FUNCTIONS

The cable has an in-line mic and a responsive remote for taking calls, skipping tracks and - if you have an Android device - changing volumes.

AKG Y40 £70



We're used to heaping praise on AKG headphones. Given that the company has two successive Product of the Year gongs for its sub-£100 headphones, we have high expectations for the Y40s, which come in black, blue or yellow.

These portables are just one step down from our current Award-winners - the superb AKG Y50s (£80). Surely they are a shoo-in for a five-star accolade? Well, not quite.

A question of balance

They're not as balanced as we'd expect, for one. The top end is given hardly any prominence, while bass performance sounds rather overcooked. The unbalanced presentation is surprising to hear. We're used to such a winningly controlled, clear and even-toned performance from AKG.

Play Aerosmith's *Crazy* and Steven Tyler's voice strains and fizzles out before he reaches his trademark wailing peaks. The Y40s' treble is rolled off to such an extent that we miss out on the finer details of guitar-string twangs and soaring orchestra highs. It lacks sparkle.

Bass performance, while not lacking in enthusiasm or richness, is on the tubby side. Coupled with the closed-in stage of the Y40s, there's an indistinct quality to the sound that's hard to shake off, even after a few days' running in. Next to more balanced and delightfully insightful rivals such as the Beyerdynamic DTX 501 p, the Y40s sound like they're holding back.

And we can hear hints of just how good the Y40 headphones could be. The punchy, snappy rhythm that AKG delivers so well is intact. We're caught up in the build up to John Williams' *Theme From Jurassic Park*, even if the Y40s don't leave much room for the strings and horns to hit the high notes. The stop and start of notes are handled with taut control, and there's plenty of detail on board. The agile presentation keeps our toes tapping, too.

The foldable, swivelling earcups make these 'phones portable and compact enough to stash in a handbag or even large coat pockets, and the sturdy construction feels durable and of a high quality - it's a great design.

We find the dinky earcups a little too small, though. Larger earcups (with softer, plusher cushioning) would cover our ears more comfortably, thereby offering a greater degree of immersion. On the plus side, they grip snugly and securely enough.

Big brother

You only have to look to the Award-winning AKG Y50s to find a more comfortable fit and far more engaging, dynamic and stunningly subtle performance. Which makes the Y40s' unbalanced presentation all the more puzzling. The punchy, agile rhythms are worth a listen, but the Y50's better, more engaging option is only a tenner away.

Rating ★★☆☆☆

FOR Punchy, upbeat rhythm; decent amount of detail; sturdy build; foldable and easily portable

AGAINST Rolled-off treble; overblown bass; earcups are not the most comfortable

VERDICT Unbalanced, unrefined performance - this isn't the AKGs we're used to

Voices are intimate and expressive. You can hear every intake of breath and intonation, as if the artists are singing right next to you

COLOUR AND CASE

You can have your DTX 501 ps finished in black or white, and the price includes a particularly compact carrying case.



Beyerdynamic DTX 501 p £60



Insightful, dynamic and utterly engaging, the Beyerdynamic DTX 501 p headphones are one of the best-sounding portable pairs we've heard at this price.

There is oodles of detail on offer, and it delivers the harmonies and vocal nuances of any song with authority and ease. Voices are intimate and expressive. You can hear every intake of breath and quirk of intonation as if the artists are singing right next to you.

The sound is wonderfully balanced, with clear, open highs and a satisfyingly deep bass that's never out of shape. There's muscle and weight behind Alice Cooper's *Poison*, while the haunting tone of The Unthanks' *Gan To The Kye* is conveyed with poise. The DTX 501 ps offer plenty of space for the song to unfold, with individual instruments easy to pick out and follow.

The rich, melodic presentation isn't masking any subtleties or lack of precision, either. These are astonishingly articulate headphones. The Dead Weather's *I Can't Hear You* can flummox even high-end headphones, but the Beyerdynamics' surefooted sense of

timing confidently handles that taut, punchy rhythm and maintains the slow build-up of suspense. Controlled, capable yet still managing to have fun, the 501 ps are hugely engaging and entertaining.

We wish we could be similarly enthused about the fit and build. These cans are flexible, light and have a folding mechanism that stows away the rotating earcups, making them easy to carry, but the headband is a touch too loose and too big. The grip would be perfect if you could adjust them to a smaller size, but as it is they never feel secure on your head. We find ourselves constantly nudging the (very comfy) earcups up to make them fit better.

We tested the 501 ps on all sizes of heads in the review team, and everyone said they'd want another notch or two of tightening. If you sneeze, they fall off – rather dramatically.

Heads up, everyone

Another crucial element for a portable pair of headphones is the inclusion of an in-line mic and remote cable. The Beyerdynamics don't offer any controls,

which is fine if you don't need them, but we think it's a glaring omission considering rivals at this price – from AKG to Yamaha – all provide the option to control music playback and take calls.

Sound and substance

We're charmed by the sound quality here. The subtle, fluid melodies and beautifully judged balance are lovely to hear at this price.

But sound is only half the story, and the DTX 501 ps don't quite pass the test when it comes to portable use. The loose fit and lack of in-line controls means they just miss out on a perfect score. But try them on for yourself: the Beyerdynamics sound far too good to be ignored.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Gorgeous sound quality; punch; agile timing; detail; lightweight, foldable design

AGAINST Loose fit won't suit everyone; no in-line mic or controls

VERDICT Superb performance that blows away the competition, but not the perfect pair



BOLD OR DISCREET

We like the Sun colours of our review sample, but for a more understated look, try the Pulse (black) or Mist (white with turquoise detail) finishes.

There's an eagerness to deliver punchy rhythm, but it manifests as a sound that's too boomy and too hard

House of Marley Positive Vibration £50



House of Marley's funky, eco-friendly design is certainly appealing, but the Positive Vibration headphones' sound leaves us feeling cold.

We've been here before: charmed by House of Marley's well built and attractive headphones, before the crushing disappointment of the limited and not-so-subtle sound quality.

The Positive Vibration sound is loud and bold - not a bad start. Notes are solid and direct, but the headphones are essentially a blunt instrument that attempts to make an impact without delving beyond superficial detail.

There's an eagerness to deliver punchy rhythm, but it manifests as a sound that's a little too boomy, a little too hard, and with little sense of space or dynamics.

Taut rhythm comes loose

Play test favourite *Wildfire* by Sbtrkt and that taut, grungy bassline loses its articulate nature. Drum hits are a touch flabby and lack the necessary impact, while leading edges of notes lack detail.

It's not the most open sound, either. Voices and instruments vie for attention

in a cramped space. The Vibrations' overeager manner pushes all notes to the forefront, and it's hard to distinguish the space between instruments. An orchestral arrangement such as John Williams' *Theme From Jurassic Park* sounds rather one-dimensional as a result.

On the flat

There's little in the way of texture and dynamic complexity to the horns or string sections, so that soaring sense of wonder as the music builds up and reaches its crescendo is never fully realised. It's a flat, uninspiring sound.

Voices, whether a rasping Courtney Love or smooth-as-butter Michael Bublé, aren't very nuanced. Rivals at this price, such as the Beyerdynamic DTX 501 ps, deliver a subtler, more interesting sound.

We like the combination of aluminium, plastic and cloth that makes up House of Marley's distinctive design. The headphones look good, and the overall build is sturdy, with a flexible headband that has a firm grip. Our one gripe - and it's a big one - is that the ear cushions are far too firm. They're

uncomfortably hard from the moment you slip them on, with more pressure than necessary pushing down on the top of our ears. The cushioning needs to be much softer to be wearable - even short bursts of listening leave us feeling headachy. We'd definitely recommend trying them on if you're close to thinking of buying them.

The Positive Vibrations come with an in-line remote, but there's an odd quirk with the controls. When used with Sony Xperia Z3 models, pressing the middle play/pause button turns the volume up.

The Positive Vibrations' sound is far from competitive, and the uncomfortably hard ear cushions have us reaching for rivals at this price.

Rating ★★☆☆☆

FOR Solid, bold sound; sturdy, eco-friendly build and design; portable; in-line controls

AGAINST Not as subtle as rivals; boomy bass; one-dimensional presentation; hard earpads

VERDICT Uncomfortable and uninspiring, these eco-friendly cans miss the mark

They're great for a snappy rhythm,
but not so great for getting fully
immersed and lost in the melodic
ebb and flow of music

COLOUR OPTIONS

The style is minimalist, but you can get the E30s in red, blue, white or black finishes. All come with an in-line mic and remote cable.



JBL Synchros E30 £60

★★★★☆

Performance and comfort should go hand in hand with headphones. The JBL Synchros E30s have every intention of being the perfect portable pair of cans, but the uncomfortably hard fit doesn't do them any favours.

Pressure point

There's ample cushioning on the earcups and headband, but the vice-like grip is our main gripe. The headphones clamp down on our ears far too hard and the initial intense pressure doesn't let up, even after a couple of days. There's no scope for adjusting the angle of the earcups - a design flaw that doesn't take into account the various shapes of people's heads. We can't imagine keeping them on for extended periods.

It's a shame they're uncomfortable to wear, because they're tough and durable. A folding mechanism lets the ear cups collapse inwards for easy storage, making them compact enough to carry around in a bag.

The E30s fare better when it comes to music. Play Blackstreet's *No Diggity* and the E30s charge along with a nimble-

footed and detailed presentation. The upbeat bassline keeps the rhythm lively, although there's a bit too much oomph in the low end to be entirely convincing.

The blaring trumpets sparkle and bite in Quincy Jones's *Blues In The Night*. There's a brightness to the very edge of the treble that rears its head when the saxophone solo really gets going - it's exciting, but it comes at the cost of a refined or elegant top end. If you're a heavy metal fan, you'll find the E30s don't take too kindly to power vocals - Dio's *The Last In Line* sounds brash and coarse just when you want to start punching the air to the Ronnie Dio's hair-raising singing. We could do with richer layers of detail fleshing out each tautly-pulled note.

Jim Croce's melodic *Time In A Bottle* could be more inviting and engaging, too. The E30s need to punch deeper to dig out the nuances and subtleties in the warm, fluid vocals.

A more capable, revealing pair of headphones, such as the Beyerdynamic DTX 501 ps, show just how much subtler, more dynamic and punchier the

sound could be. The E30s are a little on the lean side. They're great for a snappy rhythm, but not so great for getting fully immersed and lost in the melodic ebb and flow of music (which the E30s aren't entirely generous with).

Light and shade

A patchy performance from JBL, then. The top end blares a bit too sharply for our liking, and the lively overall sound needs a large helping of rich detail to get us fully engaged with the music.

The fiercely hard grip of these cans is the bigger stumbling block. It wouldn't hurt to give the E30s a chance, but keep in mind there are countless rivals offering a more comfortable listening experience.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Upbeat, nimble rhythm; punchy listen; sturdy, portable design

AGAINST Grip is too tight; sharp, bright edge to treble; rivals are more engaging, more refined

VERDICT An uncomfortable fit and bright edge mar an otherwise lively pair of headphones

There are clearer, more insightful headphones, but the P21Ss offer an easy-on-the-ears presentation



WEAR AND TEAR

That all-white finish looks classy out of the box but we worry how well it will stand up to life on the move. Keep those uncapped pens away...

SoundMagic P21S £50



Smooth-sounding and comfortable to wear: have the SoundMagic P21S headphones hit upon the magic combination? Almost - but it's not the perfect performance we're looking for. These aren't the most detailed or precise pair of headphones. They are, however, utterly pleasant and easy to listen to.

Smooth, warm, round - no edge

The sound is smooth, warm and full of enthusiasm, but the edges of notes are rolled off to achieve that rounded quality to the sound, and outright subtlety is sacrificed along the way. The aggressive punch behind Rage Against The Machine's anthemnic *Killing In The Name* sounds rich yet lacks a touch of attack, while Leonard Cohen's gravelly voice on *A Street* is softened around the edges. But the SoundMags do manage to keep the spirit of the song intact.

Unlike rivals the Yamaha HPH-M82s or House of Marley Positive Vibrations, the SoundMags are dynamic and engaging. The low end charges along merrily, punching deep enough to give weight and depth to songs. Voices are

expressive and fluid - the fervent string-pluckage in Paulo Mendonca's blues-tinged *Just In Case* may not sound the most taut and agile through the SoundMags, but it's packed with energy and the dynamic shifts are delivered admirably.

The bass is on the boomy side, which takes away a bit of sparkle and bite, but here's no hint of brightness or sharpness in the treble and we can thank the rolled-off quality for that. Next to the surprisingly unbalanced AKG Y40s, we like how inoffensive and immediately likeable the SoundMags sound - despite their shortcomings.

Functional, but comfortable

On the face of it, the SoundMagic headphones don't exude quality. The build feels cheap, and the headband creaks when flexed.

We stop caring about all that though the second we slip the P21Ss on. They're light, with a stable grip that doesn't feel too snug, and the earpads are delightfully squishy and comfortable. They even offer a degree of noise-

isolation, and you could while away the hours in Spotify-heaven without feeling encumbered by them.

The lightweight, foldable design means they're ideal for portable use and easy to store in a bag, while the in-line control lets you pause your music to take a call - from an Apple or Android phone.

Yes, there are clearer and more insightful headphones. Rivals such as the Beyerdynamic DTX 501 ps offer an impressive level of subtlety and dynamics, and are better built. But what the P21Ss offer is an easy-on-the-ears presentation, with enough punch and liveliness to keep us interested in what we're listening to. They're comfortable, too. Give them a whirl.

Rating ★★☆☆☆

FOR Smooth sound that's easy to listen to; punchy rhythm; lightweight; comfortable

AGAINST Rivals offer greater precision and detail; bass is a touch boomy; headband creaks

VERDICT Comfort trumps insight here. These are not perfect, but they're pleasant to listen to

PICK A COLOUR

Our pair of HPH-M82s were finished in a sassy shade of red, but if that's not to your taste you can have them in black, white, brown, blue or gold.

If only their lightweight build and spacious presentation were enough to win us over



Yamaha HPH-M82 £60



Light and spacious, but rough on the ears – the Yamaha HPH-M82s aren't the most exciting pair of headphones we've ever wrapped around our heads.

Despite having a good deal of openness for a closed-back design at this price (rivals SoundMagic P21S and AKG Y40 sound comparatively closed in), the HPH-M82s fail to engage fully with songs being played.

They don't summon a great deal of enthusiasm. A lacklustre approach to timing means the M82s add a sluggish quality to otherwise-upbeat songs. The punchy, dynamic tones of Red Hot Chili Peppers' *Mellowship Slinky In B Major* sound a bit too laidback for a funk-rock song. Drums lack bite and attack, and guitar strings are plucked with minimal energy and agility. We'd like a deeper plunge into the lower frequencies, too – the bass could be so much punchier and textured than it sounds here.

Sluggish with rhythm

Regina Spektor's *Fidelity* has an upbeat, nimble rhythm that demands effortless yet taut control, but the Yamahas struggle

to convey the light tone and staccato rhythm. The nuances in her delicate voice aren't fully expressed, either.

The treble, however, takes advantage of the airy presentation. There's space for the top end of notes to soar without sounding sharp, but they could do with a touch more refinement.

Detail and clarity

We like the spacious quality of the HPH-M82s, though. Stone Sour's alt-rock ballad *Bother* is delivered with a decent amount of detail and clarity, while Corey Taylor's gravelly voice is given centre stage. The issues with dynamics and punch still linger, though.

The M82s' lightweight build bodes well for long periods of listening. The headphones have a light but firm grip, which feels secure on your head.

The ear cushions, on the other hand, bother us. Made of material that feels like it could tear easily, they don't provide much in the way of cushioning. We can feel the hard outline of the earcups through the foam – it's uncomfortable and makes our ears itchy over time.

The headband is sturdy and flexible, with no sign of creaking, but the plastic finish looks and feels a little on the cheap side. Rival headphones (such as the AKG Y40 and JBL Synchros E30) offer a higher quality of build for a similar price.

Apple and Android users can use the in-line mic and remote to take calls and control playback. The controls are responsive, although we'd like better volume buttons.

If only their lightweight build and spacious presentation were enough to win us over. But until the M82s tighten up their rhythm and find some excitement (and comfier ear cushions), there's little to sing about.

Rating ★★☆☆☆

FOR Open and spacious sound; clear detail; lightweight build; responsive in-line remote

AGAINST Little excitement or punch; poor timing and refinement; uncomfortable ear pads

VERDICT A lacklustre performance from Yamaha – spacious, but short on energy and fun



WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION

iPAD EDITION

March issue available on iTunes now

TEST VERDICT**THE WINNER****Beyerdynamic DTX 501 p****£60 ★★★★★**

They're not perfect, but the **Beyerdynamic DTX 501 ps** show the way here



It's not often that our test winner is a four-star product. In our quest to find the perfect pair of portable headphones, we've been thwarted at every turn. Despite notable high points, the six on-ears in this test struggle to hit that Goldilocks sweet spot of a comfortable, secure fit combined with superb sound quality. No five stars for anyone, then.

Flawed genius

Nevertheless, the Beyerdynamic DTX 501 ps come so close. They're easily the best-sounding pair of the lot, with the kind of insight, punchy dynamics and brilliantly judged balance that eludes their rivals. It's a shame, then, that they don't fit as securely around our heads (crucial for a portable pair), nor do they include an in-line mic or remote cable (all the others do). It's a misstep that costs them that final star, but their engaging performance makes them the undeniable winners of this test.

The three-starred AKG, JBL and SoundMagic headphones delight us with punchy, lively and rather bassy performances. But the JBLs' vice-like grip and bright edge deter us, while the uneven tonal balance of the AKGs disappoint. The smooth SoundMagics are nice to listen to (if cheap-looking), but they don't have the clearest or most insightful sound. The House of Marley and Yamaha headphones bring up the rear: both lack the excitement and dynamic prowess to deliver a nuanced performance, and neither is comfortable to wear either.

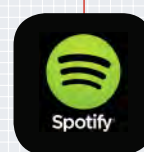
A rollercoaster of a test with some surprising results, but one thing's clear – the Beyerdynamics demand an audition. Don't be afraid to cast your net wider, though.

SYSTEM BUILDER

Perfect partners for the
Beyerdynamic DTX 501 p

**Smartphone****Apple iPhone 6 ★★★★★**

Stunning clarity, detail and punch ensure the iPhone remains king when it comes to smartphone sound. Powerful interface, too.

**Music streaming service****Spotify Premium £10/month ★★★★★**

A vast, exhaustive library of music and an intuitive smartphone app with endless scope for personalised playlists.

**DAC****Audioquest DragonFly £130 ★★★★★**

The DragonFly is a stylish and convenient sonic upgrade for your computer-stored music, making it sound insightful and exciting.

Total build from £190

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

Facts & figures

AKG Y40 £70 ★★★★★ Type On-ear Input 3.5mm jack In-line mic/controls Yes Cable length 1.2m Weight 133g	Beyerdynamic DTX 501 p £60 ★★★★★ Type On-ear Input 3.5mm jack In-line mic/controls No Cable length 1.3m Weight 120g	House of Marley Positive Vibration £50 ★★★★★ Type On-ear Input 3.5mm jack In-line mic/controls Yes Cable length 1.3m Weight 194g	JBL Synchros E30 £60 ★★★★★ Type On-ear Input 3.5mm jack In-line mic/controls Yes Cable length 1.2m Weight 150g	SoundMagic P215 £50 ★★★★★ Type On-ear Input 3.5mm jack In-line mic/controls Yes Cable length 1.2m Weight 115g	Yamaha HPH-M82 £60 ★★★★★ Type On-ear Input 3.5mm jack In-line mic/controls Yes Cable length 1.2m Weight 150g

The world's most desirable kit

TEMPTATIONS

“We can't think of an alternative with such detail and focus”

■ **Linn Akurate Exakt/Akudorik** Streaming system

■ **£17,500** ★★★★★

There's no mistaking Linn's pride in its high-end Exakt range. The brand states (rather boldly) that these systems represent “the most direct connection ever made between you and the artist.” Usually we don't take much notice of such claims, but here we're impressed by the company's refreshingly holistic approach to music replay.

Linn understands the music recording/playback chain better than most. It makes everything from original recordings right the way through analogue and digital sources to cables and speakers. Rarely have we come across a specialist hi-fi manufacturer with fingers in so many pies. Naim Audio is the only

The Akudorik speakers house Linn's bespoke digital-processing system inside their stands

other specialist company we can think of with a similarly wide spread of products.

The idea behind Exakt is to preserve the original music file as far along the replay chain as possible before any processing takes place, and from there process the signal with as little degradation as possible.

A digital journey

The signal path is as follows. Let's start with a 24-bit/96kHz Studio Master file stored on a NAS unit. The Exakt streamer - in this case an Akurate Exakt DSM (a streamer/preamp) - simply reads the digital file and passes it on to the Exakt digital-processing engine housed in each of the speaker stands.

The connection between the DSM and the speakers uses conventional Ethernet cable. The clever bit is the way the signal is transmitted. Linn couldn't find an established digital standard it liked, so the company decided to develop its own. It took three engineers more than eight months to complete the project - the result is called the Exakt Link, and it can transmit up to eight channels of 24-bit/192kHz music streams with very low jitter while maintaining excellent synchronisation between speakers.

Clever processing

Each channel pulls in the appropriate (left or right channel) lossless data into its Exakt processing engine. It's here a lot of clever things happen. First, room optimisation is applied to the music data, followed by a digital crossover that filters the correct range of frequencies for each of the Akudorik's four drive units. At this point the processing also eliminates magnitude and phase

distortions caused by the crossover, drive units and enclosure. Delays are applied to the signal for each of the drive units to ensure proper time-alignment.

The next step involves scaling the data according to the volume level set on the DSM. Just to be clear, the volume adjustment is done in the digital processing engines in the stands, not in the Akurate Exakt DSM unit.

The digital stream is then sent to the appropriate DAC, which feeds the now-analogue signal straight into a power amp. The final step in the signal path is the direct connection between the power amp and the drive unit.

The important thing to note is that the original 24-bit/96kHz file remains intact up to the point it enters the DAC (unlike on a conventional signal path where the music data is converted to analogue by the source component). All the processing is done at 32-bit, so the data shouldn't be corrupted in any way.

Making a good case

So Linn's argument for Exakt is persuasive, even more so when you see the system. This is true high-end hi-fi, but as discreet as just about any lifestyle-orientated alternative. Fit and finish are as we'd expect, the Akurate Exakt DSM being as understated and classy as most Linn electronics.

It's a well equipped unit with a good range of analogue and digital inputs including HDMI, though this is for stereo replay only as there's no home cinema decoding. There are single-ended and balanced analogue outputs, as well as connections for the crucial Exakt Link.

The Akudorik speakers are even more exotic. Their stands not only support the



The important thing to note is that the original file remains intact up to the point it enters the DAC

See overleaf for more detail...



TEMPTATIONS

Linn Akurate Exakt/Akudorik

In detail

1 The brains of the Akudorik lie behind this cover. Here you'll find four Chakra power amps, four DACs and the Exakt processing engine.

2 It's these Exakt link connectors that give the first hint that the Akudorik speakers are something different. The signals sent from the Linn DSM use the company's specially designed transmission method.

3 The Akurate DSM has good connectivity; coaxial, optical and even the rare HDMI, although without on-board movie-soundtrack decoding.



TECH SPECS

LINN AKURATE EXAKT DSM/ AKUDORIK

Plays MP3, FLAC, WAV, ALAC, AIFF, AAC, WMA (except lossless), OGG (up to 24-bit/192kHz), internet radio

Power 2 x 400W

Inputs 3 x coaxial digital, 3 x optical digital, 3 x analogue audio, phono

Outputs Coaxial digital, optical digital, headphone

DAC Yes

Dimensions (main unit, hwd) 19 x 38 x 38cm

speakers but are home to a quartet of Linn's Chakra power amps and the Exakt digital processing engine too. All the electronics are housed in the finned casing you see at the centre of the main column - this support is a terrific piece of engineering and carries a hefty price tag of £9500 to prove it. Add speakers and the price goes up to £13,500, though you'll need a dedicated Exakt source for everything to work.

Material pros and cons

These monitors use Linn's usual three-driver array of 13mm silk-dome supertweeter, 25mm polyurethane tweeter and 75mm polyurethane-dome midrange mounted onto a curved, metal front baffle (as a drive-unit material, polyurethane is heavy and so reduces efficiency, but Linn thinks its internal damping and resultant neutral sound is worth the hit.) A 16.5cm doped-paper cone bass driver augments this array.

The Akudoriks are relatively compact, standing just 35cm high, so they shouldn't dominate in most rooms. Their ability to fit in is not just about compact dimensions either. These speakers come in six standard high-grade finishes - Black Ash, Cherry, Oak, Rosenut, Walnut and White. These options are available in either standard or high gloss versions. Not good enough? Linn also offers a

range of 200 premium high-gloss colour options, which means even the fussiest of interior designers should be satisfied.

Speaker positioning is far less of an issue than usual. Using Linn's Konfig software (available from the company website) the Akudoriks can be optimised for most places in the room. We tried the speakers both in free space and close to the wall and the performance was pretty much the same. This kind of flexibility is almost unheard of with speakers generally, let alone at the high end where performance usually comes first.

Speed with articulation

In many ways this is an astonishing system. We can't think of an alternative that delivers a sound with such detail and focus. All that digital work to match the phase and outputs of the drivers really pays off. This set-up is as even as they come, delivering the kind of top-to-bottom coherence we've only heard in single-driver designs.

It's a fast sound, magnificently agile and as articulate as you like. We sit back in admiration at the way this system unravels a demanding piece of music such as the *Jurassic Park OST* by John Williams. It's a highly composed performance, with the system able to track the subtlest instrumental strand with ease. If you value control and

insight above all we doubt you'll get better for the money.

We're struck by the system's direct presentation. There's a solidity to leading edges that's a pleasure to hear, and makes the efforts of even the best passive speakers we've heard sound blurred and soft in comparison.

Stereo imaging is excellent. It's wonderfully stable and pin-sharp in focus, and layered

convincingly. The size of the sound-stage is terrific too. It extends well beyond the outside edges of

the speakers, making it incredibly hard to pinpoint their position with eyes closed.

We listen to a range of recordings from Michael Jackson's *Thriller* (24-bit/176.4kHz) and Miles Davis's *Kind Of Blue* (24-bit/192kHz) to a 320kbps file of Alt J's *This Is All Yours* and are pleased with the system's consistency across genres. It's insightful enough to make the difference in recordings (in some cases) painfully obvious, but give it something reasonably well produced and it shines.

Distinguished speakers

We rate this package highly, but think the Akudorik speakers are the real stars. Just for fun we feed in the digital output from our reference Naim NDS/555PS streamer (which costs more than three times as much as the Exakt DSM) and find notable improvements in authority, punch and rhythmic drive. It shows that the speakers are capable of more than the streaming section of the DSM delivers.

As things stand the Akurate Exakt/Akudorik system remains a highly capable package. It's nicely made, exotically engineered and designed with a flexible approach to ensure it delivers in a wide range of environments as possible. We wish more high-end manufacturers would take a similar view.

Consider if You want neatness and style without sacrificing performance

Highlight We love the purist philosophy behind the Exakt products

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Class-leading precision and clarity; cohesive presentation; neat, classy package

AGAINST Analytical balance may not be to all listening tastes

VERDICT Rarely have we come across such a neat, compact and talented system



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ROUND TWO!

Round One: No Competition
Round Two: The "DragonFly Killers"
 Take a Beating
v1.2 Only £129

"The new version of the DragonFly costs a third less than the original model, yet it sounds even better. It seems, for now, that there's no competing with that combination."

– WHAT HI-FI? Sound and Vision, Test Verdict, April 2014

"Where the original DragonFly excelled in clarity and detail, v1.2 added a richer, more colorful midrange, improved spatial abilities, and a greater sense of ease. The new DragonFly added the color, texture, body, and soul that the older model missed."

– Stereophile, Stephen Mejias, Mar. 2014

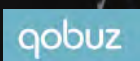
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TEMPTATIONS

Heed Thesis

Compact and minimalist it might be, but this quartet of preamp, power supply and twin monoblocs is not short of heft



TECH SPECS

Preamp (α)

Inputs 2 x line-level, 2 x coaxial, optical USB, tape loop **Outputs** preamp **Remote control** yes **Dimensions (hwd)** 9 x 22 x 35cm

Power amp (ω)

Type mono **Max power handling** 160W into 8 ohms **Inputs** phono **Outputs** 2 x speaker, line-level **Bridgeable** no **Dimensions (hwd)** 9 x 22 x 35cm

This is an amplifier that concentrates on the big picture, painting in broad strokes and giving a clear view as to what the music is about. It delivers explosive energy superbly

“The kind of authority that scarcely seems possible”

■ **Heed Thesis** Preamp/power supply/monobloc power amplifier

■ **£8350** ★★★★★

Heed Audio first came to our attention a few years ago with its £1300 Obelisk si amplifier. This simple, highly musical little integrated won our hearts, and an Award, back in 2012. The Budapest-based company has got a whole lot more ambitious since then, and pushed well upmarket with the high-end Thesis range.

The range consists of four products at the moment. There's the combination on test here – the α (alpha) preamp (£2650) with optional add-on π (pi) power supply (£1500) driving a pair of ω (omega) monobloc power amplifiers (£2100 each) – plus a ϕ (phi) moving magnet/moving coil phono stage, which will set you back another £1600.

The Thesis appearance mirrors the minimalist '80s feel of the Obelisk si and is none the worse for that. It's a clean, simple look and we like it. For the most part build quality is good. The components feel solid and nicely finished, but there's not quite the luxury feel we expect at this price. The controls, particularly the input selector, could feel a little more precise in use, and the remote feels laughably cheap. That said, Heed is not alone among high-end manufacturers in supplying a poor wand.

Hook-up options

Connectivity is decent. The α preamp has two single-ended line-level analogue inputs and four digital – co-ax in RCA and BNC form, optical and USB. You can use the preamp without the outboard π power supply (a tidy and entertaining sound), but adding it brings notable gains in scale, insight and transparency.

The ω monobloc power amplifier presents a simple face to the world,

lacking any controls on its clean front panel. Look around the back and you'll find a single RCA input and two sets of speaker outputs to make biwiring easier. There's also a line-level output to allow additional power amplifiers to be connected should you want more grunt. We'd be surprised if you do.

Don't let the compact size fool you – this is a proper powerhouse, delivering 160W of continuous power into an 8 ohm load, and capable of driving electrical loads down to 1.6 ohms. It doesn't run too hot either, so won't need acres of space around it to breathe.

Robust and authoritative

How does the four-box combination sound? Pretty good, we think. The Thesis delivers a surprisingly solid, robust sound backed up with the kind of authority that scarcely seems possible from such compact boxes.

We start with Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* and like a lot of what we hear. It's detailed, organised and composed, keeping track of the mass of instrumentation without trouble.

This is an amplifier that concentrates on the big picture, painting in broad strokes and giving a clear view as to what the music is about. It delivers the explosive energy of this Tchaikovsky piece superbly. Large-scale dynamics are delivered with enthusiasm, punch (particularly in the low notes) and plenty of muscle – that 160W power rating is entirely believable – while stereo imaging is secure and focused.

Change over to Nick Cave's *Mermaids* and the Heed's cohesive delivery continues to please. It digs up a decent amount of detail and arranges it into a



Heed is not alone among high-end makers in offering a cheap-looking remote, but that's no excuse

cohesive and convincing whole. It's surefooted rhythmically too, giving a palpable sense of momentum.

Flaws? This isn't the most subtle of amplifiers. It doesn't have the low-level dynamic expression we would expect at this price, so the emotion packed into Cave's vocals doesn't come through with the clarity we expect. The sound could be more transparent too, our reference Byrston BP26/4BSST2 combo showing clear advantages when it comes to precision, openness and resolution.

We try the on-board DAC and are left with mixed feelings. The presentation retains the tonal balance and cohesion of the line stage but sounds thinner and less solid. It's not a particularly detailed or expressive performance by high-end standards, so we would suggest leaving number-crunching duties to a suitable outboard unit such as Chord's Hugo.

This Heed Thesis combination is fun, enthusiastic and communicates the music's message well. But at this price we expect more. Greater transparency is a must, as is a more subtle attitude.

Consider if You want a simple-to-use, authoritative, compact high-end amp
Highlight We like the fuss-free way the Heed organises complex pieces of music

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Cohesive and organised presentation; rhythmically surefooted; good attack

AGAINST High price; lacks the transparency we expect at this price; DAC module not great

VERDICT A likeable combo, but the lack of finesse and the price make it hard to recommend

PLAY LIST

The movies, music and games to test your system



Dracula Untold

Blu-ray

Out now

★★★★☆



Bonus content

- Luke Evans: Creating a Legend
- Alternate opening
- Deleted scenes
- Day in the life – Luke Evans
- Dracula Retold
- Slaying 1000
- The Land of Dracula
- Feature commentary with director Gary Shore and production design François Audouy

Duration 92m

Picture	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Sound	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Extras	■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Breaking Vlad: Dracula is born

Poor old vampires. Once the legendary figures of terror, they have become synonymous with angsty teen fluff. Bram Stoker would turn in his grave.

But now we come full circle to the Daddy of vampires: Dracula. There's quite a lot here about the torture of immortality. None of that sparkly nonsense, thank you.

As the title suggests, you don't know this part of his lore. These are the wilderness years, fleshing out the time before he begins to resemble Gary Oldman.

That's right, we have another prequel-reboot at hand. As is customary with prequels, we join the main man before he sinks his teeth into his eponymous role.

He's a perfectly affable chap – talent for impaling enemies notwithstanding – minding his own business in Transylvania. Naturally, Bad Things soon happen and he gets a bit batty.

This is, of course, the best part. Vlad's transformation into Dracula plays out rather oddly like a superhero origins story. Faltering first steps and a ridiculous number of bats: Gotham City certainly springs to mind.

Dracula Untold takes the time to have a little fun with established vampire tropes. Vlad's obligation to dodge sunbeams around town is appreciably more effective than any ceiling-walking in *Van Helsing*.

Why so serious?

What does every superhero do with new powers? Grow repetitive, of course. The set pieces are a good laugh, but it's hard to cheer Vlad's ability to burst into a cloud of bats for the 10th time.

Then the tone drops off a cliff. There is an abundance of slow motion and floaty choruses, and some risible dialogue about the power of love. Poetry is recited.

Ultimately, *Dracula Untold* lacks the conviction to drive the stake in any direction. By refusing to choose between stylised silliness and Gothic romance, it ends up like the bats: all over the place.

It is best to take this more as a sensory exercise, because it's a good workout for your system.

The picture is a pleasant one. There's plenty of light and dark. The palette offers enough variety – Vlad's red armour looks particularly sumptuous. Special effects are fairly convincing.

On the audio front, you get DTS-HD Master Audio 5.1. Did we mention there are a lot of bats? They are sure to challenge any system's effects-steering prowess.

Whether or not you are a fan of vampires, *Dracula Untold* offers something a little different. Sure, it lacks bite. But unlike poor old Vlad, it's harmless and ends in 92 minutes. Add it to your Netflix list.

Spotify highlights [Join us on Spotify whf.com/playlist15](https://www.whif.com/playlist15)



D'Angelo: Sugah Daddy

14 years is quite the gap between albums, even if D'Angelo has been busy one way or another. But now he's back...

The Durutti Column: Sketch For A Summer

Featuring a virtuoso guitarist who didn't want his guitar to sound like a guitar, and first track on one of *the* great debut albums.

Royal Blood: Figure It Out

Deliriously exciting and noisy Jack White-inflected rock action from the South-East coast of England. Turns out perspiration has a sound.

The Stone Roses: Fools Gold

There isn't a dancefloor in existence, be it in an East Berlin basement nightclub or at a wedding reception in Norwich, that wouldn't enjoy a bit of this.

GAMES, MOVIES
& FORTHCOMING
RELEASES
p82



Music

Download, CD, vinyl



JOSÉ GONZÁLEZ VESTIGES & CLAWS

Out 17th February

★★★★☆

Despite the seven-year gap between albums, José González has been as busy as a bee. The time between his previous solo outing (2007's *In Our Nature*) and *Vestiges & Claws* has been filled with a flurry of collaborations – his work with the band Junip, and with The Götenborg String Theory project, is particularly rewarding. But for those for whom González's previous two albums resonate, *Vestiges & Claws* comes not a moment too soon.

It's the immediacy and the intimacy of González's solo work

that's especially resonant. He sets his stall out early with opener *With The Ink Of A Ghost* and from there on out *Vestiges & Claws* is long on warm, organic acoustic nylon-string guitar sounds and close-mic'd vocals, correspondingly short on overdubs or overt percussion. Lyrically he's not the deepest thinker ever to make a record, but musically José González is as articulate as they come.

Unthreatening intensity

This low-temperature palette of sounds does make a vocal harmony, or a tapped-guitar-body-as-beatbox, arrive like a rainstorm in a desert. And on the likes of *Stories We Build*, *Stories We Tell* and *Leaf Off/The Cave* González manages to build a sort of polite, unthreatening intensity, a kind of insistent knocking from someone you know is too considerate to just boot the door in. If your system's got the breadth of expression and a properly unified frequency range, *Vestiges & Claws* has plenty to give.

Specifications

Duration 42m 52s

Standout track *Stories We Build*, *Stories We Tell* Simmering and insistent, in a high-gloss manner.

Download, CD, vinyl



PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING THE RACE FOR SPACE

Out 9th February

★★★★☆

Retelling the story of the American/Soviet space race of 1957 – 1972 using hard-to-come-by access to the British Film Institute's archive on the subject, Public Service Broadcasting's *The Race For Space* is a collection of potent widescreen sonic paintings liberally studded with snatches of some of the most evocative broadcasts ever transmitted.

Fans of PSB's 2013 debut *Inform – Educate – Entertain* will immediately be at home with this collection of propulsive, atmospheric and

occasionally dancefloor-worthy pieces. The PSB *modus operandi* continues to be a kind of well-supervised collision between Kraftwerk and The Orb (if neither had a phobia of guitars) – consequently *The Race For Space* is quite short on actual songs, but long and luxurious on evocative soundscapes.

More insistent than it seems

From the wordless-choir-plus-JFK of the opening title track, through the genteel chillout-tent beats of *Sputnik* to the weightlessness of *Valentina*, *The Race For Space* is a more insistent and coherent proposition than 'instrumentals-plus-scratchy-old-voice-recordings' might at first seem. And while it's not the toughest challenge you could present to your set-up, without wide, deep and well-defined soundstaging *The Race For Space* could sound a bit of a mess. Timing is crucial too, plus an explicit midrange is required to fully appreciate all that history.

Specifications

Duration 43m 32s

Standout track *Go!* One of the few overtly punchy parts of the album, and none the poorer for it.

Listen to it this way

The system

Apple iPad Air 2 £400 ★★★★★
Great display, impeccable interface and outstanding digital sound quality

NAD D 3020 £400 ★★★★★

Everything a stereo amp at this price should be, both in terms of functions and of sound

Q Acoustics Concept 20 £350 ★★★★★

In straightforward value-for-money terms, not much in this magazine betters the Concept 20s



Vestiges & Claws will revel in this modern, classy system

Listen to it this way

The system

Clearaudio Concept £1000 ★★★★★
A record player of rare poise and resolution, and a system-match made in heaven

PMC Twenty 22 £1970 ★★★★★

Power and scale beyond their size, allied to class-leading finesse and articulation

Roksan K3 £1250 ★★★★★

Big and bold enough to give PSB's widescreen sound full rein, but packed with detail too



A system to provide the well-defined soundstage required



Movie shorts

Fury

Brad Pitt leads a bunch of people in a tank. There's a lot of shouting. Will appeal to anyone interested in seemingly accurate wartime brutality.

Game of Thrones (season 4)

We go on with the winning combo of gratuitous sex, violence and political intrigue. This season is less eventful, but still utterly grim for all involved.

The Equalizer

Denzel Washington breaks faces in the name of the little guy. Packs a punch despite its length and its irreverence towards the '80s TV show.

The Babadook

The monster-under-the-bed formula gets an inventive, heartfelt storyline and a top hat-wearing demon that's not as gentlemanly as it looks.

On-screen

System tester



Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles

Blu-ray

Out 16th February

★★★★☆

Nostalgia is a dangerous thing. Especially when it is wielded by Michael Bay and friends.

No, this is not the cartoon from the '80s. If you've seen the *Transformers* franchise, you have a fairly accurate idea of what to expect.

Maybe it's not that bad, but the recipe is similar. Unrestrained action, check. Product placements, check. Weak human characters, check.

Thankfully, the turtles themselves are allowed to have personalities. They have retained their immature, goofy antics, some of which are genuinely funny.

But these moments are rare. The bizarre concept quickly loses its edge. One moment you are bombarded with endless destruction. The next, you contemplate mozzarella (you will want to visit Pizza Hut). For a story about magic reptiles, it is very dull.

Not *Transformers 4* dull, mind. We are grateful for that. If you want something loud and you (or the kids) are not fussy, this will do.

Watch it this way

The system

KEF R100 5.1 £2850 ★★★★★

Multiple Awards tells its own story

Oppo BDP-105D £1100 ★★★★★

Yes, it's expensive. Yes, it's worth it

Pioneer SC-LX88 £2200 ★★★★★

Does it all, and does it beautifully

Sony VPL-HW55ES £2800 ★★★★★

The biggest, best picture around



We're not sure this film deserves this superb system, but still...

Games

Evolve

PS4, Xbox One, PC Out now

★★★★☆

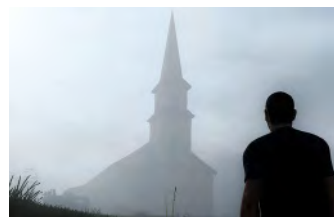


More monster killing! But this time the monster's controlled by an actual person too. So you've got two teams: the monster, which has to grow to its ultimate size so it can destroy a huge power relay, and the four hunters, which have to stop it. It's a simple premise but very tactical in action.

H1Z1 (Early Access)

PC Out now

★★★★☆



Initially dismissed as a rip-off of brilliant/harsh/brutal zombie survival simulator *DayZ*, Sony's *H1Z1* has done little to dispel the notion with its work-in-progress release on Steam. There's little in the approach or gameplay to make it stand out, but there's time for it to be improved.

Monster Hunter 4 Ultimate

Nintendo 3DS Out now

★★★★☆

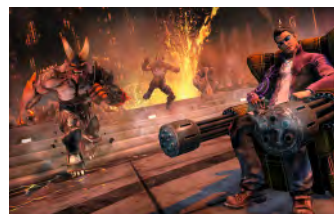


To fans of Japanese RPGs each new release of *Monster Hunter* is greeted with the sort of enthusiasm usually reserved for a One Direction concert. You take on quests to track down and kill monsters, and can team up with up to three mates for co-op beastie-bashing action. It's a lot of fun.

Saints Row: Gat Out of Hell

PS4, Xbox One, PS3, Xbox 360, PC Out now

★★★★☆



GTA's bonkers, brutal, funny little brother is back. But only a little bit. *Gat Out of Hell* is a "standalone expansion". You don't need *Saints Row IV* in order to play it, but it is more add-on than full sequel. That means it's cheap (£30 on a next-gen console), but it's also limited in size and scope.

What we are waiting for...

Movies (Cinema) Chappie (6th March) The third feature from Neil Blomkamp has a robot learning to feel, and it turns out humans are nasty folk. Especially Hugh Jackman.

Movies (Blu-ray) The Imitation Game (9th March) Benedict Cumberbatch acts his pants off as a socially awkward genius who saves the country. It's *déjà vu*, WWII-style.

Music (Download, CD, vinyl) Madonna - Rebel Heart (9th March) Kanye West, Diplo, Billboard and Blood Diamonds all feature. Just your bog-standard Madonna release, then.

Music (Download, CD, vinyl) The Prodigy - The Day Is My Enemy (30th March) The Prodigy can't possibly be as potent and threatening as before. Can they?

February in Hi-Def

The best on the box



The last time we saw him, Oliver 'Arrow' Queen had just been stabbed in the chest and then kicked off a very high cliff...

12 Monkeys Syfy HD - Fridays, 9pm

Fans of Terry Gilliam's time-travel dystopia *12 Monkeys* may blanch at the prospect of a TV adaptation, but let's not be too quick to judge. *Fargo* and *Hannibal* have proven they can expand upon their cult film origins and deliver an original take. On the other hand, this show is being produced by the channel that gave us *Sharknado*.

Closely following the film's storyline, the show depicts a future where 93.6 per cent of humans have been wiped out by a deadly virus. Scientists send a man back in time to stop the outbreak - but they keep sending him to the wrong year. What made the film so memorable was Gilliam's signature eclectic, off-kilter visual style. This show - which looks no different than a police procedural with a bit of flashy sci-fi thrown in - doesn't quite have the same effect.

Fortitude Sky Atlantic HD - Thursdays, 9pm

Continuing the trend for Nordic thrillers, *Fortitude* takes place in a small town in the northernmost tip of Norway. The savage beauty of the Arctic is the perfect landscape for a 'whodunnit' case - especially when it's the town's first-ever murder. The local sheriff is miffed when a London detective (played by Stanley Tucci) comes to lend a helping hand. He soon finds that everyone seems to want to cover up the crime, including the town's governor, who doesn't want it affecting tourism. Features a star-studded cast including Christopher Ecclestone, Michael Gambon and Jessica Raine.

House of Cards Netflix - 27th February

The ruthless political saga is back for a third term, so grab a bowl of popcorn and put your smartphone

on silent - this will be a watch-all-13-episodes-in-one-go situation. Frank Underwood (a mesmerisingly cold and calculating Kevin Spacey) is in the White House, having achieved everything he'd been working (manipulating, backstabbing and killing) for.

Underwood will use all of his political prowess and viciously pragmatic approach to stay in power, but it won't be long before secrets, rivals and circumstances move against him. Will his wife Carrie (Lady Macbeth to Frank's more efficient Macbeth) be his main opponent? Or will his past misdeeds come back to haunt him?

The Flash & Arrow Sky 1 HD - Tuesdays and Thursdays, 8pm

Superheroes return to city-saving action after a spot of Christmas holidays. The last time we saw him, Oliver 'Arrow' Queen had just

been stabbed in the chest by the aging assassin Ra's al Ghul, and then kicked off a very high cliff. We suspect we'll catch up with him mid-cliff, precariously dangling before being miraculously saved (the show is named after him, after all). Over in Central City, it was revealed that Dr Wells could be linked to the metahuman who killed Barry's mother. Will The Flash slow down enough to make the connection?

Top Gear BBC Two HD - Sundays, 8pm

From St Petersburg and Morocco to, erm, Kent, the 22nd series of *Top Gear* promises yet more fun and action-packed instalments. They send off the Land Rover Defender by driving it up a steep dam, go on a road trip across Australia's Northern Territory in luxury cars, pay homage to Peugeot and decide to improve Britain's ambulances.

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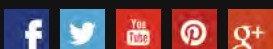
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Kobina Monney, Buyer's Guide Editor

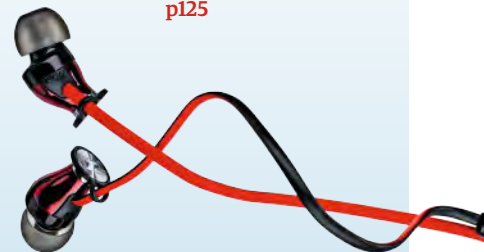
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p125



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DISPLAYS



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SONY VPL-HW55ES
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Hi-Fi Systems

CD PLAYERS



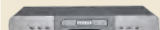
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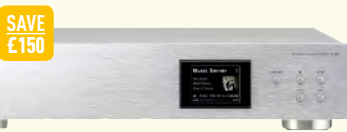
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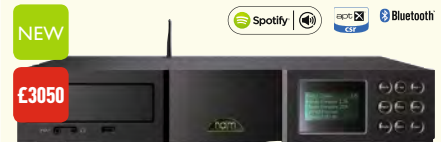
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OR LESS

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.



£599
OR LESS

£499
OR LESS

ROTEL • RA-12 / RCD-12 • AMPLIFIER / DAC / CD

Amplifier with DAC that supports iPod USB and Bluetooth audio streaming. Includes four analogue line-level inputs and a phono input. The RCD-12 CD player is an ideal partner.

B&W • P5 S2 HEADPHONES

NEW

£249
OR LESS



GRADO • SR325e HEADPHONES

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

NEW

£299
OR LESS



£100 GIFT VOUCHER
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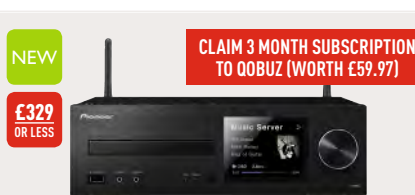
aptX
CST

Bluetooth

£699
OR LESS

SONY • MAP-S1 • MULTI AUDIO PLAYER SYSTEM

It's all right here - a powerful 2x50W amplifier, tuner and CD player integrated in an elegant compact unit. Just add speakers and you are ready for an incredible Hi-Resolution Audio experience.



NEW

£329
OR LESS

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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.

NAD • VISO HP50 HEADPHONES

£229
OR LESS



AKG • Y50 HEADPHONES

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

£79.95
OR LESS



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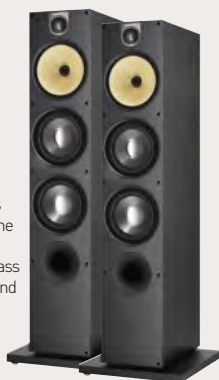
BOWERS & WILKINS • 685 S2
At home on a stand, wall or bookshelf, the versatile 685 S2 is ideal for stereo and home theatre uses in most rooms. And performance is enhanced with the addition of a Decoupled Double Dome tweeter.

NEW

£499
OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Stereo speakers
Best overall sound
Bowers & Wilkins 685 S2

Price excludes stands



BOWERS & WILKINS 683 S2

The versatile 683 S2 is ideal for stereo and home theatre use. Its performance is enhanced with the addition of a Decoupled Double Dome tweeter along with new bass driver construction techniques and an FST Kevlar midrange driver.

NEW

£1149
OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Stereo speakers
Best overall sound
Bowers & Wilkins 683 S2



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

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Monitor speakers
Best overall sound
KEF LS50



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

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014
Stereo speakers
Best overall sound
PMC Twenty 22

Price excludes stands

MONITOR AUDIO SILVER 6

2.5 way speaker system combining excellent dynamics with a naturally rhythmic sonic character and tight, controlled bass. The Silver 6 is an outstanding communicator of music and film audio.

£999
OR LESS

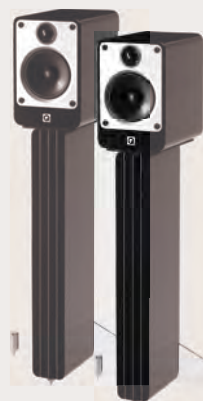


PSB IMAGINE XB

An attractive compact two-way speaker featuring a 5 1/4" woofer and one inch titanium dome tweeter. The XB is ideal for smaller rooms or in concert with a powered subwoofer for a compact full-range system.

NEW

£379
OR LESS



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



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 overall sound
Wharfedale Diamond 220



WIRELESS MULTI-ROOM MUSIC SYSTEM

HEOS by Denon is a Wireless Multi-Room Sound System comprising a family of great-sounding music players for your whole home. There is a free app to control them from your iOS or Android phone or tablet. You can enjoy your favourite streaming music services, internet radio or your own music collection and set-up is a breeze.

PRICES FROM £249



Spotify | Napster

tunein | DEEZER

90 DAYS TO BE AMAZED

- 90 Days Risk Free Trial
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- Up to £70 Cashback when you trade-in your old system*

*OFFER ENDS 28/02/2015 - ASK IN-STORE FOR DETAILS



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 overall sound
Sonos

Wireless Extender Boost **NEW**
£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 overall sound
Bluesound

Spotify | Deezer

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Real Stores

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision have 26 stores nationwide with plans to open more during 2014. Each carries the best in home cinema and Hi-Fi equipment on display, ready for you to watch, listen to and compare in our dedicated demonstration rooms.

Real Products

A wide selection of products from the world's leading manufacturers is in stock and available for you to take home. We also offer a delivery and installation service as well as a convenient on-line click and reserve option for many of our products.

Real People

Our staff are friendly, knowledgeable and passionate about music and film and the equipment needed to get the most out of your collection. They will be delighted to assist you in making the right selection to ensure you enjoy your system for years to come.

Real Value

Fantastic value for money is our aim. Although we remain independent, you will be pleasantly surprised just how competitive we can be - with the added benefit of seeing, hearing and touching the product before you buy, and someone to help if things go wrong.

Please Note: Some brands/products are not available at all stores. Special/added value offers are not in conjunction with any other offer (NICWAOO).

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ANY HOME THEATRE PRODUCT
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ARCAM • FMJ AVR450 • AV RECEIVER

7.1-channel AV receiver combines 4K "Ultra HD" upscaling and 3D video capability with Arcam's legendary sound quality. Also Available: ARCAM FMJ AVR380 & AVR750



ESSAV
.COM



ONKYO • TX-NR838 • AV RECEIVER

New 7.2-channel Network receiver supporting Dolby Atmos® upgradability, multidimensional sound plus Ultra HD streaming. Also Available: ONKYO TX-NR636 & TX-NR3030



NEW

ESSAV
.COM



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

PIONEER • SC-LX58 • AV RECEIVER

New 9.2-channel Network receiver with with Class D Amplification, Wi-Fi, AirPlay, DLNA, Bluetooth and Dolby Atmos® upgradability. Also Available: PIONEER VSX-924 & SC-LX88



ESSAV
.COM

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: DENON AVR-X2100W & AVR-X3100W



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



NEW

£1999
OR LESS



YAMAHA • RX-A3040 • AV RECEIVER

New AV receiver with built-in Wi-Fi, 11.2 channel expandability, highest grade construction and Dolby Atmos® upgradability. Also Available: YAMAHA RX-A1040 & RX-A2040

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 75 • SOUNDBASE
The Canton DM 75 sets a new standard for TV sound. Intended to be positioned under a TV's pedestal stand, the DM 75 creates a convincing, room filling sound.



NEW

£449
OR LESS



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

DENON • DHT-T110 • SOUNDBASE
The Denon DHT-T110 is an under TV Soundbase that dramatically improves your TV watching experience. Simply connect the all-in-one system to your television and enjoy powerful, dynamic audio from your favourite TV shows, movies, games and music.



NEW

£199
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

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.COM

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

£899.95
OR LESS

Q ACOUSTICS • Q7000i • SPEAKER PACKAGE

Stylish 5.1 package that delivers dynamic sound for movies, but with the ability to play music. Classic black or white matt finishes.



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

£2849
OR LESS

KEF • R100 5.1 • SPEAKER PACKAGE

Comprises four R100 speakers, an R200C centre speaker and R400B active subwoofer. Great for both home cinema and music.



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2014

£1499
OR LESS

MONITOR AUDIO • RADIUS R90HT1 • SPEAKER PACKAGE

Award-winning speaker package comprising four Radius 90 satellites, Radius 200 centre speaker and Radius 390 subwoofer.



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 UHD TV Curved

Ultra High Definition 4K



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SAMSUNG

HU8500 SERIES • CURVED 4K UHD TV

Introducing a breakthrough in TV viewing that will change the way you watch TV forever – the Samsung HU8500 Curved UHD. Wider viewing angles, pure and accurate colour reproduction and a sense of depth never experienced before are only possible on a curved Samsung screen, specifically shaped for UHD viewing at its very best.

55 65 78 FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY



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SONY 4K

X8 SERIES • 4K UHD TV

The new Sony X8 series 4K UHD LED TV boasts four times more detail than Full HD. 4K gives stunningly natural images, not pixels. Dramatically higher image quality means that you can sit closer to the screen, filling more of your field of view until the screen disappears and you are enjoying an at-the-movies experience.

49 55 65 FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY

Also Available
SONY X9 SERIES • 4K UHD TV



VISIT WWW.SSAV.COM FOR LATEST TV PROMOTIONS & PRICES

SONY

S90 SERIES • CURVED 4K UHD TV

The new S90 is Sony's first ever range of curved TVs. Available in two screen sizes: 65in and 75in, the S90 series boasts 4K Ultra HD resolution. Features and specifications include Sony's 4K X-Reality PRO picture engine, Triluminos colour technology, Motionflow XR800Hz, edge-lit LED backlighting, active 3D and a detachable Skype camera.

Sound is provided by Sony's new 4.2-channel multi-angle live speaker system which allows for "expansive, uncompromised 360-degree surround sound". Other features include Sony's Social Viewing for watching with friends over Skype, Live Football Mode, One-touch mirroring and Photo share.

FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY 4K 65 75



VISIT WWW.SSAV.COM FOR LATEST TV PROMOTIONS & PRICES

SONY • W7 SERIES • FULL HD TV

32 42 FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY



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PANASONIC • AX902 SERIES • 4K UHD TV

55 65 FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY



VISIT WWW.SSAV.COM FOR LATEST TV PROMOTIONS & PRICES

SAMSUNG • HU7500 SERIES • 4K UHD TV

48 55 65 75 FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY



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



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



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-S5200 & BDP-S6200

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Loughton • 020 8532 0770
Maidstone 01622 686366
Norwich • 01603 767605
Oxford 01865 241773
Reading • 0118 959 7768
Sevenoaks 01732 459555

Sheffield • 0114 255 5861
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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 KULED22XXXA	110	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Cheap and cheerful and all the better for it	LCD	22	1920x1080				●		2	39x54x17
LG 32LN575V	400	09.13/ST	★★★★★	A decent looking TV with credible smart and streaming features	LED	32	1920x1080	●		●			3	45x74x8
Panasonic TX-42AS500B	450	10.14/ST	★★★★★	A user-friendly TV that's a little lacking in black levels but is worth a look	LED	42	1920x1080	●		●			2	57x96x7
Panasonic TX-32AS500B	300	11.14/ST	★★★★★	A multi-talented set but its picture could do with some more subtlety	LED	32	1366x768	●		●			2	47x73x7
Panasonic TX-L32E6B	380	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Quite simply one of the best 32in TVs we've tested	LED	32	1920x1080	●		●			3	43x72x5
Philips 32PFL4258T	480	09.13/ST	★★★★★	A talented TV with excellent picture quality	LED	32	1920x1080	●		●			3	45x74x2
Philips 32PHT4509/12	280	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Insightful, refined and available at a good price. Worth a look	LED	32	1366x768	●		●			2	42x72x6
Polaroid 3-32-LED-14	200	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Another tempting package from Polaroid	LED	32	1366x768	●		●			3	44x74x10
Polaroid 5-42-LED-14	370	10.14/ST	★★★★★	A surprising performer that stands up to more established brands	LED	42	1920x1080	●		●			3	56x96x6
Samsung UE32H6400	460	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Near flawless. Pricey, but comes with a bundle of features	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●		●		4	43x73x6
Samsung UE40F6400	480	03.14/GT	★★★★★	A stunning, feature-laden TV from Samsung. Recommended	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●		●		4	54x93x5
Sony KDL-26EX553	400	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Capable enough for a kitchen or child's bedroom	LED	26	1366x768	●		●			2	41x64x6
Sony KDL-32W653A	430	09.13/ST	★★★★★	Its picture lacks subtlety but this Sony is still a worthwhile option	LED	32	1920x1080	●		●			2	44x73x7
Sony KDL-32W706B	350	11.14/ST	★★★★★	Best 32in TV, Awards 2014	LED	32	1920x1080	●			●		4	43x73x6
Sony KDL-40W605B	450	10.14/ST	★★★★★	Best 40-46in TV, Awards 2014	LED	40	1920x1080	●			●		4	55x93x9
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
Philips 46PFL8007	1700	12.12/FT	★★★★★	A strong start for Philips' new range	LED	46	1920x1080	●		●	●		5	67x104x21
Philips 47PFL6008	1200	06.13/GT	★★★★★	A few niggles but forgivable thanks to its brilliant picture quality	LED	47	1920x1080	●		●	●	●	3	63x106x3
Philips 55PFL6007T	1500	01.13/FT	★★★★★	This should be on anyone's big-screen shortlist	LED	55	1920x1080	●		●	●		4	74x124x3
Philips 55PFS6609	1200	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Dazzling with HD content, but rivals offer better overall performance	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●		●		4	72x123x4
Philips 48PFS57093	750	08.14/ST	★★★★★	Excels in many areas but its SD performance is an area of concern	LED	48	1920x1080	●			●		4	62x108x6
Samsung UE40ES6800	950	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Good spec and looks, but the backlight isn't great	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●		●		3	67x92x33

TELEVISIONS continued

TELEVISIONS continued					Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	Active 3D	Passive 3D	Freeview	Freesat	HDMI	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict											
Samsung UE40F6500	900	08.13/ST	★★★★★	Not a class leader but offers a lot for your money	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●		3		91x60x27
Samsung UE40H6400	550	10.14/GT	★★★★★	An engrossing TV with plenty of smarts and a cracking picture	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●		4		54x92x5
Samsung UE48H6400	700	08.14/ST	★★★★★	Best 47-52in TV, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	LED	48	1920x1080	●	●	●		4		63x109x5
Samsung UE48HU7500	1600	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Some minor flaws aside, this is a great smaller-sized 4K set	LED	48	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4		62x107x36
Sony KDL-46HX753	1150	08.12/ST	★★★★★	A must-see TV: superb performer for the price	LED	46	1920x1080	●		●	●	4		65x108x5
Sony KDL-42W705B	530	08.14/FT	★★★★★	A promising start for Sony's Full HD range. A consistent performer	LED	42	1920x1080	●		●		4		56x96x6
Sony KDL-42W805A	1000	08.13/ST	★★★★★	A great-looking TV with many strengths	LED	42	1920x1080	●		●	●	4		58x97x6
Sony KDL-46W905	1550	09.13/FT	★★★★★	A very capable TV with stunning detail but the picture lacks vibrancy	LCD	46	1920x1080	●	●	●		4		65x105x30
Sony KDL-48W605B	700	08.14/ST	★★★★★	A competitive performer with good picture quality	LCD	48	1920x1080	●		●		4		68x108x9
Sony KDL-50W829B	900	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Loses a star but this TV is still worth an audition	LED	50	1920x1080	●	●	●		4		66x112x6
Sony KDL-55W955B	1600	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A good TV but we expect more from a flagship set	LED	55	1920x1080	●		●	●	4		79x124x9

£2000 and above

Bang & Olufsen BeoVision 11	5250	01.14/GT	★★★★★	LCD	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	6	89x96x6
B&O BeoVision Avant 55	5995	01.15/FT	★★★★★	LCD	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	6	71x129x10
LG 55LA860W	2300	07.13/GT	★★★★★	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	4	72x123x4
LG 55EA980W	8000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	OLED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	4	80x123x19
LG 55EC930V	2000	02.15/FT	★★★★★	OLED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	4	75x123x20
LG 55UB950V	2300	09.14/GT	★★★★★	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	4	123x78x24
LG 65LA970W	5500	12.13/GT	★★★★★	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	3	84x143x41
LG 84LM960V	22500	02.13/FT	★★★★★	LED	84	3840x2160	●	●	●	4	102x190x4
Panasonic TX-L47WT50B	2000	08.12/ST	★★★★★	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	4	63x107x3
Panasonic TX-L55WT65B	2470	07.13/GT	★★★★★	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	3	72x123x3
Panasonic TX-58AX802B	2499	09.14/GT	★★★★★	LED	58	3840x2160	●	●	●	4	80x130x29
Panasonic TX-65AX902B	5000	01.15/FT	★★★★★	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	4	86x146x6
Panasonic TX-P65WT600	5500	12.13/GT	★★★★★	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	4	86x147x6
Philips 46PFL9706	2300	05.12/GT	★★★★★	LED	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	4	66x108x4
Philips 50PFL7956T	2000	09.12/GT	★★★★★	LED	50	2560x1080	●	●	●	4	58x124x3
Philips 55PFL8008	2500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	4	72x124x3
Philips 65PFL9708	4500	12.13/GT	★★★★★	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	5	84x146x4
Samsung KE55S9C	7000	01.14/GT	★★★★★	OLED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	4	78x142x14
Samsung UE55F8000	2500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	4	71x122x4
Samsung UE55HU7500	2300	09.14/GT	★★★★★	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	4	75x123x27
Samsung UE65F9000	5000	01.14/GT	★★★★★	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	4	84x146x4
Samsung UE65H8000	3300	07.14/FT	★★★★★	LED	65	1920x1080	●	●	●	4	89x145x31
Samsung UE65HU7500	3500	08.14/FT	★★★★★	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	4	88x145x30
Samsung UE65HU8500	3800	01.15/GT	★★★★★	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	4	85x145x11
Sony KD-55X8505B	2100	09.14/GT	★★★★★	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	4	79x123x29
Sony KDL-55W905A	2400	07.13/GT	★★★★★	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	4	72x124x6
Sony KD-65S9005B	3900	01.15/GT	★★★★★	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	4	155x90x33
Sony KD-65X9005A	5000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	4	90x168x10
Sony KD-65X9005B	3600	07.14/FT	★★★★★	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	4	88x172x10

Five ways to... calibrate your TV



1 First things first Make sure all cables and connections are secure, that your room's lighting is as it will be when you normally watch TV, and that the screen has been powered up for at least half an hour.

2 Dig out a disc Some DVD/Blu-rays include an Optimiser menu but be sure to check www.thx.com for a full list of titles that include THX menus for confirmation.

3 Wield those remotes You'll need your disc player's remote to navigate the Optimiser, and your TV's handset to make adjustments to your contrast, colour, brightness

and sharpness. Use the Optimiser movie clip to finesse motion processing, too.

4 Spend a bit more £5 or so put the way of www.thx.com buys you a pair of blue-lensed glasses, which you'll need to adjust your screen's tint (colour temperature).

5 Spend a lot more The Imaging Science Foundation trains TV dealers to calibrate TV to professional standards, and for the not-inconsiderable sum of £250 they'll visit your home and make sure you're getting the very best from your TV. If fine-tuning is your thing, it doesn't get better than this.



Blu-ray players

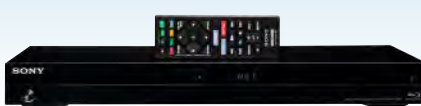
Smart ability Extends the viewing choice beyond discs with apps like BBC iPlayer
Multichannel out Analogue outputs that feed high quality sound to a non-HDMI receiver
Twin HDMI outputs These are used if you have two displays, say a projector and a TV

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
Sony BDP-S5200

Awards 2014: Best Blu-ray player up to £150



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Sony BDP-S7200

Awards 2014: Best Blu-ray player £150-£300



AWARD WINNER
Panasonic DMP-BDT700

Awards 2014: Best Blu-ray player £300+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		HDMI	Optic	Co-ax	Multic	Dimen (hwd)
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

Three products to boost your TV experience



Microsoft's Xbox One also supports DLNA streaming thanks to recent updates



About as big as a USB stick, you'll need a plug nearby to put in the Chromecast's charger



The Kubik is around 15cms tall and a metre long so take that into account when positioning it

Despite the changes in how we watch content, the television can still be the centre of your entertainment experience. We've chosen three products that can improve and extend it

Multimedia

Arguably the Xbox One's media features are greater than that of the PS4's and the console's OneGuide adds to that feeling. It works by taking the feed from your digital TV box via HDMI (Virgin, BT, Sky and the majority of HD Freesat and Freeview boxes are supported), with OneGuide acting as an EPG (electronic programme guide) showing TV channels, programme times and info over the TV feed (for now there's no DVR ability).

Its advantage lies in its integration within the Xbox OS, turning the console into a one-size fits all multimedia box that can multi-task on the fly, allowing users to 'snap' a live TV feed to the side and play a game alongside it. Last October Microsoft released a Freeview tuner (£25) that plugs into the coaxial aerial cable and takes the feed in from there. Handy for those who don't have a set-top box or smart TV.

Apps/Streaming

For those who don't have a TV that connects to the internet, there are a number of ways of doing so such as Google's Chromecast or Roku's Streaming Stick – a wireless streaming USB stick that mirrors content from your portable device to your TV.

For now we'll focus on Chromecast. Slot it into a HDMI port, download the app to your tablet or phone, log in to your wi-fi network and the set-up process is done. Content was scarce at launch but the number of apps has grown (Amazon Prime Instant and Spotify are still absent). Chromecast 2 is set to arrive soon but expect an update of the current model and not an overhaul.

Sound

With premium soundbars offering a smattering of features, they're more than just a way of boosting a TV's sound. Efforts such as Dali's Kubik One reflect a trend that sees soundbars integrating with other devices and services.

The Kubik One is a system that allows for several different connections whether it's by the two optical, RCA or micro-USB connections (for connecting to a PC or Mac), even so the lack of HDMI is a drawback. If you've invested in high-res tracks the Kubik One is able to handle 24-bit/96kHz tracks.

These features would be for naught if the sound were poor – thankfully it's not. Like Yamaha's YSP-2500, the Kubik One fills the room in a manner similar to a home cinema surround package. That comes at a cost with soundbars like the Kubik coming in a big package, so save some space for it.

BLU-RAY PLAYERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		HDMI out	Optical out	Co-axial out	Multichannel out	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Pioneer BDP-160	120	01.14/GT	★★★★★	This entry-level unit is pretty spartan, but it delivers an impressive performance	2	0	1	No	6x44x25
Pioneer BDP-450	225	01.12/FT	★★★★★	This budget deck is a real rival for the top performers	1	0	1	No	9x44x25
Samsung-BD-F6500	130	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Competitive but not the best in class	1	0	1	7ch	4x43x18
Samsung-BD-H6500	100	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Another solid, competitive effort from Samsung	1	1	0	No	4x36x20
Sony BDP-S490	110	12.12/FT	★★★★★	An excellent budget Blu-ray player that also does 3D	1	0	1	No	4x43x20
Sony BDP-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

Panasonic DMP-BDT700	500	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player £300+, Awards 2014	2	1	1	7ch	7x45x26
Cambridge Audio Azur 752BD	800	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Features and functions combine in fine style, but audio performance could be a little better	2	1	1	8ch	9x43x31
Marantz UD7007	500	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player £300+, Awards 2013	1	1	1	No	11x44x31
Oppo BDP-105D	1100	12.14/FT	★★★★★	If you want a Blu-ray player that does everything, then this is it	2	1	1	8ch	12x43x31
Onkyo BD-SP809	500	04.12/GT	★★★★★	A fine choice, but not an all-rounder	2	1	1	No	10x43x31



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)
Up to £1000														
BenQ W1070+	650	11.14/GT	★★★★★	For a first home cinema, this would be a great projector	DLP	1.15-1.5	1920x1080	2200	2	0	1	1	10x31x24	2.75
BenQ W1080ST	850	12.13/GT	★★★★★	A good fit for small-scale home cinema entertainment	DLP	0.69-0.83	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	1	10x31x24	2.85
Epson EH-TW5200	700	11.14/GT	★★★★★	For £700 it's an impressive projector with a few niggles	DLP	1.22-1.47:1	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	0	10.5x30x25	3
InFocus IN3118HD	990	05.13/GT	★★★★★	A few niggles but a bright and capable projector	DLP	1.6-1.92	1920x1080	3600	2	0	1	0	10x34x25	3.7
InFocus IN8606HD	650	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Good detail and punch, but rivals have the edge over it	DLP	1.22-1.47:1	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	1	26x28.5x12	3
Optoma HD25	800	05.13/GT	★★★★★	Plenty of features for a budget level projector	DLP	1.5-1.8	1920x1080	2000	2	0	2	2	12x38x31	4.5
£1000-£3000														
BenQ W1400	1000	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best projector up to £1500, Awards 2014	DLP	1.07-1.71	1920x1080	2200	2	0	1	1	12x34x28	4
Epson EH-TW6100W	1600	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best projector £1000-£2000, Awards 2013	LCD	1.32-2.15:1	1920x1080	2300	2	0	1	1	14x42x37	6
Epson EH-TW7200	1900	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best projector £1500-£2000, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	LCD	1.34-2.87:1	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	1	16x47x40	8
Philips Screeneo HDP1590TV	1500	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A great idea that's executed well, but not perfectly	DLP	0.321	1280x800	500	3	0	1	0	15x34x29	5
Sony VPL-HW55ES	2800	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Best projector £2000+, Awards 2014	SXRD	n/a	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1	18x41x46	9.6

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PROJECTORS continued

PROJECTORScontinued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Throw Ratio	Resolution	Rated Brightness (lumens)	HDMI in	DVI in	PC in	Component in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Weight (kg)	
£3000 and above														
Epson EH-TW9200W	3000	04.14/GT	★★★★★	A fine projector, but not the showstopper we expected	LCD	1.34-2.87:1	1920x1080	2400	6	0	0	1	14x47x40	9
JVC DLA-X35BE	3000	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Good but not great, this JVC appeals if you like bright pictures	D-ILA	n/a	1920x1080	1300	2	0	1	1	18x46x47	15
Panasonic PT-AT6000E	3000	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Best projector £2000+, Awards 2013	LCD	1.18-2.36	1920x1080	2400	3	0	1	1	15x47x36	8.7
SIM2 C3X Lumis 3D-S	30000	11.11/FT	★★★★★	The best 3D projector we've ever seen	DLP	1.82-2.48:1	1920x1080	3000	2	0	0	1	46x21x46	11
Sony VPL-HW50ES	3000	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Shows why home cinema can't be beaten	SKRD	1.64-2.37	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1	18x41x46	9.6
Sony VPL-VW500ES	8500	04.14/FT	★★★★★	Stunningly good with 4K content but pricey nonetheless	SKRD	1.64-2.37	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1	18x41x46	9.6
Sony VPL-VW95ES	5000	01.12/FT	★★★★★	By class standards, it's one of the best projectors around	SKRD	1.38-2.83	4096x2160	1700	2	0	0	0	20x50x46	14



AV receivers & amplifiers

Up to £500 Well-equipped and delivers convincing surround sound
 £500-£1000 There are gains in features, build quality and sonic performance
 £1000+ Real powerhouses that pack loads of features and cinema-style sound

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
Yamaha RX-V377

Awards 2014: Best home cinema amp up to £350



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Sony STR-DN1050

Awards 2014: Best home cinema amp £350-£700



AWARD WINNER
Pioneer SC-LX58

Awards 2014: Best home cinema amp £700-£1500

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Channels (power (w))	HDMI in	HDMI out	Networking	3D pass-through	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £300									
Pioneer VSX-528	285	02.14/GT	★★★★★	A well-equipped budget amp with good surround sound capabilities	5x130	6	1	●	17x44x33
Yamaha RX-V375	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier up to £350, Awards 2013	5x100	4	1	●	15x44x32
Yamaha RX-V377	250	07.14/FT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier up to £350, Awards 2014	5x70	4	1	●	15x44x32
£300-£500									
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
£500-£1000									
Denon AVR-X2000	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Marks a fine return to form for Denon	7x150	7	1	●	17x43x33
Denon AVR-X2100W	500	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A strong contender but competition at this price is fierce	7x150	8	2	●	17x43x33
Denon AVR-X4000	900	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Decent if you're looking for a sub-£1000 AV receiver	7x125	7	3	●	17x43x38
Harman-Kardon AVR-365	800	03.12/ST	★★★★★	Great looks, but lacks some precision	7x110	6	1	●	17x44x39
Onkyo TX-NR626	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Well-featured but not as compelling or as immersive as rival products	7x160	6	2	●	17x44x33
Pioneer VSX-924	500	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Another good effort but rivals offer more excitement	7x150	7	2	●	17x44x36
Sony STR-DN1040	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £350-£700, Awards 2013.	7x100	8	2	●	16x43x32
Sony STR-DN1050	500	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £350-£700, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	7x165	6	3	●	17x43x33
Yamaha RX-S600	500	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A small, excellent amp that delivers great sound and good features	5x90	5	1	●	17x43x33
Yamaha RX-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

"The RX-A3030's immensely enjoyable and involving sense of scale is justification enough for that £2000 price tag, while a class-leading ability to deliver any film soundtrack with subtlety, punch and agility demands your attention"

March 2014

AV RECEIVERS & AMPLIFIERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Channels / power (w)	HDMI in	HDMI out	Networking	3D passthrough	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
£1000-£2000									
Anthem MRX-510	1700	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Rarely have we seen a multi-channel amp so accomplished with music	7x75	7	2	●	16x44x37
Denon AVR-4520	1970	03.13/ST	★★★★★	An enjoyable, easygoing sound, pipped only in terms of absolute excitement	9x150	7	2	●	20x43x42
Onkyo TX-NR818	1000	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Impressive AV amp with features aplenty	7x180	8	2	●	34x59x55
Onkyo TX-NR838	1000	10.14/FT	★★★★★	A commendable amplifier with a huge number of features	7x180	7	1	●	34x58x51
Pioneer SC-LX57	1200	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £700-£1500, Awards 2013	9x190	9	3	●	19x44x44
Pioneer SC-LX58	1400	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £700-£1500, Awards 2014	9x190	8	3	●	19x44x44
Yamaha RX-A1020	1000	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Delivering excitement, detail and precision, this is a brilliantly capable all-rounder	7x110	8	2	●	18x43x43
Yamaha RX-A1030	1000	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Not without some niggles, this receiver delivers big-time power and muscle	7x110	8	2	●	18x43x43
Yamaha RX-A1040	1000	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Well-featured and full of power, but lacks in the thrill department	7x110	8	2	●	18x44x43
£2000 and above									
Anthem MRX 700	2100	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Fantastic-sounding and worthy of a serious audition	7x90	4	1	●	17x44x39
Arcam FMJ AVR450	2200	03.14/GT	★★★★★	There's plenty to like with this receiver, but its rivals better it	7x110	7	2	●	17x43x42
Arcam AVR750	4000	12.13/FT	★★★★★	It's not flawless, but this AV receiver is very good	7x100	7	2	●	17x43x43
Pioneer SC-LX87	2000	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Pioneer strikes gold again with this feature-laden powerhouse	9x220	9	3	●	19x44x44
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-NR3009	2000	04.12/GT	★★★★★	Produces seriously rewarding surround sound	9x200	8	2	●	34x61x60
Onkyo TX-NR3010	2000	03.13/ST	★★★★★	A solid performance but lacks the subtlety to cut it as a complete all-rounder	9x160	9	2	●	20x44x60
Yamaha RX-A3030	2000	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £1500+, Awards 2013	9x150	8	1	●	19x44x47
Yamaha RX-A3040	2000	01.15/GT	★★★★★	A smooth and powerful amp, that's well worth auditioning	9x230	8	2	●	19x44x47



Subwoofers

Sealed cabinet _____ Tends to produce the tightest bass but limits outright quantity
Reflex port _____ A more common design that tends to deliver more bass
Room equalisation _____ Evens out the subwoofer's response to produce a more balanced sound

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Power (w)	Driver (cm)	Passive radiator	Sealed	Ported	Drive unit orientation	Line inputs	Speaker ins	Line outputs	Speaker outs	Phase invert	Remote control	EQ	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500																		
B&W ASW610	450	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Best subwoofer up to £700, Awards 2011	200	25	●	●	Forward	1	1	●	●	●	●	●	4	31x31x38
Monitor Audio Vector VW-8	225	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Capable little sub for an entry-level system	100	20	●	●	Forward	2	0	●	●	●	●	●	2	32x28x28
REL Acoustics T-Zero	350	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Small and discreet, but limited by size	100	16.5	●	●	Downward	2	1	●	●	●	●	●	2	24x22x26
Tannoy TS2.10	430	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Small, but packs a ferocious punch	300	25	●	●	Forward	1	0	●	●	●	●	●	3	39x38x33
Velodyne EQ-Max 8	495	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Small, but punches well above its weight	180	20	●	●	Forward	2	2	●	●	●	●	●	1	37x33x38
Velodyne Impact-12	365	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Fine sub, more of a movie than a music classic	165	30	●	●	Forward	2	1	●	●	●	●	●	1	39x66x45
Velodyne Impact-Mini	435	10.09/FT	★★★★★	Amazingly small sub with fine movie performance	180	16.5	●	●	Forward	2	2	●	●	●	●	●	1	25x25x30
W'fedale Powercube SPC-10	300	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Nearly a terrific subwoofer - but there are issues	215	25	●	●	Downward	1	1	●	●	●	●	●	8	38x35x31
£500-£1000																		
B&W ASW610XP	700	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for big bass from a small box	500	25	●	●	Forward	2	1	●	●	●	●	●	4	32x32x37
Monitor Audio Apex AW-12	950	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Beautiful to look at, and punchy too	500	30.5	●	●	Forward	1	0	●	●	●	●	●	2	34x34x41
REL Acoustics T-7	650	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A compact sub with authority	200	20	●	●	Downward	2	1	●	●	●	●	●	2	30x35x33
Sonos Sub	600	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Sounds great. Makes sense with Sonos Play speakers	n/a	n/a	●	●	Inward	0	0	●	●	●	●	●	1	40x38x16
Tannoy TS2.12	549	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Attractively priced with decent sonics too	500	30.5	●	●	Forward	1	0	●	●	●	●	●	2	44x43x38
Velodyne EQ-Max 12	825	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Powerful and agile and supremely enjoyable	225	30.5	●	●	Forward	1	2	●	●	●	●	●	1	45x42x46
Yamaha NS-SW700	500	03.10/FT	★★★★★	Not the most accomplished, but very competent	300	25	●	●	Downward	4	2	●	●	●	●	●	2	45x41x41
£1000 and above																		
B&W PV1D	1200	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Delivers precision and agility in spades	400	20	●	●	Forward	1	0	●	●	●	●	●	2	34x27x36
Jamo D600	1300	05.12/GT	★★★★★	A brilliant sub that's worth the price	400	38	●	●	Forward	n/a	0	●	●	●	●	●	1	56x59x50
Velodyne SPL-1000 Ultra	1400	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Best subwoofer £700+, Awards 2011	1200	25	●	●	Forward	1	1	●	●	●	●	●	3	34x33x34

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Surround speakers

Full size Traditional cabinet design that's big but can deliver a great sound
Style Compact speakers that make a lot of sense in smaller living spaces
Bipole/Dipole Surround speaker designs that give a more cohesive soundfield

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
Q Acoustics 2000i 5.1

Awards 2014: Best Traditional Pack up to £700



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Dali Zensor 15.1

Awards 2014: Best Traditional Pack £700-£1500



AWARD WINNER
Monitor Audio Radius R90HT1

Awards 2014: Best Style package £1400-£1800

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Front speaker (hwd, cm)	Center speaker (hwd, cm)	Rear speaker (hwd, cm)	Subwoofer (hwd, cm)	Finishes
Up to £500								
Boston Ac. Soundware XS SE	220	12.11/FT	★★★★★	Just as good as its predecessor: a must-hear	11x11x9	11x11x9	11x11x9	31x28x40 2
Canton Movie 130	450	05.12/FT	★★★★★	Likeable and listenable	12x9x10	9x19x10	12x9x10	41x24x42 3
Jamo S426 HCS3	350	01.12/FT	★★★★★	A worthy home cinema solution	91x18x24	12x34x12	21x12x12	n/a 3
Tannoy HTS-101	400	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Best style package up to £700, Awards 2014	16x11x14	11x25x17	16x11x14	42x28x37 1
Wharfedale DX-1HCP	400	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Gets a lot right for this kind of money	19x12x12	12x29x12	19x12x12	34x29x32 2
£500-£1000								
Boston Ac. SoundWare S	510	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Dinky yet substantial-sounding	14x14x14	14x14x14	14x14x14	34x32x44 2
Dali Zensor 1 5.1	980	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £700-£1500, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	27x16x22	16x44x29	27x16x22	31x29x31 3
Jamo A 200 HCS 5	640	01.13/FT	★★★★★	Agutty and entertaining sound at this price	22x9x5	22x9x5	22x9x5	31x28x31 7
KEF E305	900	11.13/ST	★★★★★	A room-filling system but there are more dynamic packages out there	26x14x16	16x22x15	26x14x16	32x43x27 2
Mission M ³	700	01.15/FT	★★★★★	Petite, likable and convenient, just lacks the thrills of rival packages	9x9x9	9x9x9	9x9x9	28x27x27 1
Mission MX15.1	600	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for a medium sized room	28x17x26	15x42x19	28x17x26	30x30x33 4
Monitor Audio MASS	800	11.13/ST	★★★★★	Still an excellent system, it narrowly falls short of the best	22x13x13	13x22x13	22x13x13	42x38x38 1
Q Acoustics 2000i 5.1	625	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package up to £700, Awards 2014	23x15x20	23x16x12	23x15x20	23x16x12 2
Q Acoustics 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

Setting up your... Surround sound

It's not easy figuring out where to set up your speaker system to get the right performance. Here are a few bits of advice to keep in mind when setting up...

Where should I position my sub?

Each manufacturer will have different suggestions so it's worth checking the manual to see what it says. As a rule, though, the best place for a subwoofer to get the most integrated sound is at the front of the room between the left and right speakers.

And the surrounds?

In precise terms, the surround speakers should be 110° either side of the centre speaker, angled in to your listening position. This should mean they sit just behind you, for the most immersive effect.

What about the front speakers?

As a general rule, the centre speaker should be as close to ear height as possible and the front speakers should be placed at a 30° angle either side.



Dali suggest that the ideal position for the Vokal centre speaker is on a shelf below the television

SURROUND SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Front speaker (hwd, cm)	Center speaker (hwd, cm)	Rear speaker (hwd, cm)	Subwoofer (hwd, cm)	Finishes
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-ite Plus 5.1 package	1200	12.13/FT	★★★★★	A fine package that's up against some formidable rivals at this price	25x14x18	15x38x17	25x14x18	31x24x24	3

£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
B&W CM9 Theatre	4200	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £3500+, Awards 2013	102x32x37	22x59x28	34x20x28	32x32x32	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
PMC DB1i 5.1	4675	12.09/FT	★★★★★	Small and sonically brilliant package	29x16x23	16x29x23	29x16x23	55x20x55	4
Tannoy Revolution SEAV	2400	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Despite a few issues with the centre and sub, this is an exciting package	95x20x25	15x31x16	37x20x25	44x43x37	1

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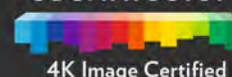
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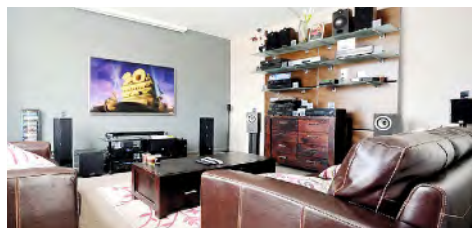
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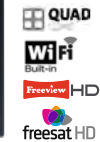
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CD players

Integrated _____ Has both a CD mechanism and digital-to-analogue conversion tech
Transport _____ Needs an outboard DAC but can deliver a higher standard of sound

Our recommendations

Our recommendations					Integrated Transport	Co-axial out	Optical out	XLRout	RCAout	Headphone out	Co-axial in	Optical in	AES/EBU in	USB in	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	
Product	£	Tested	Verdict														
Up to £500																	
Cambridge Audio Azur 351C	300	11.12/FT	★★★★★	A worthy rival to the Award-winning Marantz CD6004	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	9x43x31	
Cambridge Audio Azur 651C	450	03.12/FT	★★★★★	A spacious sounding disc spinner	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x31	
Marantz CD6004	300	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Best CD player up to £500, Awards 2012	●	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	11x44x34	
Marantz CD6005	350	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Best CD player up to £500, Awards 2014	●	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x44x34	
Sansui CDD-201V	200	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Sensibly priced, but not quite an all-rounder	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	7x43x28	
£500-£1000																	
Audiolab 8200CD	800	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1000, Awards 2012	●	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	0	1	1	8x44x30	
Audiolab 8200CDQ	950	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Improves on the sky-high performance of the 8200CD	●	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	0	1	2	8x44x30	
NAD C 546BEE	500	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Talented but struggles against the more enjoyable budget Marantz	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	9x44x31	
Cyrus CD Transport	750	01.12/ST	★★★★★	An impressive and affordable CD transport	●	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36	
Cyrus CD6 SE2	700	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Subtly upgraded, with worthwhile results	●	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	8x22x36	
Naim CD5si	995	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1500, Awards 2013	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	7x43x30	
Pioneer PD-50	500	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Worth considering but this SACD player doesn't quite engage	●	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	13x44x33	
Rega Apollo-R	550	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Admirable, but lacks some cohesion	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	9x22x32	
Roksan Kandy K2	900	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Big and powerful, with an entertaining sound	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	10x43x38	
Yamaha CD-S2000	979	03.09/GT	★★★★★	A beautiful object that's involving to listen to	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	14x44x44	
£1000 and above																	
Audio Research CD6	8050	08.14/FT	★★★★★	In the market for a top-class CD player? This could be the one	●	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	1	1	2	13x48x31	
Burmester 069	35840	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Quite possibly the best CD player money can buy		2	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	16x45x34	
Cambridge Audio Azur 851C	1200	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Impressive sonic presentation but a touch too clinical for our tastes	●	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	1	1	2	12x43x34	
Copland CDA 825	4298	05.13/FT	★★★★★	A hugely capable player with stunning sound quality	●	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	10x43x39	
Cyrus CD 8 SE2	1200	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Best CD player £1000-£1500, Awards 2012	●	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36	
Cyrus CDI	1050	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1500, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	7x22x36	
Esoteric K-05	7495	01.14/FT	★★★★★	A great place to start... if you're looking for your final disc-player	●	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	13x45x36	
Leema Antila IIS Eco	2995	09.11/FT	★★★★★	The already good Antila goes up another level in performance	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	11x44x31	
Musical Fidelity M6CD	2100	08.13/FT	★★★★★	Its powerful, yet refined sound will appeal to many, a fine performer	●	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	13x44x39	
Naim CD5 XS	1950	Aw.09/FT	★★★★★	It's an excellent CD player, but faces stiff competition	●	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	7x43x30	
Naim CD555/555PS	18345	10.09/FT	★★★★★	The CD555/555PS has a hefty price tag, but a classy performance	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	11x43x31	
Naim CDX2	3640	02.10/FT	★★★★★	The tweaked CDX2 remains a fine proposition	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x31	
Parasound Halo CD1	5000	07.13/FT	★★★★★	Not cheap but it's a fine CD player with an idiosyncratic design	●	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x44x35	
Primare CD32	2200	04.11/FT	★★★★★	It's massively detailed, but not as engaging as we'd like	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	11x43x38	
Roksan Caspian M2 CD	1695	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Best CD player £1500+ Awards 2014	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x43x33	
T+A MP 3000 HV	7900	12.13/FT	★★★★★	A classy multi-source player that delivers high-quality sound	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	11x43x35
Yamaha CD-S3000	3500	10.14/GT	★★★★★	An understated player that lets the music take centre stage	●	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	14x44x44	

System killers



Eminem
The Marshall Mathers LP2

Arriving 13 years after *The Marshall Mathers LP* album, this strong sequel is good for sniffing out a system's grasp of timing and rhythmic precision with its caffeinated delivery and aggressive, complex beats. Eminem's flexible, angst-ridden vocals demand dynamic attention and every last ounce of insight, while its hard, edgy nature will eat up any unrefined or bright-sounding electronics for breakfast.



Whiplash
Original Motion Picture Soundtrack

A collection of music performed and arranged by Justin Hurwitz and Tim Simonec for the Oscar-nominated film *Whiplash*, this is a jazz soundtrack at full tilt from the off and it rarely relents. A system that can communicate the ebb and flow without tripping up on detail and dynamics, or muddying the energy of the tracks is key here with the nine-minute long *Caravan* a pulsating test for systems.

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DACs

Digital-to-analogue converters take a digital data stream from their source (such as a computer or CD transport) and turns it into an analogue signal that your amplifier can work with. These devices have become more popular in recent years due to the emergence of computer-based audio

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		USB in	Optical in	Co-axial in	AES EBU in	HDMI in	Wireless	Headphone out	RCA out	Balanced XLR out	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500														
Arcam airDAC	400	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Not as good as the irDAC but delivers good sound on a budget	0	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	4x19x12
Arcam irDAC	400	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Best DAC £300-£500, Awards 2014	0	2	2	0	0	●	0	1	0	4x12x19
Arcam irDAC Wireless	380	09.12/GT	★★★★★	No longer the default choice at the money, still very much a contender	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	4x16x11
Arcam miniBlink	90	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Best Bluetooth receiver, Awards 2014. Accessories Product of the Year	0	0	0	10	0	●	0	1	0	2.5x3x4
Arcam rPAC	150	04.13/ST	★★★★★	More desirable alternatives, but the rPAC still has plenty of merit	1	0	0	0	0	●	1	1	0	3x10x6
Audioengine D1	150	05.12/FT	★★★★★	A DAC and headphone amp with a fine sound	1	1	0	0	1	●	1	1	0	3x9x10
Audioquest DragonFly	215	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC up to £300, Awards 2012	1	0	0	0	0	●	1	0	0	6x2x1
Audioquest DragonFly v1.2	130	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC up to £300, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	1	0	0	0	0	●	1	0	0	6x2x1
Belkin Song Stream BT HD	50	05.14/GT	★★★★★	A solid performer for the price	0	0	0	0	0	●	0	1	0	n/a
Camb. Audio DacMagic 100	200	06.12/FT	★★★★★	An affordable, fine looking and listenable DAC	1	2	2	0	0	●	0	1	0	5x11x13
Camb. Audio DacMagic Plus	350	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Better sound and features than the original - but pricey	1	2	2	0	0	●	1	1	1	5x22x19
Camb. Audio DacMagic XS	100	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Drops down a star but still a delightful little device	0	0	0	0	0	●	1	0	0	5x3x1
CrystalAcoustics BluDAC	60	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Doesn't quite have the finesse of others but this is still a real entertainer	0	0	0	0	0	●	0	1	0	6.5x7.5x2
Denon DA-300USB	330	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Soft bass detracts from what is otherwise a great first DAC from Denon	1	2	1	0	0	●	1	1	0	6x17x18
Furutech ADL GT 40	400	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Cables & Accessories, Awards 2011	1	0	0	0	0	●	1	1	0	6x15x11
Focal Universal Wireless Receiv.	85	05.14/GT	★★★★★	A very talented performer that comes with a few quirks	0	0	0	0	0	●	0	1	0	n/a
HRT Headstreamer	145	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A neat headphone amp and DAC combination	1	0	0	0	0	●	1	0	0	3x6x7
HRT microStreamer	180	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC up to £300, Awards 2013	1	0	0	0	0	●	1	0	0	1x3x6
LH Labs Geek Out	200	09.14/FT	★★★★★	A clever little device that's a solid performer	0	0	0	0	0	●	2	0	0	1.3x3.5x6.7
Meridian Director	450	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Packs a sonic punch but lacks the swagger found in others	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	3x14x8
Meridian Explorer DAC	250	07.13/GT	★★★★★	The Explorer's design and assured sonic performance makes it a top contender	1	0	0	0	0	●	1	0	0	2x3x10
Micromega MyDAC	260	04.13/ST	★★★★★	If you like your music to have an attacking edge, then this DAC's for you	1	0	0	0	0	●	1	0	0	2x3x10
Musical Fidelity V-90 DAC	200	12.13/FT	★★★★★	A well-featured DAC that's a little too relaxed in its sound	1	2	1	0	0	●	0	0	0	5x17x10
NAD D 1050	400	06.14/GT	★★★★★	For those looking for a desktop DAC, the NAD D 1050 is a brilliant box of tricks	1	2	2	0	0	●	1	1	1	19x6x21
Pro-Ject DAC Box DS	299	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A solid performer but doesn't excel in any area	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	7x10x14
£500-£1000														
Audiolab M-DAC	600	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £500-£700, Awards 2014	1	2	2	0	0	●	0	1	1	6x25x25
Cambridge Audio Azur 851D	1000	07.14/GT	★★★★★	A fine DAC, even if it can't scale the heights of the class leaders	1	4	3	1	0	●	1	0	1	12x43x36
Chord Chordette QuteHD	990	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £700-£1000, Awards 2013	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	7x16x4
Chord Electronics Qute Ex	990	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best DAC £700-£1000, Awards 2014	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	7x16x4
Rega DAC	500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Beefy build; natural, unforced, dynamic and detailed sound	1	2	2	0	0	●	0	1	0	8x22x27
Musical Fidelity M1 SDAC	800	08.13/FT	★★★★★	An impressive spec list but performance is trumped by cheaper rivals	1	1	2	0	0	●	1	1	0	10x22x31
Parasound Zdac	500	11.13/GT	★★★★★	The Zdac produces a lively, likable sound	1	1	1	0	0	●	1	1	1	5x22x26
Rotel RDD-1580	600	05.14/FT	★★★★★	Plenty to be impressed with, but the poor quality of its USB input holds it back	1	2	2	0	0	●	0	1	1	5.5x43x32
Sony PHA-3AC	720	02.15/FT	★★★★★	A fine performer with plenty of strengths but more than a few weaknesses	2	1	0	0	0	●	2	1	0	7x8x14
Sony UDA-1	500	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Not the most musically exciting DAC, but an excellent choice for desktop users	2	1	0	0	0	●	2	1	0	3x18x14
£1000 and above														
Aesthetix Romulus	6500	06.14/GT	★★★★★	A fine performer that draws in the listener with a smooth and elegant sound	1	1	1	1	0	●	0	1	1	11x46x45
Antelope Zodiac Gold/Voltikus	3100	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Unique and appealing, it just misses out on a fifth star	1	2	2	0	0	●	2	1	1	11x17x19
Audio Research DAC 8	4698	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Pricey, but as organic-sounding as you can get	1	1	1	0	0	●	1	1	1	13x48x25
Arcam FMJ D33	2000	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A well-equipped DAC, but not the best in class	3	2	2	1	0	●	0	1	2	11x43x37
Benchmark DAC HGC	1750	11.14/FT	★★★★★	A hugely capable DAC but there are cheaper contenders out there	1	2	2	0	0	●	1	2	1	5x20x21
Bricasti Design M1 DAC	7000	03.14/FT	★★★★★	An understated but deeply talented performer. Thoroughly impressive	1	1	2	1	1	●	0	1	1	6x43x30
Bryston BDA-1 DAC	2350	06.11/FT	★★★★★	A great sounding DAC with appealing build quality	1	2	4	1	0	●	0	1	1	4x48x29
Burmester 113	2300	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Small and unassuming but packs a seriously exciting sound	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	1	6x20x17
Chord QBD76 HDSD	4995	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A top-class, visually appealing DAC that delivers brilliant sound	2	2	2	2	0	●	0	1	1	6x34x15
Chord Hugo	1400	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £1000+, Awards 2014	2	1	1	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	1	1	7x45x39
McIntosh D100	3000	06.13/GT	★★★★★	A solid and entertainer performer. Well featured, too	1	2	2	0	0	●	1	0	0	10x45x41
Musical Fidelity M6 DAC	2000	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A mighty performer but its price and competition rob it of a fifth star	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	1	13x44x39

DACs continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	USB in	Optical in	Co-axial in	AS EBU in	HDMI in	Wireless	Headphone out	RCA out	Balanced XLR out	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
NAD M51	1500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £1200+, Awards 2012	1	1	1	1	2	0	1	0	8x44x30
Naim DAC	2150	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Flexible, fine sounding and future-proof. The Naim is some DAC	2	3	3	0	0	0	1	0	7x43x30
Naim DAC-V1	1250	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £1000+, Awards 2013	1	2	3	0	0	1	1	1	9x21x32
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

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	33.33 RPM	45 RPM	78 RPM	Elec. speed change	Manual operation	Phono amp	Tonearm inc.	Cartridges inc.	USB port	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £1000														
Audio Technica AT-LP1240USB	500	10.14/GT	★★★★★	A competent turntable than could do with more subtlety sound-wise	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	16x45x35
Edwards Audio TT1	380	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A tempting alternative to the class-leaders at this price	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	12x45x36
Pro-Ject Elemental	150	04.14/FT	★★★★★	A top-class budget deck from Pro-Ject	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	3	9x43x30
Pro-Ject Essential II	210	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable up to £400, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	3	14x46x36
Pro-Ject 1 Xpression Carbon UKX	575	01.15/FT	★★★★★	A terrific package for the price and worth serious consideration	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	13x42x34
Pro-Ject 2 Xperience 2-Pack	900	12.14/GT	★★★★★	An eye-catching turntable with a robust sound. A very fine effort	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	13x46x36
Pro-Ject 2 Xperience Basic+	600	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Fuss-free package with a strikingly clear sound	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	1	14x46x36
Pro-Ject Debut Carbon	300	10.14/GT	★★★★★	It's been a few years but the Carbon is still a tempting proposition	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	7	12x42x32
Rega RP1	225	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable up to £400, Awards 2011	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	3	12x45x36
Rega RP1 Performance Pack	300	10.14/GT	★★★★★	A blindingly good turntable for the price	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	4	12x45x36
Rega RP3/Elys2	550	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best turntable £400-£800, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	3	10x45x36

Five steps to setting up your turntable

Vinyl is making a comeback in a big way so make sure you've set up your turntable just right



Platter



Cartridge



Tone-arm adjustment

1 Get it totally level
Your deck has no chance of working at its best until this is done. It helps considerably if the support is light and rigid, so external vibrations don't upset the cartridge as it tracks the record groove.

2 Sort the suspension
If your record player has suspension, make sure the platter sits level too. Doing this allows the stylus to sit properly in the record groove and lets it dig up more information.

3 Prevent excessive hum
You can do this by making sure the tone arm lead isn't stressed and is positioned away from anything that runs on mains voltage.

4 Tweak the tone-arm
First up is the tracking weight, adjusted by moving a counter-weight at the rear of the arm. To start with, the down-force should be set according to the cartridge-maker's spec. Too high and the sound will be dull and slow. Too low and the presentation turns thin and the cartridge won't track the groove properly.

Next up is bias – a sideways force on the cartridge to balance out the inward pull of the groove. It's usually set to the same as the tracking value.

5 Align the cartridge
Even errors of less than a degree can result in increased coarseness. Most manufacturers supply printed gauges to get this aspect right.

All about cartridges

There are two main types of turntable cartridges you need to know: moving magnet (MM) and moving coil (MC).

The former tends to dominate at lower prices and usually produces a relatively high electrical output, typically 5-10mV. Compare that with a typical CD player's output, about 2V, and you can see why the

extra amplification of a phono circuit is needed.

Moving-coil designs tend to deliver a cleaner, more detailed sound, but command a higher selling price and produce an output that's around a tenth of MM alternatives.

Such a low output means that extra amplification will be needed in the phono stage, and any shortcomings in the circuit will be more readily apparent.



The Award-winning
Pro-Ject Essential II, £210

TURNABLES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	33.33 — 45 78 RPM	Elec. speed change	Manual operation	Phono amp	Tonearm inc.	Cartridges inc.	USB port	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
£1000 and above												
Clearaudio Concept	1000	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable £800+, Awards 2014								
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 Gyro. SE/TecnoArm A	1478	09.08/FT	★★★★★	Packs a sublime punch – it makes listening a pleasure								1 19x41x53
Michell Orbe SE/Tecnoarm A	2675	01.09/FT	★★★★★	Don't buy anything without hearing this deck first								2 26x64x53
Origin Live Calypso package	2440	12.11/FT	★★★★★	Impressive package, but lacks some attention to detail								1 14x45x38
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/GT	★★★★★	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 TD160HD/TP250	1560	10.08/GT	★★★★★	One of the best at this price								1 18x43x34
Thorens TD309	1250	06.10/FT	★★★★★	The TD309 is a good deck, but it's no TD160HD on the cheap								2 13x47x43
Townshend Rock 7	1500	09.09/FT	★★★★★	It's got its quirks, but it's great value for the money								1 15x40x34



Radios

DAB Digital radio signal that now offers coverage across most of the UK
Internet Allows you to listen to thousands of radio stations from around the world

Our recommendations

Our recommendations					DAB	FM	MW	Internet	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict							
Up to £100										
Aves Air	50	09.13/GT	★★★★★	A neat, lightweight radio that's fine for listening on the go	●	●			●	10x6x2
Pure Digital Elan II	99	01.10/GT	★★★★★	Classy and natural - another joy from Pure	●	●			●	16x28x9
Pure Digital Move 2500	90	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A great performer in the right circumstances	●	●			●	10x6x1.5
Pure Digital Move 400D	90	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Perfect for on-the-go casual listening, but not as your main home radio	●	●			●	8.5x15x2.7
Pure Digital One Classic II	65	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	An upgrade of an established favourite	●	●			●	15x21x7
Pure Evoke D2	85	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Best Radio up to £100, Awards 2014	●	●			●	15x21x7
Q2 Internet radio	90	03.11/FT	★★★★★	No-frills wi-fi radio that sounds great for its size	●	●		●	●	10x10x10
Roberts Duologic	75	01.10/GT	★★★★★	User friendly and sleek – with great sound	●	●			●	15x25x83
£100 and above										
Geneva World Radio DAB+	270	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Best Radio £200+, Awards 2013	●	●			●	17x30x7
Philips Original Radio Mini	110	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Terrific sound and features makes this radio an appealing buy	●	●				25x12x12
Pure Evoke D4 with Bluetooth	150	08.14/FT	★★★★★	A decent radio that doesn't sound as good as some of its stablemates	●	●			●	18x22x12
Pure Digital Evoke Flow	150	05.10/GT	★★★★★	Internet and DAB-capable radio that's a delight to use and listen to	●	●		●	●	18x21x11
Pure Digital Evoke-1S Marshall	120	01.11/FT	★★★★★	A quirky and appealing style classic			●		●	17x22x12
Pure Evoke F4	180	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best Radio £100-£200, Awards 2013	●	●		●	●	18x21x11
Pure Digital One Flow	100	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best Internet Radio up to £150, Awards 2012	●	●		●		15x21x8
Pure Digital Sensia	250	01.10/FT	★★★★★	Plenty to offer: add to your shortlist of portable internet radios	●	●		●		17x28x18
Revo AXIS XS	200	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best Internet Radio £150+, Awards 2012	●	●		●		12.5x22x15
Revo AXIS X3	200	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Great radio and a nice little streamer	●	●		●		12.5x22x15
Revo Heritage	230	03.10/FT	★★★★★	Beyond reproach on paper, but comes up a bit short with sound	●	●		●		18x26x10
Revo Pixis	100	09.13/GT	★★★★★	A decent rather than ground-breaking effort from Revo. Worth an audition	●	●				13x16x16
Revo SuperConnect	250	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Best Radio £200+, Awards 2014	●	●		●		18x27x12
Roberts Revival iStream 2	200	12.14/GT	★★★★★	A retro radio with great looks and sound	●	●		●	●	16x26x13
Roberts Stream 83i	150	05.10/GT	★★★★★	Good in most areas, but the 83i needs a more balanced sound	●	●		●		21x25x13
Roberts Stream 93i	150	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Best Radio £100-£200, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	●		●		21x24x13
Ruark Audio R1 MkII	160	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best DAB/FM radio, Awards 2012	●	●				18x13x14
Tivoli Alberg+	200	02.14/FT	★★★★★	On the expensive side, but a neat unit nonetheless	●	●			●	11x19x11
Tivoli Model 10+	160	09.13/GT	★★★★★	A good table-top offering at an affordable price	●	●				20x12x12
View Quest Retro 1	100	12.11/GT	★★★★★	A neat, talented portable radio that deserves an audition	●	●			●	16x28x9



Hi-fi speakers

Standmounters _____ Usually smaller speakers that need to be put on a stand, not bookshelves
Floorstanders _____ Larger speakers that tend to go louder and deeper than standmounters
Powered _____ Have built-in amplifiers and need mains power to work

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Q Acoustics 2050i

Awards 2014: Best floorstander up to £600



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

B&W 683 S2

Awards 2014: Best floorstander £600-£1200



AWARD WINNER

Spendor A6R

Awards 2014: Best Floorstander £1200+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £200							
Acoustic Energy Compact 1	150	10.11/FT	★★★★★	Stylish looks meet grown-up performance	●	2	22x15x20
Audioengine P4	183	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Small in size, huge in sound: a must-audition pair	●	3	23x14x17
Cambridge Audio SX-50	130	04.14/ST	★★★★★	Full of zip and gusto, the SX-50s are excellent value for money	●	2	23x16x24
Mission MX1	150	06.11/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers up to £150, Awards 2010. A real return to form from Mission	●	4	28x17x26
Q Acoustics 2010i	120	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Set the standard at this price and size level	●	4	23x20x15
Q Acoustics 2020i	170	04.14/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers up to £200, Awards 2013	●	4	26x17x28
Roth Oli RA1	100	12.14/FT	★★★★★	If space is at a premium and your budget is low, then these are an excellent fit	●	2	23x15x15
SoundScience Frankenspiel FS-1	130	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Best Budget desktop speakers, Awards 2011	●	1	9x9x9
SoundScience QSB	85	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Compact, clever and with a big detailed sound	●	1	85x85x85
£200-£500							
Acoustic Energy Neo One V2	210	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Real ability in most areas but they don't quite gel	●	2	36x18x23
Acoustic Energy 301	425	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Very good speakers for the money, definitely worthy of consideration	●	2	30x19x25
Audioengine A5+	290	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Bigger, better and more flexible than the originals	●	3	27x18x20
Audio Pro Addon T8	250	06.14/ST	★★★★★	Punchy and energetic, these beautifully built speakers aren't perfect but they are enjoyable	●	2	16x10x14
Bose Companion 20	200	05.13/GT	★★★★★	Solid, reliable speakers for buyers on a tight budget	●	1	22x9x12
Bose Computer Music Monitor	250	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Enjoyable sound for a speaker this small	●	2	12x7x12
Boston Acoustics A-26	260	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A beautifully accomplished standmounter	●	2	33x21x27
B&W 685	400	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Great Award-winning speakers from B&W. Just edged out by newer rivals	●	4	34x20x33
B&W MM-1	399	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Still good, but there's better available	●	1	17x10x10
Cambridge Audio Aeromax 2	450	12.14/FT	★★★★★	A fine pair of stand-mounters, however a little honing wouldn't go amiss	●	2	37x20x34
Cambridge Audio SX-60	200	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Impressive speakers but they could do with more refinement	●	2	34x20x27
Dali Lektor 1	250	10.09/GT	★★★★★	As musically enjoyable as you'll buy at this price	●	2	26x15x21



Spendor D7 Simply the Best

"Among the finest speakers I've heard at any price"
Sam Tellig, Stereophile Nov 2014

"However it's been achieved, we can't help but marvel at the sound from the D7's. Spendor D7's set the standard for speakers at this price"
What Hi-Fi Oct 2013

Let the technology work - Hear the music

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★

stereophile

CLASS A RECOMMENDED
COMPONENT 2014

WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014

Stereo speakers
Best Floorstander £1200+
Spendor A6R

SPENDOR

www.spendoraudio.com

SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
£200-£500							
Dali Lektor 2	299	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Seriously entertaining speakers and simply stunning at this money	●	2	31x18x22
Dali Zensor 1	200	04.14/ST	★★★★★	These brilliant budget standmounters demand a listen	●	2	27x16x22
Dali Zensor 3	300	10.14/GT	★★★★★	If it's entertainment you crave, then these standmounters deliver in spades	●	3	35x21x29
Epos Epic 1	325	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Punchy and exciting but they can't deliver all-round ability	●	2	31x19x25
Focal Chorus 706V	390	03.11/FT	★★★★★	Thoroughly enjoyable but they may not cut it with dance music	●	3	39x22x29
Focal XS Book	300	07.12/GT	★★★★★	A potent-sounding speaker that brings hi-fi listening to your desktop	●	1	28x11x20
Focal XS Book Wireless	300	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Stacks of detail but not quite the measure of their rivals	●	1	28x11x20
KEF Q300	450	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Not quite at the top anymore, but still fine, engaging standmounters	●	3	36x21x30
Monitor Audio Bronze BX1	200	05.11/FT	★★★★★	Stylish as you like, but not the complete article	●	4	26x17x18
Monitor Audio Bronze BX2	250	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers £200-£350, Awards 2012	●	4	35x19x26
Monitor Audio Silver RX1	425	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Well-made and refined speakers, just lacking the flexibility of its rivals	●	6	31x19x24
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 1XR	250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Still great, but the rivals have caught up	●	1	28x18x27
Mission MX2	200	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Dynamic enough but maybe too exciting	●	4	34x21x31
Mission MX3	350	11.11/GT	★★★★★	Peppy and communicative floorstanders	●	4	82x17x34
Pioneer S-CN301-LR	200	04.14/ST	★★★★★	Polished, insightful and appealing	●	1	23x14x22
Q Acoustics Concept 20	350	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers £200-£400, Awards 2014	●	2	26x17x28
Q Acoustics Q-BT3	350	06.14/ST	★★★★★	There are few products as versatile and as easy to like as the Q-BT3s at this price	●	4	31x19x24
Q Acoustics 2050i	460	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander up to £600, Awards 2014	●	4	100x32x27
Quad 11L Classic	330	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Impressive standmounters but lack a touch of sparkle	●	4	31x19x24
Ruark Audio MR1	300	06.14/ST	★★★★★	Best desktop speakers, Awards 2014	●	3	17x13x14
Tannoy Mercury V1i	150	04.14/ST	★★★★★	A stylish, self-assured pair of speakers that are well worth auditioning	●	2	30x17x26
Tannoy Mercury V4	380	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £350-£700, Awards 2011	●	2	97x20x28
Tannoy Mercury V4i	400	01.14/FT	★★★★★	An exciting and punchy listen, but it comes with compromises	●	1	100x20x28
Tannoy Revolution DC4	380	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Well worth considering if your listening room isn't too big	●	2	27x15x16
Tannoy Revolution DC6	400	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Best standmounter £350-£700, Awards 2012	●	1	36.5x20x25
Triangle Color	470	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Small, but perfectly formed	●	3	29x17x24
Wharfedale Diamond 121	230	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Fabulous sound. For insight and entertainment, the 121s needn't fear any rival	●	7	32x17x23
Wharfedale Diamond 220	200	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers up to £200, Awards 2014	●	4	50x32x41

Jargon buster: Loudspeakers

Choosing the right pair of speakers is fundamental to your enjoyment of recorded music, so it may help in knowing a few technical terms so you won't be bamboozled when it comes to making a purchase

Coloration

Any tonal alterations or distortion added to the original signal can be classified as colouration.

Crossover

The circuit inside a speaker that splits, or filters the incoming signal, sending high frequencies to the tweeter and midrange/bass to the woofer.

Dynamics

A speaker's dynamic ability is the way it goes from quiet to loud and back. The best speakers manage this quickly, in a smooth sweep. The difference between the quietest sounds the speaker produces and the loudest is called the dynamic range.

Sensitivity

A measure of how loud a speaker will go for a given input power. Typical values

are around 89dB/W/m. Every 3dB of sensitivity means you'll need only half the amplifier power to go as loud.

Tweeter

A type of loudspeaker usually shaped like a small dome (but can also look like a cone) that's designed to reproduce the high frequency sounds.

Bi-wire

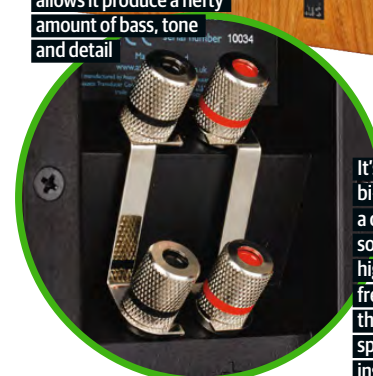
Speakers that are bi-wired have two pairs of speaker terminals. This allows for two connections to be made between the amplifier and the speaker; one for high frequency sounds and another for mid/bass frequencies.

Woofer

Usually the largest drive unit. It's designed to deliver low frequency sounds. Can be used in multiples to increase output.



ATC's SCM11 employs a sealed box design which allows it produce a hefty amount of bass, tone and detail



It's claimed that bi-wiring produces a clearer, expansive sound thanks to high and mid/bass frequencies being sent through two pairs of speaker cables instead of one

SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
£500-£1500							
Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic	1000	07.11/GT	★★★★★	A classic yes, but not the best around	●	2	30x18x26
Audio Pro LV2e	700	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Wireless desktop speakers with a hi-fi flourish		3	98x14x24
Audiovector Ki1 Super	800	04.12/GT	★★★★★	These pint-sized speakers lack far-reaching dynamics, but are easy to live with	●	5	98x14x24
Audiovector Ki3 Standard	1200	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Packed with resolution and speed	●	5	98x14x24
ATC SCM11 (2013)	1200	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best standmounter up to £1200, Awards 2014	●	2	38x21x25
AVI ADM9.1	1125	07.12/GT	★★★★★	A simple way to make the most of your music	●	5	30x20x26
B&W 683 S2	1150	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £600-£1200, Awards 2014	●	2	99x19x36
B&W 685 S2	500	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best standmounter £400-£800, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	2	35x19x32
Cambridge Audio Aeromax 6	900	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Lots of potential with these speakers, however they struggle in a few areas	●	2	98x24x34
Dali Ikon 1 MK2	530	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Huge sound and good timing, these Dalis are heartily recommended	●	3	33x15x26
Dali Ikon 6 MK2	1200	09.10/FT	★★★★★	Cleaner, clearer and more insightful than its forerunner	●	3	100x19x36
Dali Lektor 8	1200	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Likeable as long as you can live with the size and bass	●	2	106x27x37
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 DM 3/7	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
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 906	760	12.13/ST	★★★★★	For scale, power and refinement, you won't find many better	●	2	30x30x28
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
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 6	600	01.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine all-rounder, with power and bass in spades, and plenty more besides	●	3	95x21x30
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
Neat Petite SX	1250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Small and perfectly formed standmounters	●	6	31x20x18
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
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	07.14/ST	★★★★★	A refined and easy-going pair of speakers. They deserve serious consideration	●	2	97x17x29
Quad 9AS	600	07.14/FT	★★★★★	A decent pair of speakers but they need more punch and verve	●	3	30x15x21.5
Quad 12L Classic	500	11.11/FT	★★★★★	There's plenty to admire here	●	4	34x21x28
Rega RS3	780	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Floorstanders that are effortless with dynamics	●	3	80x22x25
Roksan Kandy K2 TR-5	750	06.09/GT	★★★★★	Stunning speakers that deserve to be labelled as contenders for class-leading status	●	1	37x19x28
Tannoy Precision 6.1	900	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Rhythmic, detailed speakers but a lack of solidity leaves them sounding unbalanced	●	2	33x22x26
Tannoy Revolution DC6 SE	700	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Responsive with a good sense of cohesion. Could do with a little more spark	●	1	37x20x24
Tannoy Revolution DC6T	799	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £700-£1500, Awards 2011	●	1	95x26x29
Tannoy Revolution DC6T SE	1000	07.14/ST	★★★★★	Best floorstander £800-£1500, Awards 2013	●	1	100x31x28

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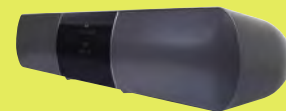
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SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
£500-£1500							
Tannoy Rev. Sig. DC4	600	07.12/GT	★★★★★	DC4s are still appealing across the board	●	2	27x17x18
Triangle Color 123	600	08.12/FT	★★★★★	A brilliant desktop speaker package		3	14x14x14
Wharfedale Denton	500	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Relaxed yet engaging sound has a lot of appeal	●	1	32x20x31
Wharfedale Diamond 155	500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Class leaders when it comes to sound, but let down by average build quality	●	7	94x20x31
£1500 and above							
Acoustic Energy Reference 1	1500	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Terrific all-rounders for the money	●	1	31x19x28
ADAM Aud. Classic Compact 3	2800	06.10/GT	★★★★★	For those who like their music ear-poppingly loud	●	1	44x23x29
ADAM Audio Tensor Gamma	12500	05.09/FT	★★★★★	Quite possibly the best speakers we've seen in a decade	●	2	108x32x34
Analysis Audio Omega	14500	08.11/FT	★★★★★	These planar floorstanders are a sonic treat	●	1	168x61x6
ATC SCM 100A	11615	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Massively talented and proportioned	●	4	107x40x56
Beauhorn Rhapsody B2	2750	10.07/FT	★★★★★	Outlandish shape but treat them right and you'll be deeply rewarded	●	98	120x34x75
B&O BeoLab 9	5060	05.07/FT	★★★★★	Work not just as style but in hi-fi terms too	●	4	78x40x430
B&O BeoLab 5	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	39x21x28
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
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 Easysa	1800	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Convenient and easy to use, these Focals are compromised by a relaxed delivery	●	2	90x17x24
GamuT M'inenT M3	5140	03.14/FT	★★★★★	These are some of the best standmounters we've ever heard	●	10	40x23x46
Image Audio IA8	2000	02.12/GT	★★★★★	Deeply impressive wall-mounted alternatives to convention		1	59x48x10
Linn Akubarik	15600	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Deeply impressive engineering but its presentation veers towards the clinical	●	200+	105x35x45
Monitor Audio Gold GX200	2300	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Pretty looks and excellent refinement	●	2	90x17x30
Mon. Audio Platinum PL300	6000	03.08/FT	★★★★★	Its been a long time coming, and it is well worth the wait	●	3	111x41x47
Naim Ovator S-400	3650	10.13/GT	★★★★★	The most rounded Naim speaker we've heard	●	5	106x33x35
Neat Ultimatum XLS	4500	09.12/FT	★★★★★	An entertainer of the highest order if partnered with care	●	9	38x22x37
PMC Fact 3	4100	08.11/FT	★★★★★	Hugely 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	★★★★★	Best standmounter £1200+, Awards 2014	●	4	41x18x37
PMCTwenty 23	2300	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £1500+, Awards 2013	●	4	92x15x33
PMCTwenty 26	5750	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Yet another top-class speaker from PMC's Twenty range	●	4	109x19x44
PMC Wafer 2	2295	02.12/GT	★★★★★	A real achievement for those after proper hi-fi		2	57x35x10
ProAc Response D18	2145	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £1500+, Awards 2011	●	6	93x19x27
ProAc Response D30R	4750	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Superb all-rounders	●	6	104x22x31
ProAc Response D40/R	6125	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Articulate and dynamic, a top-class pair of floorstanders	●	6	120x21x34
ProAc Studio 140 Mk2	1650	12.10/FT	★★★★★	An entertaining and dynamic performer	●	4	104x19x28
Quad ESL-2812	6500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Won't be to everyone's tastes but these electrostatic speakers truly excel	●	1	107x69x38
Quad ESL 2905	6000	01.07/FT	★★★★★	A truly world-class speaker	●	1	143x70x39
Roksan Darius S1	5000	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Excellent pair of performers and one of the most enjoyable stand-mounters we've heard	●	2	38x20x38
SPAcoustics SP1 Signature	14950	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Able to challenge the very best at this exalted level	●	Any	106x35x46
Spendor A5	1695	03.11/FT	★★★★★	The most accomplished speakers for this money	●	4	79x17x25
Spendor A6R	2500	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £1200+, Awards 2014	●	5	87.5x19x28
Spendor D7	3500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	The finest Spendors in years	●	6	95x20x32
Tannoy Precision 6.2	1700	10.13/GT	★★★★★	A beautifully balanced and hugely listenable pair of standmounters	●	3	100x31x28
Tannoy Precision 6.4	2200	02.14/GT	★★★★★	If bass is important to you, then these speakers are worth an audition	●	3	105x31x35
Tannoy Definition DC8	2500	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Capable of seriously controlled sound	●	3	47x27x26
Tannoy Definition DC10T	5250	10.13/GT	★★★★★	While the DC10Ts aren't the most refined speakers out there, they're easy to love	●	3	113x34x32
Totem Element Ember	3995	05.14/FT	★★★★★	If you're looking for entertainment, we can't think of a better alternative	●	2	36x11x25

SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount	Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Triangle Magellan Cello SW2	6699	05.10/FT	★★★★★		●	2		114x42x37
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

Theshortlist



AWARD WINNER
Marantz PM6005

Awards 2014: Best Stereo amp up to £300



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Arcam FMJ A19

Awards 2014: Best Stereo amp £500-£800



AWARD WINNER
Rega Elex-R

Awards 2014: Best Stereo amp £800-£1500

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Power (w)	DAC	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	USB in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Speaker out	Tone controls	Headphone out	Remote control	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £1000																	
Audiolab 8200A	750	05.13/ST	★★★★★	Capable, but lacks some subtlety	60	6	0	0	3	●	1	●	●	2			7.5x45x34
Arcam FMJ A19	650	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Best Stereo amp £500-£800, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	50	6	1	0	1	●	2	●	●	1			9x43x28
Cambridge Audio Azur 350A	250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A budget amp with a decent grasp of timing	45	●	6	0	0	1	2	●	●	2			9x43x34
Cambridge Audio Azur 351A	300	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Worth considering if you prefer an energetic approach	45	●	5	0	0	●	1	2	●	●	2		9x43x34
Cambridge Audio Azur 651A	450	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Meaty and powerful, but not the most refined	75	●	5	0	0	1	●	2	●	●	1		12x43x35
Cambridge Audio Topaz SR10	230	06.10/FT	★★★★★	This affordable stereo receiver has plenty to offer	85	5	1	0	1	2	●	●	●	1			11x43x34
Creek Audio Evolution 50A	800	01.15/GT	★★★★★	An entertaining amp that holds its own against established rivals	55	5	0	0	0	1	●	●	●	2			6x43x8
Cyrus 6a	800	01.15/GT	★★★★★	Still precise and insightful but now lacks rivals' energy	40	6	0	0	0	●	2	●	●	2			7x22x36
Denon PMA-720AE	350	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Entertaining and capable, but sonically stubborn	50	4	1	0	1	1	●	●	●	2			12x43x31
Icon Audio Stereo 25	500	01.09/FT	★★★★★	The Stereo 25 is superbly made for the money	30	3	0	0	0	0	1			1			22x32x31
Marantz PM6005	300	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp up to £500, Awards 2014	45	5	1	0	1	2	●	●	●	2			11x44x37
Micromega MyAmp	480	12.14/GT	★★★★★	An amp with attack and verve, although the finish could be better	30	●	3	0	0	●	0	1	●	●	2		7.5x14x14
Monitor Audio Airstream A100	400	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Insightful and composed, this is a worthy rival to the NAD D 3020	50	●	1	0	0	0	●	1		●	2		5x37x21
NAD C316BEE	260	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A decent listen that's overshadowed by rivals	40	5	0	0	1	1	●	●	●	2			8x44x29
NAD C326BEE	300	07.10/GT	★★★★★	A really musical amplifier to grace any budget system	50	7	0	0	2	●	1	●	●	●	1		10x44x29
NAD C356BEE	600	10.10/FT	★★★★★	A party animal of an amplifier	80	7	0	0	2	●	2	●	●	●	1		13x44x34
NAD C356BEE DAC	695	01.12/FT	★★★★★	A good amplifier with a great DAC	80	●	8	0	0	●	2	●	●	●	1		13x44x34
NAD D 3020	400	12.14/GT	★★★★★	A punchy and lively sound that's great fun to listen to	30	2	0	0	●	0	1	●	●	1			19x6x22
NAD D 7050	800	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Admirable, but not quite the measure of its cheaper rivals	50	●	0	0	0	●	0	1	●	●	1		24x7x27
Naim Nait 5i	875	05.13/ST	★★★★★	A strong all-round performer	50	4	0	0	1	1		●	●	1			7x44x31
Naim Nait 5si	925	01.15/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £800-£1500, Awards 2013	60	3	0	0	1	1	●	●	●	1			7x43x31
Onix A-25	775	05.13/ST	★★★★★	A good choice for those who value finesse over muscle	30	3	0	0	0	●	1		●	1			9x21x36
Onkyo A-9030	300	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Proof that Onkyo knows how to build good stereo gear	65	4	1	0	1	2	●	●	●	2			14x44x33
Onkyo A-9050	350	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Lean presentation, but there's plenty to like	75	5	1	0	1	●	1	●	●	2			14x44x33
Peachtree iDecco	999	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for a digital based set-up	40	1	0	0	●	1	●	1	●	●	1		13x38x29
Pro-Ject Stereo Box S	200	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A small amp that's worth investigation	40	2	0	0	0	1		●	2				4x10x10
Pioneer A-70	800	05.13/ST	★★★★★	Excels in many areas, falls short of class-leading	90	3	1	1	●	1	2	●	●	●	2		14x44x36
Quad Vena	600	01.15/FT	★★★★★	An interesting proposition but it's left wanting in terms of finesse	46	●	2	0	0	●	0	1	●	●	4		10x31x30
Rega Brio-R	480	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £400-£600, Awards 2012	50	4	1	0	1	1		●	2				8x22x31
Rega Elex-R	900	01.15/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £800-£1500, Awards 2014	72	4	1	0	1	●	1	●	●	1			8x43x32
Roksan Kandy K2	795	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £700-£1000, Awards 2011	125	5	1	0	1	●	1	●	●	3			10x43x38
Roksan Kandy K2 BT	895	05.14/FT	★★★★★	Full of power and punch but some heart and soul is missing	140	5	1	0	1	●	1	●	●	2			11x43x38
Rotel RA-10	350	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Sounds good, but rivals offer more insight and better digital features	40	4	1	0	1	●	2	●	●	2			7x43x34

AMPLIFIERS continued

AMPLIFIERS continued					Power (w)	DAC	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	USB in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Speaker outs	Tone controls	Headphone out	Remote control	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict															
Up to £1000																		
Rotel RA-12	600	05.13/ST	★★★★★	Well priced, appealing amp, just lacks a little expression	60	●	4	1	0	●	1	●	1	●	●	2		14x44x36
TEACAI-301DA	400	12.14/GT	★★★★★	An amp with an unadventurous, but pleasant presentation	30	●	2	0	0	●	0	●	1	●	●	2		6x21.5x25
Wadia 151 PowerDAC Mini	999	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A compact digital amp with plenty of appeal	25	●	0	0	0	●	0		1			1		7x20x20
Yamaha A-S300	195	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Solid performer but you can get better for a little more money	60		6	1	0		1	1	●	●	●	2		15x44x39
Yamaha A-S501	360	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	A capable amplifier that's packed with features	60		6	1	0		1	1	●	●	●	2		15x44x39
£1000 and above																		
Arcam FMJ A39	1500	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Powerful and authoritative, but it needs better timing and detail	120		6	1	0	●	1	●	2	●	●	1		10x43x43
Audio Analogue Class A Int. SE	9190	06.11/FT	★★★★★	A fantastic, and sonically rounded performer	50		5	0	0		1	1				1		33x45x41
ATC SIA 2-150	2379	02.10/GT	★★★★★	One of the best amplifiers at this price level	150		4	0	0		1	●	1	●	●	1		14x44x35
Bryston B60R	2600	07.09/FT	★★★★★	The Bryston B60R may be unassuming, but has quality	60		4	0	0		1	1		●	●	2		5x43x28
Cambridge Audio Azur 851A	1200	12.12/GT	★★★★★	For scale, power, build and style, this is hard to beat	120		8	0	0		1	●	2	●	●	2		12x43x39
Cyrus 6XPD	1250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A sturdy DAC-toting amp that's a cracker	40	●	6	0	0	●	1	●	2	●	●	2		7x22x36
Cyrus 8a	1350	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Everything we've come to expect and love about Cyrus	70		5	0	0		1	●	2	●	●	2		7x22x36
Cyrus 8 DAC	1400	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Meticulous and engaging amp and DAC combo	70	●	6	0	0	●	0		2	●	●	2		7x22x36
Cyrus 8 XPd	1500	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Sets a sky-high standard at the price point	70		5	0	0	●	1	●	1	●	●	2		7x22x36
Cyrus 8XP	1250	11.09/GT	★★★★★	The Cyrus 8XP misses nothing out in sonic thrills	70		6	0	0		1	●	1	●	●	2		7x22x36
Cyrus DACXP Signature	3000	11.13/FT	★★★★★	With the Signature upgrade, the DACXP remains a fine product	70		2	0	0		1	●	1	●	●	2		7x22x36
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 KA180Mk2	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 C 390DD	2250	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Novel thinking delivers an alternative to the favourites	150		1	0	0	●	0	●	2	●	●	1		13x43x39
Naim Nait 5XS	1500	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Still a top class premium amplifier	60		3	0	0		2	●	1			1		7x43x30
Naim Nait XS 2	1595	10.13/GT	★★★★★	An improvement on the Nait XS, even if it sacrifices a little detail	70		5	1	0		1	●	1	●	●	1		7x43x30
Naim Supernait 2	2750	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Even at this price, the Supernait 2 is a fantastic buy	80		5	0	0		1	●	1	●	●	1		9x43x31
Pathos 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	●	●	●	1	14x48x31
Audionet Pre 1 G3	3525	01.10/FT	★★★★★	As revealing as amplifiers get for the money	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	1	7x43x31
ATC CA-2	1058	12.09/FT	★★★★★	A matchless preamp when paired with the P1 power amp	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	1	9x44x32

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)
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	●		●			7x22x36
Heed Audio Obelisk pre/px	2230	04.13/FT	★★★★★	A superb-sounding preamp, but Heed needs to make it feel more luxurious	5	0	0	1	●				●	9x22x33
Lavardin C62	3471	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Belongs near the top of any shortlist	6	0	0	1	●					9x43x31
Leema Pyxis	3995	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A versatile, enjoyable preamp	5	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	●	11x44x31
Linn Akurate Kontrol	4200	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Part of the Linn Akurate system - and truly awesome	4	1	1	1	●	●	●		●	9x38x38
NAD C165BEE	650	08.10/FT	★★★★★	A brute of a preamp	4	1	1	0		●	●		●	8x44x29
Naim NAC 152XS	975	02.10/GT	★★★★★	It's good, but could do better with dynamics	5	0	0	0	●				●	7x43x30
Quad Elite Pre	850	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Doesn't blow us away, but it's still worth consideration	6	1	1	1	●		●		●	7x32x31
Quad QC-twenty four	1000	06.13/FT	★★★★★	Pleasant listen but works best with Quad's valve power amps	5	0	0	2	●					9x30x22
Townshend Allegri	1895	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Basic features, but terrific sound	6	0	0	0	●					5x13x31

£5000 and above

Audio Research LS27	6500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	A fine preamp but struggles to shine in comparison to the Reference 75	6	0	0	1	●	●			●	13x48x34
Aesthetix Calypso Signature	6400	03.11/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest preamps on the market today	5	0	0	1	●	●			●	11x46x45
Bryston BP26DA	5050	08.06/FT	★★★★★	A must-hear preamp. Lacks style but built to last	5	0	0	1	●	●	●		●	6x49x28
Burmester 808 MK5	22242	02.13/FT	★★★★★	A beautifully constructed, highly versatile preamp for serious devotees	Opt	Opt	Opt	Opt	●	●			●	95x48x33
Chord Electronics CPA 8000	25500	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A magnificent preamp, but not quite the masterpiece its price demands	8	0	0	2	●	●	●	●	●	31x42x36
Chord Electronics Indigo	8670	11.09/FT	★★★★★	A far sighted design mixing useful features with great sound	6	0	0	0	●	●	●	●	●	36x42x9
GamuTD3i	5500	01.15/FT	★★★★★	If you want an insightful and honest pre-amp, this is a fine place to start	4	0	0	1	●	●			●	11x43x42
Krell Phantom II	12000	11.12/FT	★★★★★	A hugely capable preamp that is able to dig deeply into any recording	8	0	0	1	●	●			●	10x44x46
McIntosh C2500	7495	01.14/FT	★★★★★	A refined and entertaining preamp that needs a little care in partnering	8	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	●	19x44x46
Naim NAC252/Supercap	9070	11.08/FT	★★★★★	Makes a magical combination with the NAP250 power amp	6	0	0	0	●				●	9x43x31
Plinius Tautoro	6325	09.08/FT	★★★★★	A mighty amplifier in every sense of the word	4	1	1	1	●	●	●		●	16x45x48



Power amps

These are effectively the powerhouse of the system. They deliver the high currents necessary to make a loudspeaker work. They can be configured as a stereo unit, or monoblocs, where the circuitry for each channel is housed separately. Don't judge a power amp by its output level.

Our recommendations

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 Elite Stereo	700	11.10/FT	★★★★★	The Elite power amp paired with the Elite Pre is well worth consideration	Stereo	80	1	0	7x32x31	6.25
Quad QSP	1200	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Needs to be auditioned - a confident listen	Stereo	140	2	0	15x33x27	14
Rotel RB-1582	1095	03.10/FT	★★★★★	Great when paired with the RC-1580 preamp	Stereo	200	1	0	14x43x41	33
£5000 and above										
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
GamuTD200i	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
Marantz MA-9S2	5000	02.08/FT	★★★★★	Right up there with the very best power amplifiers	Mono	300	2	1	45x46x20	37
Plinius SA-REF	12650	09.08/FT	★★★★★	As enticing an amplifier as you can get	Stereo	300	1	1	28x51x54	57
Quad II eighty	6000	06.13/FT	★★★★★	A capable monobloc amp that should be considered	Mono	80	1	0	21x43x18	57



iPod docks

Docks with power _____ These are ready-made systems for your iPod and usually include speakers
Docks without power _____ These integrate an iPod into an existing system as a line level source

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	Docktype	Aux	Power(w)	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500									
Audyssey South of Market	350	04.11/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	n/a	23x13x28
B&W Z2	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	18x32x10
Epoz Aktimate Micro	260	09.13/GT	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	24x15x20
Epoz AktiMate Mini	350	07.12/GT	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	30x19x21
Epoz AktiMate Mini+	360	08.13/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	40	30x19x21
Gear4 AirZone Series 1	200	04.12/ST	★★★★★	●		iOS	●	n/a	18x33x19
JBL OnBeat Venue LT	200	03.13/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	30	13x42x14
Klipsch iGroove HG WWI	110	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	30	14x40x16
KitSound Boom Dock	100	12.10/FT	★★★★★			iOS		60	15x42x28
Logitech S715i	80	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	20	6x39x13
Logitech UE Air Speaker	300	06.12/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	n/a	17x53x15
Orbitsound T12v3	299	12.11/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	180	10x61x11
Philips Fidelio Primo DS9	300	09.11/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	50	18x51x21
Philips Fidelio Primo DS9010	400	08.11/GT	★★★★★			iOS	●	100	21x56x23
Pure Digital Contour 100Di	100	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	20	18x31x15
Pure Digital Contour 200i Air	200	09.12/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	36	23x37x18
Revo K2	300	02.12/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	33x11x11
Ruark Audio R2i	280	09.09/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	20	12x34x18.5
£500 and above									
B&W Zeppelin Air	500	12.11/ST	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	150	17x54x21
Geneva Lab Model M	550	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	50	20x37x25
Loewe AirSpeaker	500	01.13/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	4x20	13x24x24
Marantz Consolette	700	05.13/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS		150	26x54x21
Philips Fidelio SS DS9800	700	05.12/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	100	22x27x9



Wireless speakers

Bluetooth _____ Universal wireless system that's incorporated into most sources
AirPlay _____ Apple's accepted wireless system; works over your home network

The shortlist



Monitor Audio Airstream S200

Awards 2014: Best Wireless speaker £150-£300



Dali Kubik Free

Awards 2014: Best Wireless speaker £500-£750



Naim Mu-so

Awards 2014: Best Wireless speaker 750+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	Aux	Charging	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £300									
Bayan Audio SoundBook	150	01.14/GT	★★★★★		●	●	●		9x16x4
Bose SoundLink Mini	170	01.14/GT	★★★★★			●	●	●	5x18x6
Bose SoundLink III	260	12.14/FT	★★★★★			●	●	●	13x26x5
Cambridge Audio Bluetone 100	200	10.14/GT	★★★★★			●	●		118x35x12
Cambridge Audio Minx Air 100	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★		●	●	●		18x35x12

WIRELESS SPEAKERS continued

WIRELESS SPEAKERS CONTINUED					AirPlay	Bluetooth	Aux	Charging	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict							
Up to £300										
Cambridge Audio Go	120	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker up to £150, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●		24x12x6
Cambridge Audio Minx Go	100	08.13/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker up to £150, Awards 2013	●	●	●	●		23x24x6
Denon Envaya DSB200	170	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Overcooked bass aside, this is one of most powerful sounding portable speakers we've heard		●	●	●		14x26x5
Harman/Kardon Go+Play	280	05.13/FT	★★★★★	These wireless active speakers deliver good sound	●	●	●	●		24x50x23
Jawbone Big Jambox	260	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Great for bass and sound, lacks a little finesse though	●	●				9x26x8
iLuv MobiOut	70	05.13/GT	★★★★★	A small unit that boasts a likable sound	●		●	●		0x0x0
JBL Charge	120	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A punchy and energetic sound is let down by some coarse and harsh treble	●	●	●	●		18x7x7
JBL Flip	100	05.13/GT	★★★★★	A great value bluetooth speaker	●		●	●		0x0x0
JBL Flip 2	100	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Good performer for the money, but has issues with volume and battery life	●	●			●	6.5x16x16
JBL OnBeat Rumble	230	10.14/GT	★★★★★	A chunky, fun unit that's starting to sound a little unrefined against more recent competition	●	●	●			17x45x22
Loewe Speaker 2go	200	02.15/ST	★★★★★	Lots of power to go with its enthusiasm, but gives up a little clarity and insight to its rivals	●	●	●		●	11x24x5
Logitech UE Boombox	200	12.12/GT	★★★★★	It's not faultless, but for the money it's difficult to argue with this	●	●				16x39x8
Logitech UE Mobile Boombox	75	05.13/GT	★★★★★	Limited functionality but a good choice for portable users		●	●	●		6x7x11
Monitor Audio Airstream S200	200	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £150-£300, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●		27x12x14
Monitor Audio Airstream S300	250	10.14/GT	★★★★★	It only supports iOS devices but this speaker sounds fantastic	●		●	●		15x47x15
Monitor Audio Airstream WS100	250	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Cracking speakers. A desktop force to be reckoned with			●			13x12x12
Panasonic SC-NA10	130	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A speaker that oozes class and subtlety. Watch out for the cabinet vibrations, though	●	●		●		10x20x3
Pure Jongo S3	170	06.13/FT	★★★★★	Great sound and easy portability make this a real gem	●	●				13x13x14
Roth OLI POWA-5	250	06.14/ST	★★★★★	Updated and better than before but rivals still have in edge in terms of sound	●	●	●			27x18x21
Samsung M5	230	10.14/FT	★★★★★	A talented speaker with a clean, open and fun sound	●		●			14x34x17
Sonos Play:1	170	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Another strong addition to the Award-winning Sonos multi-room family	●	●	●			16x12x12
Sony RDP-XA700	285	03.13/GT	★★★★★	With a bit more definition and a bit less bass this could have been the speaker for us	●		●	●		18x40x16
Sony SRS-X3	130	07.14/GT	★★★★★	A hugely confident performer but its tonal balance won't be for everyone	●	●			●	7x19x7
Sony SRS-BTM8	85	05.13/GT	★★★★★	Classy, cleverly designed speaker that can handle large volumes.	●	●	●			19x25x9
£300 and above										
Audio Pro Allroom Air One	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £400+, Awards 2013	●		●	●		20x31x19
Bang & Olufsen BeoPlay A2	300	02.15/ST	★★★★★	Not perfect, but its spacious sound, battery life and stylish design are worthy of a look	●	●	●	●		14x26x4
Bluesound multi-room system	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Best multi-room system £500+, Awards 2014. Product of the Year			●		●	n/a
B&W A5	400	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Not the loudest but delivers a potent, punchy sound	●		●			18x30x20
B&W A7	700	12.12/FT	★★★★★	If you use AirPlay, the A7 demands your attention	●		●			22x36x16
B&W T7	300	02.15/ST	★★★★★	B&W's first Bluetooth speaker is a resounding success		●	●		●	11x21x5
Bose SoundLink Air	300	12.12/GT	★★★★★	Not the last word in power or dynamics, but a tidy little package		●	●			17x31x10
Cabasse Stream 1	500	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Mediocre software lets this very enjoyable speaker down		●	●	●		14x46x33
Cambridge Audio Minx Air 200	430	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Majors in excitement, detail and power – a real entertainer	●	●	●			45x22x17
Dali Kubik Free	645	03.14/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £500-£750, Awards 2014	●	●	●			31x15x15
Eclipse TD-M1	1000	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Great stereo imaging, but we'd like more refinement to go with it	●		●	●		24x16x22
Geneva Model M Wireless	500	08.14/GT	★★★★★	If you're after Bluetooth and radio features, then this would be a good choice		●	●			22x30x18
Geneva Model S Wireless DAB+	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £300-£500, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●		15x14x18
Libratone Zipp	370	10.13/ST	★★★★★	Stylish, portable and fully-featured. Libratone hits the jackpot with the Zipp	●		●		●	26x12x12
Libratone Zipp BT	300	02.15/ST	★★★★★	A wireless speaker that's lovely to listen to	●	●	●	●	●	26x12x12
Libratone Loop	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★	An enjoyable-sounding speaker with some unique looks	●		●	●		33x33x8
Loewe AirSpeaker	500	03.13/GT	★★★★★	Fussy set up issues aside, this is one incredibly capable speaker	●		●			24x13x24
Naim Mu-so	895	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £750+, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	●	●	●		12x63x26
NAD Viso 1 AP	500	08.14/GT	★★★★★	A strong, rounded package that thoroughly deserves your attention	●	●	●	●		26x48x30
Nocs NS2 v2	300	02.15/FT	★★★★★	Versatile and fun desktop speakers	●	●	●			16x11x14
Philips Fidelio E2	300	06.14/ST	★★★★★	Classy, versatile speakers but you'll need some room to accommodate them		●	●			30.5x16x16
Pioneer XW-SMA4	350	12.12/GT	★★★★★	Bags of features, solid build and smart design – just watch that bass	●		●	●	●	21x36x17
Pure Jongo S3 (pair)	340	06.14/ST	★★★★★	A tad disappointing as a pair; rivals offer a more insightful performance		●	●		●	13x13x14
Pure Jongo System	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Not the ultimate word in sound quality, but it wins us over with its peppy character		●	●		●	n/a
Samsung M7	330	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Overly fussy in terms of setting up, the M7 is a comfortable performer nonetheless		●	●			14x40x19
Samsung Shape Audio System	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Lacks a consistent sound across the range but a good first effort nonetheless		●	●			n/a
Simple Audio Roomplayer+	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	A worthy contender but there are cheaper, more impressive options out there	●		●			n/a
Sonos System	n/a	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Best multi-room system £500+, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●		n/a
Sony SRS-X9	600	06.14/FT	★★★★★	A do-it-all speaker with superb sound quality	●	●	●			13x43x13
Tangent Classic	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★	A speaker with a big sound and plenty of bass		●	●	●		23x60x32
Ultimate Ears Boom	170	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Loads of fun to listen to, the Boom is exciting, attractive and packed with features to boot	●	●			●	16 x6.5 x6.5

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Headphones

Ear tips _____ Most in-ears come with these. Experiment with size to get the best fit
In-line remote _____ Mostly for Apple devices, but Android-friendly units are increasing. Handy...

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

SoundMagic E10S

Awards 2014: Best in-ears up to £50

"The SoundMagic E10Ses punch well above their weight in terms of sound quality."



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Sony MDR-EX650AP

Awards 2014: Best in-ears £50-£100

"They'll happily turn their hand to just about anything, effortlessly finding that balance between the details and the overall flow."



AWARD WINNER

Shure SE425

Awards 2014: Best in-ears £150-£300

"The SE425s sound fun, absorbing, classy, polished and captivating."

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight (g)
Up to £70									
AKG K323XSi	50	08.14/FT	★★★★★	As good as you can reasonably expect at this price range	●	Closed			n/a
AKG K451	50	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears up to £100, Awards 2013	●	Closed			120
Audio Technica ATH-CKS55i	45	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Big on bass, these cans are no shrinking violets	●	Closed			6
Audio Technica ATH-T400	50	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Nicely balanced pair that just lack the wow factor of the class leaders	●	Closed			260
Apple EarPods	25	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A big upgrade of Apple's original earbuds, but there are better rivals	●	Open			10
Beyerdynamic DTX101iE	65	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £40-£80, Awards 2013	●	Closed			11
Beyerdynamic 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
Jays t-Jays Two	67	09.11/ST	★★★★★	A sure-fire winner for those who like their bass	●	Closed			8
JVC HA-ETR40	35	02.15/GT	★★★★★	An affordable in-ear that nails both comfort and sound	●	Closed			6.6
Ministry of Sound MOS003	30	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Tidy, well balanced and nicely made	●	Closed			15
Mix-Style inner headphones	30	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Punchy, controlled and balanced	●	Closed			13.5
Monster iSport Strive	50	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Stylish, sporty-looking buds with a fine sound	●	Closed			47
Panasonic RP-HTX7	35	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears up to £50, Awards 2012	●	Closed			153
Philips CitiScape Downtown	55	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Fun, stylish and great to use on an everyday basis	●	Closed			174
RHA MA-350	30	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Nicely made from quality materials, with impressive sound to match	●	Closed			48
Sennheiser CX 300-II	30	09.10/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ear headphones up to £50, Awards 2010	●	Closed			4
Sennheiser CX281	35	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Enjoyable enough, but a touch quiet	●	Closed			16
Sennheiser CX495	35	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A brilliant upgrade bargain	●	Closed			4
Sennheiser HD 202	26	02.11/FT	★★★★★	Great sound for the money and a bargain buy	●	Closed			130
Sennheiser HD 218	40	11.09/FT	★★★★★	For closed-back cans, the Sennheisers are very good – but not the best	●	Closed			224
Sennheiser MM 70i	50	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Nice features for the money	●	Closed			12
Sennheiser PMX 685i Sports	45	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Modest looking in-ears but they have it where it counts despite the poor remote	●	Closed			18
Sennheiser PX100-II	40	11.10/FT	★★★★★	An improvement over the previous model, very good open-backed cans	●	Open			80
Skullcandy Full Metal Jacket	65	07.10/FT	★★★★★	An extremely likeable pair of in-ear 'phones	●	Closed			13
Slick Distributions SD50	30	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Features and price make it easy to forgive minor sonic flaws	●	Closed	●		71
Sol Republic Relays	60	02.15/GT	★★★★★	A satisfying, fuss-free pair of in-ears	●	Closed			13.4
SoundMagic E10	35	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears up to £40, Awards 2013	●	Closed			11
SoundMagic E10S	40	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears up to £50, Awards 2014	●	Closed			11
SoundMagic PL30	30	01.10/GT	★★★★★	Great headphones that are held back by better value rivals	●	Closed			10
SoundMagic PL50	50	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Comfy and smooth-sounding; great all-rounders	●	Closed			8
Sony MDR-EX650AP	60	11.14/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £50-£100, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	●	Closed			9
Soul Electronics Flex	50	02.15/GT	★★★★★	Performance surpasses expectations at this price, a great buy for fitness bods	●	Closed			18

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HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight (g)
£70 and above									
AKG K3003i	1000	04.12/FT	★★★★★						
AKG K370	73	12.10/GT	★★★★★						
AKG K450/HA450	180	09.11/ST	★★★★★						
AKG K545	210	12.13/FT	★★★★★						
AKG K550	99	02.12/ST	★★★★★						
AKG K551	230	02.13/GT	★★★★★						
AKG K812	1100	10.14/FT	★★★★★						
AKG K845BT	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★						
AKG Y845BT	110	12.14/GT	★★★★★						
AKG Q701	250	09.14/ST	★★★★★						
AKG Q460	140	02.11/GT	★★★★★						
AKG Y50	80	09.14/FT	★★★★★						
Audeze LCD-3	1725	02.14/GT	★★★★★						
Audio Technica ATH-AD700X	190	04.14/GT	★★★★★						
Audio Technica ATH-A900X LTD	390	09.14/ST	★★★★★						
Audio Technica ATH-CX9iS	75	01.14/GT	★★★★★						
Audio Technica ATH-ES88	230	02.12/FT	★★★★★						
Audio Technica ATH-M50	130	02.13/GT	★★★★★						
Audio Technica ATH-M50x	130	12.14/GT	★★★★★						
Audio Technica ATH-W1000X	650	07.10/FT	★★★★★						
Audio Technica ATH-WS55i	89	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★						
Beyerdynamic DTX102iE	75	08.14/FT	★★★★★						
Beyerdynamic DX160 iE	86	11.14/GT	★★★★★						
Beyerdynamic Custom One Pro	170	10.13/GT	★★★★★						
Beyerdynamic DT880	200	06.09/GT	★★★★★						
Beyerdynamic DT990 Premium	290	09.14/ST	★★★★★						
Beyerdynamic MMX 101iE	95	01.14/GT	★★★★★						
Beyerdynamic T1	880	11.10/FT	★★★★★						
Beyerdynamic T50P	230	02.12/ST	★★★★★						
Beyerdynamic T51i	245	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★						
Beyerdynamic T51P	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★						
Beyerdynamic T70	456	11.11/FT	★★★★★						
Blackbox i10	80	12.10/GT	★★★★★						
Bose AE2w	200	02.14/GT	★★★★★						
Bose MIE2i	120	09.11/ST	★★★★★						
Bose QuietComfort 15	280	04.12/GT	★★★★★						
Bose QuietComfort 25	270	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★						
Bose Soundlink On-ear	220	01.15/GT	★★★★★						
B&WP3	170	08.12/FT	★★★★★						
B&WP5	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★						
B&WP5 Series 2	250	02.15/FT	★★★★★						
B&WP7	330	09.14/ST	★★★★★						
Denon AH-D600	200	11.13/GT	★★★★★						
Etymotic Research HF2	180	08.09/FT	★★★★★						
Focal Spirit Classic	250	09.14/ST	★★★★★						
Focal Spirit One	200	04.12/FT	★★★★★						
Focal Spirit One S	225	12.14/GT	★★★★★						
German Maestro GMP 8.35 D	150	10.12/ST	★★★★★						
Goldring NS-1000	100	03.10/GT	★★★★★						
Grado GR10	399	09.11/ST	★★★★★						
Grado GR8	300	04.10/GT	★★★★★						
Grado GS1000i	1000	10.09/GT	★★★★★						
Grado PS1000	1700	09.11/ST	★★★★★						
Grado SR125e	150	12.14/GT	★★★★★						
Grado SR325e	300	09.14/ST	★★★★★						
Grado SR325is	300	09.11/ST	★★★★★						
Grado SR60i	80	02.10/GT	★★★★★						
Grado SR80i	100	04.14/GT	★★★★★						
Grado iGi	90	01.12/GT	★★★★★						
Harman/Kardon CL	170	09.12/FT	★★★★★						

HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	In-ear On-ear	Type	Noise canceling	Wireless	Weight (g)
£70 and above								
Jamo IN40i	90	09.11/ST	★★★★★	●	Closed			11
Jamo wEAR IN20m	70	06.11/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed			13
KEF M200	150	10.13/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed			12
KEF M500	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed			208
Klipsch Image One	140	05.11/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed			138
Klipsch Image X7i	170	04.13/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed			16
Klipsch Image X10i	219	09.11/ST	★★★★★	●	Closed			320
Klipsch Mode M40	290	02.13/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed	●		356
Klipsch S4i	90	12.09/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed			12
Klipsch X11i	200	11.14/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed			10
Logitech UE 9000	300	03.13/GT	★★★★★		Closed	●	●	378
Lindy Premium Headphones	75	09.11/ST	★★★★★	●	Closed			225
Martin Logan Mikros 70	150	04.13/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed			13
Monster Beats Pro by Dre	350	09.11/ST	★★★★★	●	Closed			299
NAD Viso HP50	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	●	Open			453
NAD Viso HP20	130	11.14/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed			n/a
Nocs NS400 Titanium	80	01.12/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed			12
Onkyo ES-HF300	180	10.13/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed			240
Oppo PM-1	1100	07.14/FT	★★★★★	●	Open			395
Panasonic RP-HC101	82	04.12/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed	●		79
Parrot Zik	300	07.13/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed	●	●	352
Phonak Audeo PFE 022	80	03.11/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed	●		14
Phiaton MS300	150	02.12/ST	★★★★★	●	Closed			140
Philips Fidelio L1	230	05.12/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed			272
Philips Fidelio M1	125	10.13/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed			166
Philips Fidelio M1MKII	180	12.14/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed			166
Philips Fidelio M1BT	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed	●		500
Philips Fidelio M2BT	185	01.15/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed	●		190
Philips Fidelio S1	70	01.14/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed			14
Philips Fidelio X1	200	04.14/GT	★★★★★	●	Open			430
PSB M4U1	219	11.13/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed			340
PSB M4U2	300	10.12/ST	★★★★★	●	Closed	●		362
Sennheiser CX880i	90	01.12/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed			11
Sennheiser HD 380 Pro	110	02.10/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed			220
Sennheiser HD25-1 II Adidas	190	09.11/ST	★★★★★	●	Closed			140
Sennheiser HD 558	130	04.14/GT	★★★★★	●	Open			260
Sennheiser HD 598	190	02.12/ST	★★★★★	●	Open			270
Sennheiser IE 8i	260	03.11/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed			18
Sennheiser IE 80	270	02.11/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed			5
Sennheiser IE 800	600	09.13/FT	★★★★★	●	Closed			8
Sennheiser MM 400-X	150	10.12/ST	★★★★★	●	Closed	●		105
Sennheiser MM 70s	70	01.14/GT	★★★★★	●	Closed			13

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Paul Rigby, theaudiophileman.com

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HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight(g)
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 PXC310	200	02.11/GT	★★★★★	Perfect for a walk on the mild side	●		Closed	●		115
Sennheiser RS 160	115	05.10/GT	★★★★★	An exciting, affordable option but tiring over longer periods	●		Closed		●	226
Sennheiser RS 180	185	05.10/GT	★★★★★	These comfortable, wireless headphones justify their premium price	●		Open		●	204
Sennheiser Momentum On-ears	170	10.13/GT	★★★★★	A comfortable pair of cans, just lacking a little presence in the mid-range	●		Closed			160
Sennheiser Urbanite	150	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Stylish but not quite as expressive when it comes to sound	●		Open			260
Sennheiser X 320	70	10.12/ST	★★★★★	The best Xbox gaming headphones we've heard so far	●		Closed			280
Shure SE425	200	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £150-£300, Awards 2014	●		Closed			32
Shure SE846	950	06.14/FT	★★★★★	The most capable in-ears we've heard	●		Closed			36
Shure SRH1540	430	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Best home on-ears £300+, Awards 2014	●		Closed			286
Shure SRH1840	500	06.12/FT	★★★★★	Not cheap, but worth every penny	●		Open			268
Sony MDR-1R	210	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Detailed and airy, but need more kick	●		Closed			240
Sony XBA-2iP	130	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £120-£200, Awards 2012	●		Closed			6
SoundMagic HP100	150	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Sparkling detail, spacious character	●		Closed			228
thinksound ts02+mic	90	02.13/FT	★★★★★	Eco-friendly buds provide a clear sound and a clearer conscience	●		Closed			10
Ultrason HFI-580	125	11.10/GT	★★★★★	Not class-leading, but still worthy of consideration	●		Closed			285
Ultrason HFI-780	160	02.12/ST	★★★★★	Big and bold, and offer excitement in spades	●		Open			285
V-moda Crossfade M-80	160	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Good-looking and great fun, with lots of bass	●		Closed			200
V-moda Remix Remote	70	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Smooth and enjoyable sounding buds	●		Closed			17



Stereo systems

This category includes a wide range of products including all-in-one packages where the speakers are part of the system, through to micro systems where the electronics are housed separately from the speakers. A streaming option is available on many newer systems.

Our recommendations

Our recommendations					CD	Streaming	Internet Radio	DAB	FM	Analogue inputs	Digital inputs	Headphone out
Product	£	Tested	Verdict									
Up to £500												
Denon CEOL Piccolo	260	03.13/FT	★★★★★	No matter what the source, the CEOL Piccolo will play all your music in superb style		●	●			●	●	●
Denon CEOL RCD-N8	350	02.14/FT	★★★★★	An attractive option if you're looking for a compact system that does a bit of everything	●	●	●		●	●	●	●
Denon D-M39DAB	310	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Best music system up to £400, Awards 2014	●	●		●	●	●	●	●
Onkyo CR-N755	300	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best networked micro system, Awards 2012	●	●	●	●		●	●	●
Panasonic SC-PMX9DB	450	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Well-featured but its laid-back sound makes it a solid buy	●	●		●	●	●		●
Pioneer X-HM70	350	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Not flawless, but gets much right	●		●	●	●	●		●
Yamaha MCR-232	300	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Harsh treble docks it a star but it's an impressively compact micro system	●			●	●	●		●
£500 and above												
Aura Note Premier	1500	05.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine sounding all in one system		●				●	●	●
Cabasse Stream3	850	07.13/FT	★★★★★	Hardware is great but the app needs developing	●	●	●			●	●	
Cambridge Audio Minx Xi	600	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £400-£800, Awards 2014. Product of the Year		●	●				●	●
Cyrus Lyric 09	3000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £1500+, Awards 2014	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
HRT Stage	1200	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Limited inputs and a low-rent feel, but judged on sound alone and it's fantastic						●		
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	●	●	●	●	●			

"Not only does the very reasonably priced CEOL Piccolo play anything you'd care to listen to, from wherever you might like to get it from, but it does so with aplomb"

March 2013



Surround systems

This category includes a wide variety of systems. Most include a disc drive and now tend to feature video and music streaming capabilities. The speakers supplied tend to either be small satellite designs, or towers that usually provide greater scale and sonic authority.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Blu-ray	3D Blu-ray	DVD	Streaming	Optical in	HDMI in	Channels
Up to £500										
Panasonic SC-BTT460	350	06.13/FT	★★★★★	No HDMI inputs but still a cracking system	●	●	●	1	0	5.1
Philips HTS5563	400	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A super budget solution	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
Pioneer BCS-SC626	400	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Great features, with tough competition	●	●	●	2	2	2.1
Q Acoustics Q-TV2	150	11.09/FT	★★★★★	A great way of boosting poor sound on your TV				1	0	2.1
Samsung HT-E5530	450	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Plenty of bang for your bucks	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
£500-£1000										
Harman-Kardon BDS-570	750	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Compact and ultimately convenient	●	●	●	2	3	5.1
LG BH8220B	600	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A bit pricey, but a good performer	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
LG BH9520TW	600	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Packed with features but a little pricey	●	●	●	1	2	9.1
Panasonic SC-BTT590	500	08.12/GT	★★★★★	An excellent all-in-one Blu-ray system	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
Sony BDV-N7100W	600	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Best cinema system, Awards 2013	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
Sony BDV-N5200W	500	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best cinema system, Awards 2014	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
£1000 and above										
Harman-Kardon BDS 477	1100	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A jack of all trades that's pretty good	●	●	●	0	3	2.1



Soundbars/Soundbases

One-box speaker systems that include amplification, and are a great alternative to a full-on home cinema package if you don't have much space. Soundbases have emerged as alternatives in the market, a one-box unit that can sit beneath and support your television.

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER Cambridge Audio Minx TV2

Awards 2014: Best soundbase up to £300

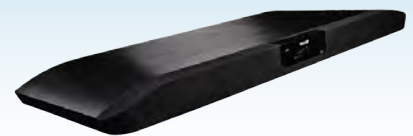
"An affordable product that ticks all the criteria of a good TV sound-booster: detailed sound, smart style, and practical build."



AWARD WINNER Canton DM 75

Awards 2014: Best soundbar up £300+

"Canton has come up trumps with the DM 75. Clearer, bigger and more powerful sounding - it's surely worth the £50 price hike if you can justify it."



Maxell MXSP-SB3000

02.14 Group Test ★★★★★

"Its size might be ludicrous, but that excellent feature count and affordable price is hard to ignore."

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Disc drive	Smart	Ext. subwoofer	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	RCA in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £2000											
Bowers & Wilkins Panorama 2	1650	09.13/GT	★★★★★	An improvement on the original	●	3	1	0			13x110x18
Cambridge Audio Minx TV	200	02.14/ST	★★★★★	A soundbase that delivers an exciting sound at a great price		0	1	0			8x43x38
Cambridge Audio TV2	200	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbase up to £300, Awards 2014		0	1	0	●		12x53x33
Canton DM 50	400	09.14/GT	★★★★★	With gorgeous sound and looks, the DM 50 justifies its price		0	1	1			6.5x54.5x30
Canton DM 75	450	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbase £300+, Awards 2014		0	1	1	●		7x73x32
Canton DM 90.2	1100	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Thunderous sound but needs a bit more refinement	●	0	2	2			15x90x30
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
Harman/Kardon SB30	800	07.12/FT	★★★★★	A good alternative to a full-on home cinema system	●	0	1	1	●		10x116x8
JBL Cinema Base	300	01.15/FT	★★★★★	Delivers a good sound at an appealing price		0	1	0			10x60x40

SOUNDBARS/SOUNDBASES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Discdrive	Smart	Ext. subwoofer	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	RCA in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
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
JBL Cinema SB200	200	03.14/ST	★★★★★	A very good single-bar solution to boost your TV sound	●	0	1	0	●	●	●	12x99x10
JBL Cinema SB 350	350	12.14/ST	★★★★★	Stiff competition prevents this immersive sounding soundbar from getting five stars	●	1	1	0	●	●	●	8x100x6
JBL Cinema SB400	450	06.13/ST	★★★★★	A good-looking, capable alternative to TV speakers	●	3	1	0	●	●	●	10x110x6
LG NB3520A	250	01.13/GT	★★★★★	Impressive quality and authority for a soundbar	●	0	2	0	●	●	●	8x100x5
LG NB3530A	190	03.14/ST	★★★★★	An admirable and attractive soundbar from LG, but it's up against fierce competition	●	0	2	0	●	●	●	71x95x50
LG NB4530A	300	06.13/ST	★★★★★	Best soundbar up to £400, Awards 2013	●	1	1	0	●	●	●	8x104x4
Libratone Diva	650	01.15/ST	★★★★★	Connection issues aside, this is a strong one-box system with streaming options aplenty	●	0	1	0	●	●	●	16x99x10
Maxell MXSP-SB3000	220	02.14/ST	★★★★★	An enjoyable performer with some impressive features	●	3	1	1	●	●	●	8x94x39
Monitor Audio ASB-2	800	01.15/ST	★★★★★	Still great but new competition takes its toll	●	3	1	1	●	●	●	101x19x17
Orbitsound M9	300	06.13/ST	★★★★★	Given its size, the M9 is an impressive performer	●	0	1	0	●	●	●	9x30x10
Philips HTL5120	250	03.14/ST	★★★★★	A stonking soundbar for only £250	●	2	1	0	●	●	●	15x101x8
Philips HTL5140	270	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbar up to £300, Awards 2014	●	1	1	0	●	●	●	5x105x7
Philips HTL9100	600	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbar £400-£800, Awards 2013	●	2	1	1	●	●	●	7x103x16
Pioneer SBX-N700	250	12.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented subwoofer with an exhaustive feature set. And now with a price cut	●	0	2	0	●	●	●	9x90x12
Polk Audio N1	200	12.14/GT	★★★★★	A sizeable soundbar with an appealing sound	●	0	1	1	●	●	●	10x99x11
Q Acoustics Media 4	400	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbar £300-£600, Awards 2014, Product of the Year	●	0	1	0	●	●	●	11x14x100
Samsung HW-H550	310	12.14/ST	★★★★★	A soundbar that combines decent design with good performance	●	1	1	0	●	●	●	6x94x6
Sandström S42SWLH13	150	03.14/ST	★★★★★	A great-looking soundbar with plenty of connections	●	2	1	0	●	●	●	11x90x5
Sonos Playbar	600	01.15/ST	★★★★★	An impressive soundbar that produces fantastic surround sound	●	0	1	0	●	●	●	9x90x14
Sony HT-XT1	300	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Packs a punch but rivals are more insightful	●	3	1	0	●	●	●	7x72x31
Tannoy BaseStation One	350	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Tannoy's first soundbase may not be a class-leader, but it has a great sound	●	1	0	●	●	●	●	12x64x36
Toshiba SB3950M1	190	12.14/ST	★★★★★	Nails the basics of sound quality and user-friendliness	●	2	1	0	●	●	●	9x90x6
Yamaha YAS-201	350	06.13/ST	★★★★★	A very good soundbar but not worthy of being a class-leader	●	3	2	1	●	●	●	14x43x35
Yamaha YSP-1400	400	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Brings big sound to a smaller budget	●	0	1	1	●	●	●	10x100x13
Yamaha YSP-2200	800	10.11/GT	★★★★★	Best soundbar, Awards 2012	●	3	2	1	●	●	●	9x89x12
Yamaha YSP-2500	800	01.15/ST	★★★★★	Best soundbar £600+, Awards 2014	●	1	2	1	●	●	●	7x94x14

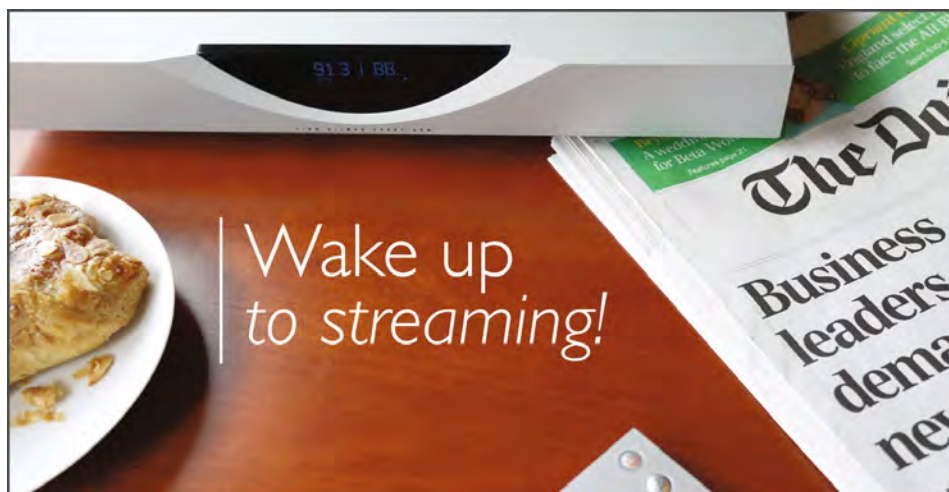


Media servers

These have hard drives built in. Go for the largest storage possible as that leaves room for future expansion of your music and video library.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Hard drive capacity	HDMI out	Optical out	Coaxial out	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/kHz)	Video
Up to £3000															
Lacie Lacinema Classic HD	190	04.10/GT	★★★★★	As good as Apple TV, this needs to be auditioned	1TB	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	●	24/92	●
Microsoft Xbox 360 (250GB)	200	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Now an appealing media hub as well	250GB	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	●	16/48	●
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	●



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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.

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
Bluesound Node

Awards 2014: Best streamer up to £600



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Cambridge Audio Stream Magic 6 V2

Awards 2014: Best streamer £600-£1000



AWARD WINNER
Naim UnitiQute 2

Awards 2014: Best music system £800-£1500

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	HDMI out	Optical out	Co-axial out	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/kHz)	Video
Up to £500													
Amazon Fire TV	80	01.15/FT	★★★★★	A great streaming media player... if you're an Amazon customer	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
Apple TV	100	06.12/GT	★★★★★	A limited but likeable streamer from Apple	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
Bluesound Node	400	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer up to £600, Awards 2014	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	24/192	●
Now TV	10	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Oodles of free and premium content makes this a great upgrade for a 'dumb' TV	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
Pure Jonga T2	130	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Cheaper than Sonos but comes with a few niggles	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
QED uPlay Stream	150	03.14/FT	★★★★★	A handy device that boasts decent sound and good features	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24/196	●
Roku 2 XS	100	06.12/GT	★★★★★	A family friendly streamer	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	16/48	●
Roku Streaming Stick	50	10.14/FT	★★★★★	Performs a very specific task and does it brilliantly	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
Sonos Play 3	259	12.11/ST	★★★★★	A cracking little performer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/44.1	●
Sonos Play 5	349	12.11/ST	★★★★★	An ideal one-box network player	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/44.1	●
£500-£1000													
Bluesound Powernode	600	10.14/FT	★★★★★	A superb way for hi-fi fans and audiophiles to get their high-res kicks	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24/192	●
Camb. Audio Stream Magic 6	700	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £600-£1000, Awards 2013	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	24/96	●
Camb. Audio Stream Magic 6 V2	700	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £600-£1000, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	24/96	●
Pioneer N-50	400	05.12/ST	★★★★★	Best streamer up to £600, Awards 2013	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	24/192	●
Rotel RT-09	650	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Does a lot but not all of it to the standard we'd like	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	24/192	●
£1000 and above													
Bryston BDP-1	2350	06.11/FT	★★★★★	A true hi-fi media player	0	1	1	0	1	0	3	24/192	●
Cyrus Stream Xa	1250	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £1000-£1500, Awards 2014	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	24/192	●
Cyrus Stream XP	2000	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best streamer £1000-£2500, Awards 2011	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	24/192	●
Cyrus Streamline	1600	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Best streaming system up to £2000, Awards 2011	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	24/192	●
Cyrus Stream XP2-Qx	2010	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best streaming system £1500+, Awards 2014	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	24/192	●
Linn Kiko	2500	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £1500+, Awards 2013	1	0	0	4	1	0	0	24/192	●
Linn Majik DS-I	2500	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Gives a glimpse of the music-streaming future	1	1	1	4	1	1	0	24/192	●
Naim NAC-N 172 XS	1650	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £1000-£2000, Awards 2013	0	2	0	0	2	2	1	24/192	●
Naim ND5 XS	1950	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A thrillingly musical music streamer	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	24/192	●
Naim NDS/555PS	12620	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Engaging sound, bags of detail and many features	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	24/192	●
Naim NDX	2995	07.11/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £2500+, Awards 2011	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	24/192	●
Naim Uniti	2670	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best streaming system £2000+, Awards 2011	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	24/192	●
Naim Uniti 2	2795	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Uniti continues to lead the market at this price	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	24/192	●
Naim UnitiLite	1650	12.12/FT	★★★★★	UnitiLite hits the streaming sweet spot	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	24/192	●
Naim UnitiQute 2	1195	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £800-£1500, Awards 2014	0	0	1	0	2	2	1	32/192	●
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	●

"If you're after a cheap and straightforward way to stream a range of files through your home cinema or audio system without sacrificing a decent sound and good features, then the uPlay Stream is a real steal"

March 2014



Set-top boxes

Freeview	Large choice of digital TV channels via a rooftop aerial
Freesat	Much like Freeview, but takes signal from a satellite dish
Subscription	Services from Sky and Virgin give a vast array of premium content

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Freeview	Freesat	Sky	Virgin	YouView	Tuners	Hard drive capacity (GB)	HDMI out	Smart
Up to £500												
Equinix Tizi	150	03.11/FT	★★★★★	Wi-fi Freeview for your iPad, iPhone or iPod Touch	●				1	n/a	0	
Humax DTR-T2000	200	11.14/FT	★★★★★	Best Freeview HD recorder, Awards 2014	●			●	2	500	1	●
Humax DTR-T1010 (500GB)	230	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best Freeview HD recorder, Awards 2013				●	2	500	1	
Humax HD-FOX T2	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	★★★★★	Best subscription service, Awards 2014. Product of the Year			●		2	1TB	1	
Sony SVR-HDT1000	300	12.11/GT	★★★★★	One to appeal to the 'bigger is better' crowd	●				2	1TB	1	
Virgin Media TiVo	200	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Best cable recorder, Awards 2011			●		3	1TB	1	●



Portable music players

A category of products that has been put under increasing pressure by the rise of the ubiquitous smartphone. At the most basic level it will be a standard music player that can be used in the gym. Higher-end machines will add video, internet browsing and apps as well.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Web browsing	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Up to £1000								
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

Subscriptions 0844 848 8813 email: 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

OLSON ELECTRONICS LIMITED
OLSON HOUSE, 490 HONEYPOOT LANE,
STANMORE, MIDDLESEX HA7 1JY
TEL: 020 8905 7273 FAX: 020 8952 1232
email: sales@olson.co.uk www.olson.co.uk

Call 020 8905 7273



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Tablets

Android Offers great flexibility and innovation
Apple iOS Fantastic ease of use; massive choice of quality apps
Windows New kid on the block. Watch this space

The shortlist



Apple iPad Air 2



Sony Zperia Z3 Tablet Compact



Apple iPad mini 3

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	OS	NFC	3G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Up to £600										
Amazon Kindle Fire HD 16GB	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	7	1280x800	16/32	193x137x10	
Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 7	200	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	7	1920x1200	16/32/64	186x128x9	
Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 8.9	330	01.15/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	8.9	2560x1600	16/32/64	231x158x8	
Asus VivoTab ME400	400	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Windows 8	●	10.1	1366x768	32/64	263x171x10	
Apple iPad Mini 64GB Wi-Fi	430	04.13/GT	★★★★★	iOS	●	7.9	1024x768	16/32/64	200x135x7	
Apple iPad Mini/Retina display	320	01.14/ST	★★★★★	iOS	●	7.9	2048x1536	16/32/64	200x135x7	
Apple iPad mini 3	320	01.15/GT	★★★★★	iOS	●	7.9	2048x1536	16/64/128	200x135x7	
Apple iPad 4 16GB Wi-Fi	400	04.13/GT	★★★★★	iOS	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x190x9	
Apple iPad Air	400	01.14/FT	★★★★★	iOS	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x170x8	
Apple iPad Air 2	400	12.14/FT	★★★★★	iOS	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/64/128	240x170x6	
Asus Eee Pad Transformer Prime	500	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	10.1	1280x800	16/32	181x263x8	
Asus Transformer Pad Infinity	600	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	10.1	1900x1200	32/64	263x181x9	
BlackBerry PlayBook 16GB	400	09.11/GT	★★★★★	QNX	●	7	1024x600	16/32/64	130x194x10	
Google Nexus 7	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	7	1280x800	16/32	199x120x11	
Google Nexus 7 (2013)	200	10.14/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	7	1920x1200	16/32	200x114x9	
Google Nexus 10	319	01.13/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	10	2560x1060	16/32	264x178x9	
LG G Pad	260	01.14/ST	★★★★★	Android	●	8.3	1920x1200	16	216x127x8	
Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1	450	02.14/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	10.1	2500x1600	16/32/64	171x243x8	
Samsung Galaxy Tab 2 7.0	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	7	1024x600	8/16	190x120x10	
Samsung Galaxy Tab S 8.4	320	01.15/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	8.4	2560x1600	16/32	213x126x7	
Sony Xperia Tablet S	330	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	9.4	1280x800	16/32	240x170x10	
Sony Xperia Tablet Z	399	06.13/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	10.1	1920x1200	16/32	172x266x69	
Sony Xperia Tablet Z2	400	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	10.1	1920x1200	16/32	172x266x64	
Sony Xperia Z3 Tablet Compact	330	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	8	1920x1200	16/32	213x124x6	
Tesco Hudl 2	130	01.15/FT	★★★★★	Android	●	8.3	1920x1200	16	128x224x9	

Things to consider: Tablets



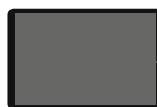
Battery life

Ten hours tends to be the average but by our measurements Sony's Z3 Tablet Compact can last a whopping 17 hours. There's a trade-off as the Z3 has a Full HD screen compared to its rivals which pack more pixels.

bit/HZ

High-res

A new feature and not many tablets incorporate it. Despite its scarcity, it's a chance for audiophiles to hear their music in even better quality. Storage could be an issue though, unless you intend to stream 24-bit/96kHz or higher tracks.



Screen

The tablet with the highest resolution may be the obvious choice but there's more to consider. What's the colour reproduction like? The viewing angles? Will it retain its level of performance outdoors (if you intend to use it that way) as it does indoors?



Storage

On-board or expandable storage? Amazon, Apple and Google opt for the former, LG, Samsung and Sony the latter. Price will be a consideration, too. A micro-SD card and a tablet could be cheaper than buying one with more storage and no means of upgrading it.



Smartphones

Android	Offers great flexibility and innovation
Apple iOS	Fantastic ease of use; massive choice of quality apps
Windows	New kid on the block. Watch this space

The shortlist



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Apple iPhone 6

Awards 2014: Best phone up to 5in



AWARD WINNER

Sony Xperia Z3

Awards 2014: Best phone 5in+



Samsung Galaxy Note 4

12.14 Group Test ★★★★★

Also consider

Product	Tested	Verdict	OS	NFC	4G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Apple iPhone 5S	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best smartphone, Awards 2013	iOS	●	4.0	1136x640	16/32/64	124x59x8
Apple iPhone 6	Aw.14/FT	★★★★★	Best phone up to 5in, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	iOS	●	4.7	1334x750	16/32/128	138x67x7
Apple iPhone 6 Plus	12.14/GT	★★★★★	A big-screen phone from Apple, but the sound disappoints	iOS	●	5.5	1920x1080	16/64/128	158x78x7
Google Nexus 5	07.14/GT	★★★★★	A decent all-rounder but new rivals have bettered it	Android	●	4.95	1920x1080	16/32	138x69x9
HTC One	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Sets the bar high for smartphones in 2013	Android	●	4.7	1080x1920	32	137x68x9
HTC One (M8)	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Improves considerably on its predecessor. Does very little wrong	Android	●	5	1920x1080	32	146x71x9
HTC One Max	05.14/ST	★★★★★	A fine performer but could make better use of its bigger screen	Android	●	5.9	1920x1080	16/32	165x82x10
HTC One X+	01.13/ST	★★★★★	Well worth considering: good for music and a joy to use	Android	●	4.7	1280x720	32/64	134x70x9
HTC One XL	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Great for mobile media fans but its poor battery life just takes the edge off it	Android	●	4.7	1280x720	32	135x70x9
HTC 8S	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Capable and fun, if feature-light	Windows	●	4.7	800x480	4	121x63x10
LG Optimus 4X HD	01.13/ST	★★★★★	Not outstanding, but a worthy alternative to the best	Android	●	4.7	1280x720	16	132x68x9
LG Optimus L5 II	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Not a thrilling phone but the user experience is good	Android	●	4.0	800x433	4	118x62x9
LG G2	07.14/GT	★★★★★	A little outdated but still a worthy contender	Android	●	5.2	1920x1080	16/32	139x71x9
LG G3	12.14/FT	★★★★★	Still an excellent phone even if newcomers have bettered it	Android	●	5.5	1440x2560	16/32	146x75x9
LG G Flex	05.14/FT	★★★★★	All the pros of the G2, but with a low-res screen	Android	●	6	1280x720	32	161x82x8
Motorola Moto X (2014)	12.14/GT	★★★★★	Little in the way of flashy features but one of the best phones of 2014	Android	●	5.2	1920x1080	16/32	141x72x10
Nokia Lumia 920	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A promising start for Nokia's flagship	Windows	●	4.5	1280x768	32	130x71x11
Nokia Lumia 925	09.13/FT	★★★★★	The best Windows Phone yet	Windows	●	4.5	1280x768	16/32	129x71x9
Nokia Lumia 930	11.14/FT	★★★★★	We'd like more apps but this is (again) the best Windows effort we've seen	Windows	●	5	1920x1080	32	137x71x10
Nokia Lumia 1520	05.14/ST	★★★★★	Apps still disappoint but this is the best Windows Phone yet	Windows	●	6	1920x1080	32	163x85x9
Oppo N1	05.14/ST	★★★★★	Quirky and flexible, this is a great effort from a promising brand	Android	●	5.9	1920x1080	16/32	171x83x9
Samsung Galaxy Note	07.12/ST	★★★★★	A hybrid between a smart phone and a tablet	Android	●	5.29	1280x800	16/32	147x83x10
Samsung Galaxy Note II	01.13/ST	★★★★★	Massive screen, massive battery, very tempting	Android	●	5.55	1280x720	16/32/64	151x81x9
Samsung Galaxy Note III	05.14/ST	★★★★★	The original phablet, updated and still the best	Android	●	5.7	1920x1080	32	151x80x8
Samsung Galaxy Note 4	12.14/GT	★★★★★	The fourth iteration of the Galaxy Note and it's the best one yet	Android	●	5.7	1440x2560	16/32	154x79x9
Samsung Galaxy S II	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Still great but upped by the new kids on the block	Android	●	4.3	800x480	16/32/64	125x66x8
Samsung Galaxy S III	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Best smartphone, Awards 2012	Android	●	4.8	1280x720	16/32	137x71x9
Samsung Galaxy S4	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Better than its predecessor but not as good as its rivals	Android	●	5.0	1920x1080	16/32/64	137x70x8
Samsung Galaxy S5	07.14/GT	★★★★★	An improvement on the S4, but not radical enough	Android	●	5.1	1920x1080	16/32	142x73x8
Sony 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

"Sony's Xperia Z1 is a brilliant smartphone not just for sophisticated picture and sound quality that's a cut above most rivals but also as an all-round package"

March 2014

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.soundcraft-hifi.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

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

WALES
Monmouth
CERITECH AUDIO
5 Monnow Bridge.
t: 01600 716362
www.ceritech-audio.co.uk

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SERVICE	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
FACILITIES	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
VERDICT	★ ★ ★ ★ ★



HDMI cables

Digital cables that carry both picture and sound. These carry control signals as well, so they can integrate the operation of components in your system.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Length as tested (m)	HDMI type
Up to £80					
Audioquest Pearl	23	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Best HDMI cable, Awards 2012	1 1.4
Cambridge Audio 500 (5m)	69	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A perfectly acceptable cable for the money	5 1.3a
Kimber Kable HD-09	73	03.09/GT	★★★★★	Picture quality is up with the best and it creates a wide sound field	2 1.3
Philex Thor HDMI/DVI kit	60	09.06/FT	★★★★★	A very decent cable for not much cash - you can't really go wrong	5 1.3
QED HDMI-P	50	11.08/FT	★★★★★	This award winning cable just got better	1 1.3
QED Performance HDMI	70	03.09/GT	★★★★★	Capable performer - finely balanced sound and a wonderfully rendered picture	3 1.3
QED Profile HDMI	25	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Now with 1.4 status, this is still a worthy cable	1 1.4
QED Qunex HDMI-P (5M)	75	09.08/GT	★★★★★	Fantastic picture quality mated with a dynamic and powerful sound	5 1.3
ThatCable HDMI	5	10.09/FT	★★★★★	Brilliant way to spend a fiver - will give rivals up to £20 something to think about	1.5 1.3
ThatCable HDMI (5m)	10	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A no-brainer for those on a tight budget	5 1.3a
Vivanco Sound and Image	30	11.09/GT	★★★★★	A respectable upgrade, it provides greater fidelity in sound and vision over budget cables	2 1.3
Wireworld Island 6	46	10.10/GT	★★★★★	Packs a firm punch and strong dynamics	1.4 2.0
£80 and above					
Audioquest Cinnamon	80	01.11/FT	★★★★★	A top-notch HDMI that's a credit to any system	2 1.4
Audioquest Forest	80	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A true and worthy rival to Chord's Supershield	5 1.4
Audioquest HDMI-X	95	03.09/GT	★★★★★	A real entertainer - chunky bass and images are well defined	3 1.3
Atlas HDMI	160	07.07/GT	★★★★★	Upgraded version of the existing Atlas HDMI - delivers good detail and contrast	7 1.3

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WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014

Accessories

Best speaker cable

QED XT40



QED XT40 Speaker Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014

Accessories

Best audio interface

Atlas Element Integra



Atlas Element Integra Audio Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2012

Cables & Accessories

Best optical digital cable

QED Performance Graphite



QED Performance Optical Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2014

Accessories

Best DAC

AudioQuest DragonFly V1.2



AudioQuest DragonFly V1.2

WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2012

Cables & Accessories

Best HDMI cable

AudioQuest Pearl



AudioQuest Pearl HDMI Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2012

Cables & Accessories

Best optical digital cable

QED Performance



QED Performance Digital Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2012

Cables & Accessories

Best USB cable

Supra USB 2.0



Supra USB 2.0 Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
AWARDS 2010

Cables

Best mains cable

Merlin Tarantula MK6



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)
Up to £50					
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)
Up to £50					
QED Performance Coaxial	30	10.08/GT	★★★★★	Best coaxial digital cable, Awards 2012	Co-axial 1
QED Performance Graphite	40	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best optical digital cable, Awards 2012	Optical 1
Supra USB 2.0	29	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best USB cable, Awards 2012	USB 1
True Colours Industries Coral	35	06.09/GT	★★★★★	Best digital interconnect, Awards 2010. Excellent optical lead	Optical 1
Wireworld Nova 6	40	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Like an up-and-coming band: unrefined but likeable and energetic	Optical 1
£50 and above					
Audioquest Cinnamon	60	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Like a fine paintbrush: controlled and delicate but lacking the big, broad strokes of a roller	USB 1.5
Atlas Equator Optical	50	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Worth checking out, but not for the basshunters	Optical 1
Chord Company Optichord	51	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Confident, competent and extremely likeable. Highly recommended	Optical 1
Chord Co. Prodac Pro Digital	70	05.11/FT	★★★★★	Even better following an upgrade to its plugs	Co-axial 1
Clearer Audio Copper-line 75	97	Aw.08/FT	★★★★★	This is another fine cable from the Copper-line stable. It's well worth a listen	Co-axial 1
Clearer Aud. Silverline Optimus	185	09.09/GT	★★★★★	The sheer brilliance of this cable makes it stand out	Co-axial 0.5
Ecosse The Director SE	89	09.09/GT	★★★★★	Spacious sounding and great with higher frequencies	Co-axial 1
Furutech Formula 2	55	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Best USB cable, Awards 2011	USB 1.2
Kimber USB	52	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Worth an audition if you're after something laid-back	USB 1
QED Qunex 75 Signature	80	09.09/FT	★★★★★	Beautifully made, but not quite as thrilling as we'd like	Co-axial 1
QED U Play (Bluetooth)	65	05.10/FT	★★★★★	It's small, cheap, and does an efficient job	Bluetooth 10
Vertere Pulse D-Fi	70	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	A must-audition if you can stretch your budget	USB 1
Wireworld Ultraviolet 5 USB	50	08.09/FT	★★★★★	Best USB cable, Awards 2010. If you use digital kit, this needs to be on your audition list	USB 2



Analogue interconnects

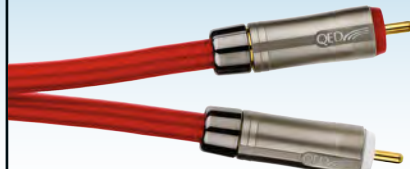
These carry audio signal from source to amplifier, or between pre-amplifier and power amplifier. Some use a shielding construction to reduce external electrical interference.

The shortlist



Wireworld Luna 7

06.14 Group Test ★★★★★



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)
Up to £50					
Atlas Element Integra (1m)	45	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Best analogue interconnect, Awards 2014	● 1
Black Rhodium Twist	36	06.14/GT	★★★★★	We wouldn't recommend this cable for bright-sounding systems but it's a decent option for the money	● 1
Clear. Aud. C-line Alpha One	30	12.11/FT	★★★★★	A bargain interconnect that should be on your shortlist	● 1
Ecosse Conductor CA1.2	49	06.11/GT	★★★★★	Excellent with detail - a good all-rounder	● 1
Ecosse The Composer	37	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Lacks excitement, but a lovely design with warm and punchy sounds	● 0.8
Merlin Mozart	40	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Open and exuberant, if lacking in warmth	● 1
QED Performance Audio 2	40	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Agile, fun and nuanced: would do well in pretty much any system	● 1
QED Profile	18	06.11/GT	★★★★★	At the top of the first upgrade tree	● ● 1
Wireworld Luna	37	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Excellent with subtlety and dynamics: should be on any interconnect shortlist	● 1
Wireworld Luna 7	40	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Delivers a confident and likable sound. A great option at this price	● 1
£50 and above					
Atlas Equator Integra	75	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A recommended second-upgrade cable	● ● 1
AudioQuest Red River	85	06.14/GT	★★★★★	What it lacks in smoothness and subtlety, it makes up for in scale and dynamics	● 1
Chord Co. Chameleon Plus	125	11.11/FT	★★★★★	New plugs make these even more essential	● 1
Chord Company Cobra VEE 3	95	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Clear and detailed, this cable brings a very driven and focused feel to music	● 1

ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		RCAphono 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
Up to £100					
Clear. Aud. C-Line Alpha One	25	11.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine first stage mains cable upgrade	● ● n/a
Clear.Aud.C-L Alpha P/HUB	90	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Makes a noticeable difference, but not the last word in cohesion	● ● ● 6
Ecosse Big Orange MK2+	60	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Provides worthwhile gains in performance – and plenty of them	● ● n/a
Lindy 6-way	40	12.08/FT	★★★★★	For just £40, this conditioner is a bona fide system booster	● ● ● 6
Merlin Tarantula Figure '8'	40	01.11/GT	★★★★★	Incredible bang for your buck from Merlin	● ● n/a
Merlin Tarantula MK6	40	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Best mains cable, Awards 2010. A good tweak for a hi-fi or AV system	● ● n/a
Russ Andrews Powerkord-8	75	01.11/GT	★★★★★	An ideal choice for a simple upgrade	● ● n/a
Tacima CS929	40	08.06/FT	★★★★★	Explicitly illustrates the gains a modest outlay can achieve	● ● ● 6
£100 and above					
Audioquest NRG 1.5	100	01.11/GT	★★★★★	A lively and precise cable that does much right	● ● n/a
Atlas Eos	147	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Well-balanced, delivering impressive depth and scale	● n/a
Clearer Audio Silver-line	150	07.06/FT	★★★★★	Capable of truly astonishing improvements	● n/a
Furutech G-320AG	165	02.11/GT	★★★★★	A pricy but worthwhile addition to your set-up	● ● n/a
R Andrews Ref P/Kord W350i	232	05.09/GT	★★★★★	If you have components costing £2000 upwards, consider this cable	● ● n/a
Russ Andrews X2	200	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Effective but suffers from a lack of sockets	● ● ● 2
Supra MD-06	150	07.08/FT	★★★★★	It adds clarity, but some might not like the leaner sound	● ● 6
van den Hul M/Server Hybrid	150	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Not boring or dull, but it's just too relaxed and safe sounding	● ● n/a

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TacimaTM CS947 New Mains Conditioner for 2015

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- Status Button to test for degradation by Lightning etc.



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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



Awards 2014: Best speaker cable

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict
Up to £10/m			
Audioquest FLX-SLiP 14/4	5.80	11.13/GT	★★★★★ Best Speaker Cable, Awards 2013
Audioquest G4	4.50	03.14/GT	★★★★★ Loses out when it comes to the weight and solidity of its sound. Exciting and articulate nonetheless
Audioquest X2	5	07.11/GT	★★★★★ A perfectly smooth and even-handed sounding performer
Atlas Equator 2.0 OFC	6	03.14/GT	★★★★★ Allows for an impressive sense of weight and power, but doesn't quite match its rivals
Chord Co. Carnival Silv. Screen	6	10.12/GT	★★★★★ Slightly overtaken by newer rivals, but still a mighty fine choice
CL Audio C-line Alpha Shield	5	10.12/GT	★★★★★ Restrained dynamics hold this otherwise good cable back from the full five stars
Ecosse CS 2.3	5	10.12/GT	★★★★★ Balanced, nuanced and an easy listen, but a little subdued
Ecosse CS 4.2	3	02.12/FT	★★★★★ A decent cable that needs a touch more punch

Biwire

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WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2014
Accessories
BEST SPEAKER CABLE
QED XT40

NEW



QED XT40 Speaker Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
March 2014



Wireworld Lluna 7 Speaker Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
March 2014



Van Den Hul The Clearwater

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
July 2008



Atlas Hyper 2.0 Speaker Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2013
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
AUDIOQUEST
AUDIOQUEST FLX-SLiP 14/4



AudioQuest FLX-SLiP 14/4 Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2011
CABLES & ACCESSORIES
BEST SPEAKER CABLE
CHORD COMPANY
CARNIVAL SILVERSCREEN



Chord Carnival Silverscreen Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
July 2008



QED Silver Anniversary XT

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
Futureshop Recommended



Tellurium Q Black Speaker Cable

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SPEAKER 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	★★★★★	Best speaker cable, Awards 2014. Product of the Year	
QED Revelation	15	04.10/GT	★★★★★	A fine cable that should be on your audition list	
QED Silver Anniv. XT Biwire	10	10.06/GT	★★★★★	A clear class-leader with exceptional sonic transparency on display	●
van den Hul The Clearwater	10	03.14/GT	★★★★★	A cable with an impressive level of detail and clarity	



Speaker stands

Many stands are hollow and can be filled with sand or other similar heavy materials. This is to increase mass and dampening and the sonic benefit is tighter bass – although too much of it can be counter-productive and end up deadening the sound.

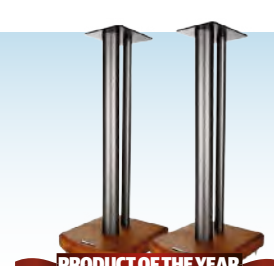
The shortlist



Custom Design FS104 Signature
£200



Q Acoustics Concept 20 speaker stands
£200



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Atacama Moseco 6
Awards 2014: Best speaker stands

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Fillable	Finishes
Up to £500							
Atacama Duo 6	65	02.13/GT	★★★★★	A very likable pair of speaker stands	60x31x31	●	1
Atacama Nexus 6	200	12.00/FT	★★★★★	Still fine performers despite their age	60x25x30	●	1
Atacama Moseco 6	120	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Best speaker stands, Awards 2014	60x24x28	●	4
Custom rc60 Deluxe	125	10.07/FT	★★★★★	This bespoke service has made a fine pair of stands	60x20x25		5
Custom Design FS103	160	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A good pair of stands but rivals offer better overall performance	61x22x26	●	4
Custom Design FS104 Signature	200	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Best speaker stands, Awards 2013	62x16x18	●	4
Custom Design RS300	90	03.07/GT	★★★★★	Minimal design, a thoroughly appealing listen	61x22x26	●	2
Custom Design RS302	120	11.06/FT	★★★★★	Plenty of detail & clarity especially with vocals	61x22x26	●	3
Hi Fi Racks Podium T5 IV	150	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Ideal for those with forward sounding speakers	50x24x30		2
Hi Fi Racks Podium Slimline	120	09.14/GT	★★★★★	A comfortable listening experience that's marred by some less than appealing fuzziness	60x15x21		5
Mission Stance	100	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Will do a fine job with £200-£400 speakers	58x21x28	●	3
Partington ANSA 60	150	09.11/GT	★★★★★	They remain fine stands - but no longer outstanding value	60x23x28	●	1
Part. D'nought Broadside	300	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Deliver wide ranging improvements to sound	60x23x28		1
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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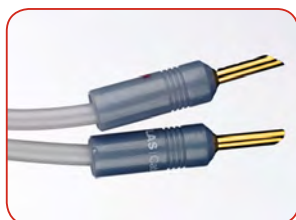
AV & hi-fi racks

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.

Our recommendations

Our recommendations					Modular Shelves	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Finishes
Product	£	Tested	Verdict				
Up to £500							
Alphason Finewood 1100	300	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Looks great and provides sturdy support for your kit	3	51x110x45	1
Atacama Equinox AVI	380	05.07/FT	★★★★★	Neat solution to mount a TV above AV electronics	2	110x106x60	3
Atacama Equinox	339	11.09/GT	★★★★★	Still a good rack, but newer rivals offer more	2-5	Variablex60x55	3
Atacama Evoque Eco 60-40	450	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Best equipment support, Awards 2014	3	Variablex60x40	3
Atacama Eris Eco 5.0	460	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Best equipment support, Awards 2013	4	70x59x56	4
Audiophile Base Stratabase	360	01.08/FT	★★★★★	It isn't cheap but justifies the cost	1	0.4x43x36	2
Custom Design Concept AV	350	04.07/GT	★★★★★	Looks and sounds excellent, plus four colour options	3	60x101x40	4
Custom Design Icon Sig.	330	10.06/FT	★★★★★	A great rack for an upgrade to tame unruly systems	4	42x75x66	11
Custom Design Milan 4	470	11.09/GT	★★★★★	Small and well made, but lacks subtlety	4	59x57x40	5
Custom Design Milan LCD3	350	09.08/FT	★★★★★	A stylish addition to Custom Design's catalogue	3	42x77x40	4
Hi Fi Racks Podium	460	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Best equipment support, Awards 2011	3	62x60x40	1
HiFi Racks Podium SL Ak. XL	260	09.14/GT	★★★★★	Easy to build and a very good deal for the good price	3	Variablex79.5x40	5
Hi Fi Racks Podium Slimline	350	03.13/FT	★★★★★	A simple rack design with pretty decent results	4	Variablex55x40	1
Quadraspire Q4evo	380	11.09/GT	★★★★★	A solid, cohesive and supremely affordable rack	4	Variablex59x39.5	8
Techlink Ovid	200	04.07/GT	★★★★★	Perfect for a minimalist system in a trendy flat	3	32x95x40	4
£500-£1000							
Atacama Elite Eco 12.0	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Offers solid performance and flexibility	5	Variablex115x32	1
BDI Valera 9724	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Complicated to assemble but the results make it worthwhile	3	54x112x52	3
Hi Fi Racks Akomer XL	930	09.12/FT	★★★★★	A corner-friendly alternative to the Podium	3	45x110x40	6
Optimum Avion 8925	999	06.10/GT	★★★★★	Heavyweight, but likeable and good with sonics	3	57x127x56	3
Quadraspire Q4 Bamboo	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	An all round performer. Easy to set up and excellent results	4	Variablex59x40	1
Quadraspire QAVM (Oak)	540	04.07/GT	★★★★★	Solid and rigid, delivers a fine performance	3	50x109x50	8
Quadraspire QAVX	560	12.07/FT	★★★★★	Supports a great big telly and expansive system	2	Variablex163x52	8
Quadraspire Sunoko Vent T	800	11.09/GT	★★★★★	A first-rate rack, that highlights subtleties	4	Variablex59x47	6
£1000 and more							
Audiophile Base StarBase	1180	12.06/GT	★★★★★	Exceptional, spectacular results with high end hi-fi	3	65x59x52	3
Hi Fi Racks Podium XL	1050	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A great performer: plenty of weight and dynamics	3	53x140x40	1
Spectral Closed CL1050	1100	07.07/FT	★★★★★	Fantastic build and style, plus numerous options	2	31x101x53	17
Spectral Closed CL1552	1800	07.07/GT	★★★★★	Awesome style and decent abilities - a great rack	6	VariablexVariablex53	16

Before you buy... Speaker cables



Termination

The price we list for a cable off a reel – chances are you'll want it terminated, but that will add to the final cost. It does make connecting easier, though, and also reduces oxidation of the cable.

Direction

If there are no obvious markings or arrows, look for writing and make sure it reads in the same direction of the music flow i.e. from amps to speakers. It's a controversial subject but try it and we believe it can make a difference.

Length

When you're measuring up for a new speaker cable, ideally you should use the same length for both left and right speakers. We'd also recommend you try to keep the lengths as short as possible for best results.



Headphone amps

The headphone outputs on most products are usually afterthoughts and have had little care taken in trying to make them sound good. A dedicated headphone amp is a must if you want the best headphone sound.

Our recommendations

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Line level in Outputs	
Up to £1500					
Beyerdynamic A1	975	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Best headphone amplifier £500+, Awards 2010. A formidable combo when partnered with T1 headphones	2 1
Chord Electronics Toucan	800	10.10/FT	★★★★★	A headphone amp with built in DAC that's worth a punt	2 2
Creek OBH-21SE	280	04.09/GT	★★★★★	Perfectly pleasant but it could do with more bite	2 2
Edwards Audio HA1	280	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Packs a punch but not that refined	2 1
FiiO E7	65	03.11/FT	★★★★★	One of the most cost-effective ways to improve headphone sound from a computer	1 2
Lehmann Black Cube Linear	750	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Deeply impressive device given the right system	1 1
Lehmann Rhineland	400	04.09/GT	★★★★★	Best headphone amplifier £300-£500, Awards 2010. Its user-friendly sound makes this a very wise buy	2 2
Meridian Prime	1200	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A top-class headphone amp and a talented preamp to boot	2 4
Musical Fidelity V-CAN II	120	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Does enough right to be worth serious consideration	1 3
Pathos Aurium	850	08.13/FT	★★★★★	This amplifier is a top class choice	4 2



Phono amps

Dedicated units tend to sound better than the circuits integrated into amplifiers. Higher priced options usually allow for electrical optimisation for your cartridge, thus producing better results.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	MM MC	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500						
Cambridge Audio 651P	120	06.13/GT	★★★★★	● ●	1	2.5x8x11
Creek Audio OBH-15	240	02.09/GT	★★★★★	● ●	1	6x10x15
Graham Slee Gr- Amp 2 Comm.	160	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●	1	7x10x25
Leema Elements	495	03.10/FT	★★★★★	● ●	2	5x11x10
Lehmann Black Cube	325	02.09/GT	★★★★★	● ●	1	5x11x11
Pro-Ject Phono Box S	120	06.13/GT	★★★★★	● ●	2	7x10x14
Musical Fidelity V-LPS II	160	06.13/GT	★★★★★	● ●	1	5x11x11
Rega Fono Mini A2D	85	03.12/FT	★★★★★	●	1	6x18x25
Rega Fono MM MK2	200	06.13/GT	★★★★★	● ●	2	7x4x33



Cartridges

Moving magnet (MM) These produce a higher output, giving your phono stage an easier time
Moving coil (MC) Can produce more detail, but is more demanding of your phono stage

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	MM/MC	Tracking weight (g)
Up to £500					
Goldring 2100	92	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.7
Goldring 2500	224	03.09/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.7
Grado Prestige Silver	115	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.5
Nagaoka MP110	89	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.8
Ortofon 2M Black	460	04.11/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.5
Ortofon 2M Bronze	275	03.09/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.5
Ortofon 2M Red	80	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.8
Rega Exact	195	03.09/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.75
Roksan Corus Silver	400	01.11/FT	★★★★★	MM	1.9



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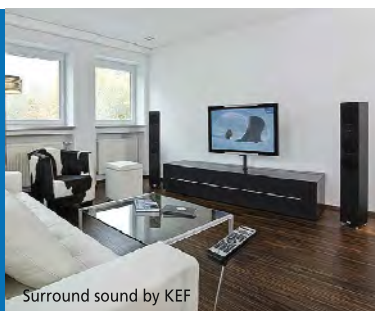
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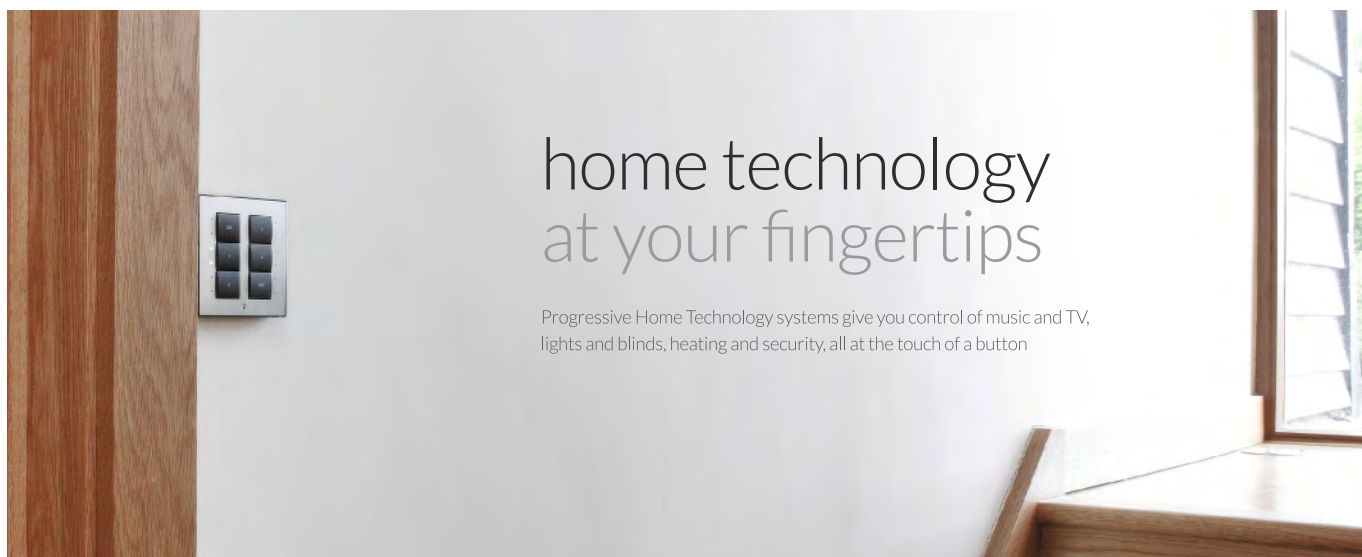
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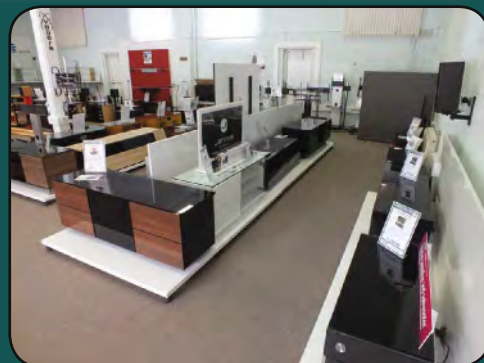
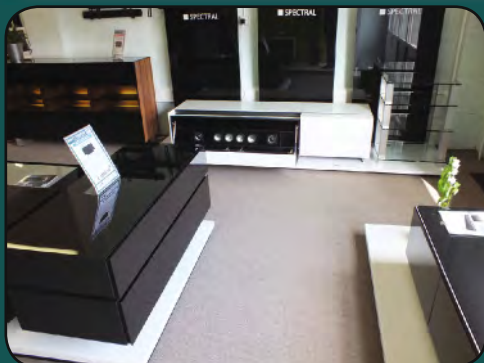
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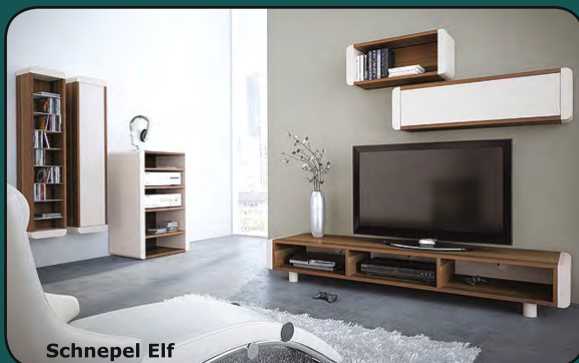
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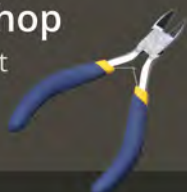
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