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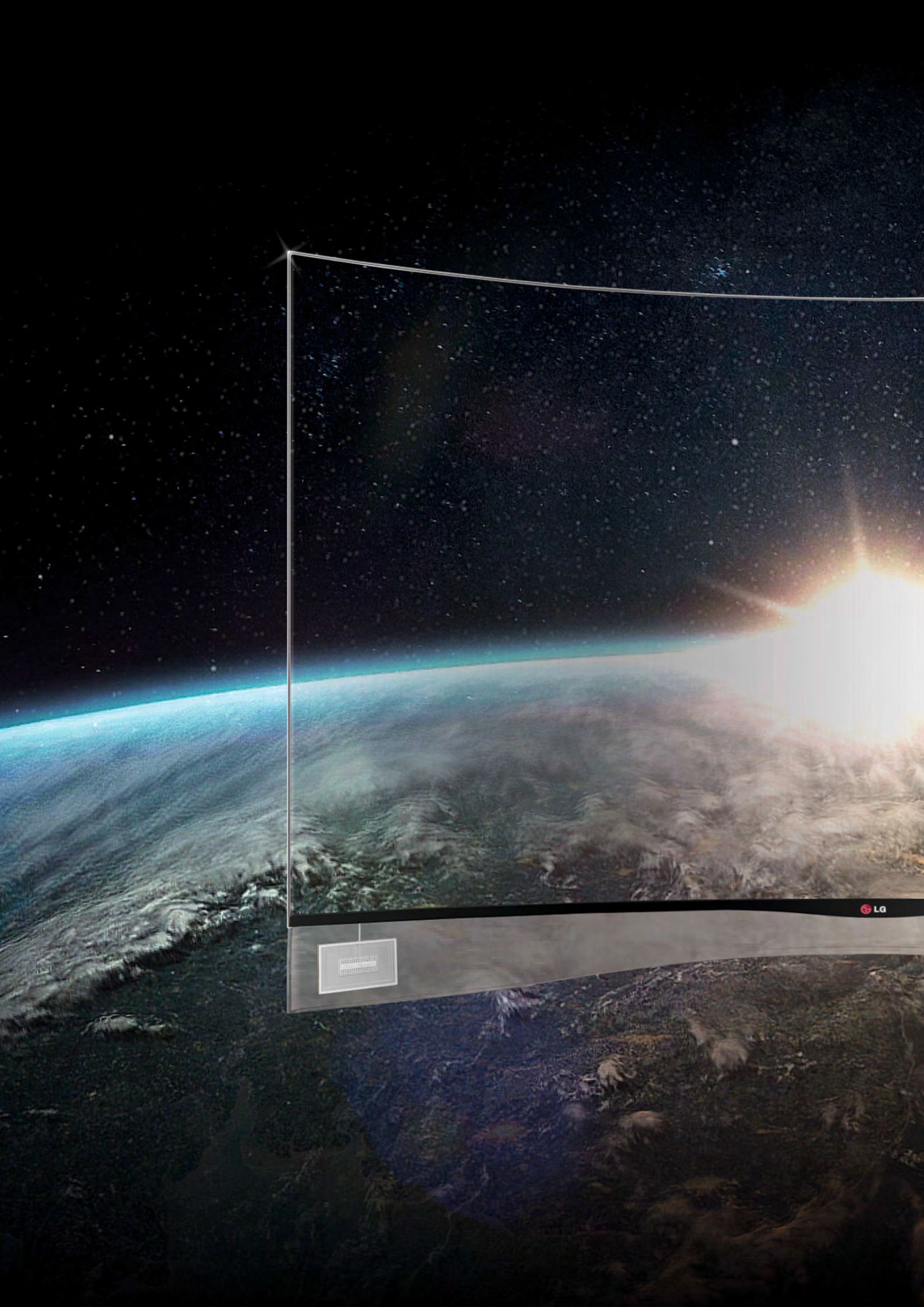
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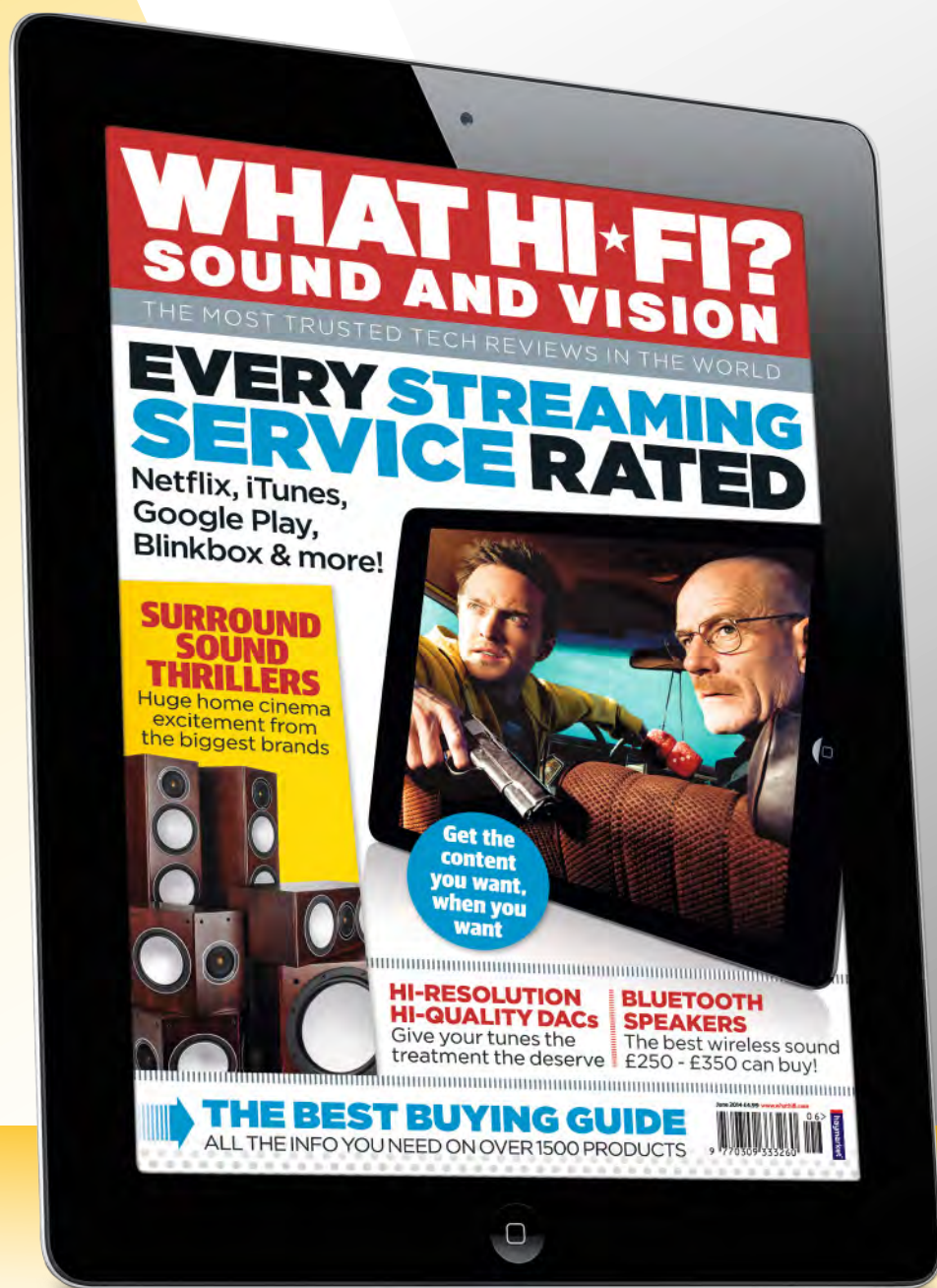
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I need all the image, I need all the sound, I need all the info

What do we want a television for? If we're thoroughly modern consumers, it's unlikely we'll often sit in front of it at an allotted time in order to watch a broadcast programme. That's a bit passive these days. Not 'personal' enough.

Most of the time we're more likely to use it to gorge on DVD or Blu-ray box-sets, to catch up on recordings we've made or to watch streamed content at a time that's convenient to us. Taking control. Calling the shots. All the stuff that makes us feel empowered.

That's why we've gone to such lengths to examine **eight high-profile video-streaming services, both on-demand and subscription (p48)**. After all, if we're all going to run our own television channel, we want the highest quality and best value for money for the audience.



Simon
Simon Lucas, Editor

My products of the month

Cambridge Audio Azur 851D

First Test p16

The digital-to-analogue conversion process is absolutely critical, of course, and I like a DAC big enough to make that point.



Audio Pro Addon T8

Supertest p28

As compact and shiny as Kylie, and a sight more likely to end up in my front room.

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION

Reviews you can trust

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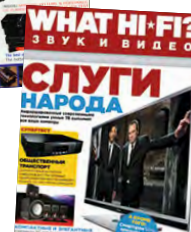
We test every product in the magazine or at whathifi.com against its peers in our bespoke £1m reviewing facilities. And we test every product as a team,

so our opinions and conclusions are always the result of collaboration.



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CONTENTS

Group test
Interconnects
"These interconnects
allow for a punchy,
solid sound"

Our products of the month



Sony SRS-X9
First test p18

"A do-it-all wireless speaker
that does it very well.
The Sony sounds big,
bold and brilliant"

Andy Madden Reviews editor



HTC One (M8)
First test p8

"HTC has done it again,
the One (M8) is as
beautiful on the inside
as it is on the out"

Verity Burns Multimedia editor



Shure SE846
Temptation p80

"If the idea of spending
a grand on a pair of
in-ears doesn't upset you,
then dive right in"

Ketan Bharadia Technical editor



Netflix
Group test p57

"A shining example of what
happens when you do all
the right things well"

Ced Yuen Staff writer



KEF R100 5.1 package
Group test p68

"Dynamic, detailed and
immersive, this hair-raising
package gives movies
that 'wow' factor"

Becky Roberts Staff writer



Ruark Audio MR1
Supertest p36

"Gorgeous sound and stylish
looks - these are the wireless
stereo speakers we want
sitting on our desks"

Kashfia Kabir Multimedia journalist

Supertest Wireless speakers
"There is something for everyone
in this test. There are big
speakers, little speakers,
simple speakers..."



First tests

"A resounding success,
building on one of the
best phones of last year
and making it better
in every way"



Group tests

"We've said it before
and we'll say it again:
this is an impressive
speaker package"



What's in this issue...

08 First tests HTC makes new friends with the launch of the HTC One (M8), while Sony brings quality and convenience together with its high-resolution wireless speaker, the SRS-X9.

26 Supertest: Wireless speakers If you want a hi-fi style set-up with the added convenience of wirelessness then this test is for you. We have seven pairs of stereo speakers around the £300 price point, all vying to be the ones that tie your system together.

41 DACs Once the pauper, digital music has become an accepted feature of hi-fi. You still need a good DAC to eke the best out of your collection though, and we've brought four of them together to find the best.

48 Video streaming Ten years ago we'd have to walk to town to get the latest rentals, now they're streamed to our living room. We test eight streaming services for the best in price, quality and comfort.

Insider Multi-room music p22

Will 2014 be the year of multi-room music? We look at what's in store as more players include this feature

Subscriptions p86

A free pair of RHA MA-350 headphones
Plus save up to 54% on the shop price of What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision

That Was Then p162

A glimpse into the What Hi-Fi? past
We travel back to 2001 with a look at a surround package from Monitor Audio



Group test Video streaming

"For as little as £5.99 per month, you can bend television to your every viewing whim"

62 Interconnects A round-up of eight stereo interconnect cables as the chasing pack looks to knock our Award-winner off its perch.

65 Speaker packages We review efforts from KEF, Dali, Acoustic Energy, Monitor Audio and Tannoy in a titanic clash of speaker packages priced £2000+

76 Temptations Featuring a pair of impressive in-ear 'phones from Shure, and a talented CD player/DAC from American hi-fi brand Aesthetix.

82 Playlist Pixies return with their first album in 23 years as David O. Russell's crime caper *American Hustle* hits Blu-ray, and we look forward to Sam Mendes's horror-inflected TV series *Penny Dreadful*.

Our ratings explained

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

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

★★★★★
★★★★☆
★★★☆☆
★★★☆☆
★★☆☆☆
★☆☆☆☆

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
TEST WINNER

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



Group test DACs

"We've pulled together four of the serious contenders at this price to see how they fare"



Temptation
"It's fair to say they're the most capable in-ears we've heard"

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

Revamped hi-fi guide!
1500 products rated **p89**
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...

Setting up your home cinema p98
Jargon buster: loudspeakers p121
What is it? Chromecast p139



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Exclusive reviews of the latest kit

FIRST TESTS

The sound is even and clean. Stereo imaging is an asset of the 103s

Acoustic Energy 103, p15

MORE
FIRST TESTS



Nakamichi AV1/AVP1
£900 **Page 14**
A famous name returns with an AV amplifier



Cambridge Audio Azur 851D
£1000 **Page 16**
A first look at this new DAC from CA



Sony SRS-X9
£600 **Page 18**
A fine wireless speaker plays any format

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product reviews!

The Dot-View case
interacts with the HTC
to give basic info. It's
an extra £35, though



EXCLUSIVE

HTC takes the special One and makes it better still

HTC One (M8) | **Smartphone** | from free on contract

It's fair to say the HTC One (M8) has some pretty big shoes to fill. The original HTC One was one of our favourite phones of last year, and we weren't alone. It received five-star praise from just about every tech mag, website and blog the world over. The great news is, its successor is even better.

Pick up the One (M8) and you know you're dealing with a piece of pure quality. As with its predecessor, it's created from a piece of single aluminium. Up from around 70 per cent metal in the original, the One (M8) is now around 90 per cent metal, and it shows. There's next-to no plastic to be seen.

The way it looks has been tweaked too, with more curved corners than before, and a gorgeously rounded back panel. The result is that it feels slimmer than ever too, despite its depth unchanging at 9.4mm.

A thing of beauty

Put simply, it's the best-looking phone we've ever seen. The flagship colour will be the metal-grey colour we tested, though arctic silver (similar to the original One) and amber gold versions will also be available.

Of course, while we love a beautiful design, we know its what's on the inside that counts, and luckily the HTC One (M8) doesn't slip up there either.

Under the hood, there is a 2.3GHz Qualcomm Snapdragon 801 processor, supported by 2GB RAM. The Samsung

Galaxy S5 may just pip it on paper for processor power, but the HTC One (M8) is as fast as we could want it to be.

We try our best to fluster it, running multiple apps, whizzing around the operating system and opening data-heavy webpages, but it keeps up at every stage without a single stutter or stumble.

Sitting over the top of Android 4.4 (KitKat) is HTC's newest iteration of its Sense user interface, and it looks as lovely as ever. If we had to opt for something other than vanilla Android, HTC's Sense skin would be it.

This is the best-looking phone we've ever seen. Of course, while we love a beautiful design, we know its what's on the inside that counts, and the HTC One (M8) doesn't slip up there either

There haven't been a whole host of changes in the way it looks. It still has the beautifully clean, unobtrusive design we loved, with very little bloatware pre-installed, which is a welcome decision.

Blinkfeed, HTC's content-aggregating homepage, is back, with some usability tweaks. Customising it is easier than ever too (including turning it off), so you really can make it into a snapshot of all the things that matter to you.

A new software feature on the One (M8) is Motion Launch, which offers up gesture-based commands. Like the LG G2, you can now wake the screen by simply double tapping, but you can also swipe up to unlock, swipe right to go straight to Blinkfeed and turn it landscape and press the volume key to launch the camera. We found all these features responsive and reliable during our test, with some becoming second nature before we realised.

Let's talk about that screen. Up from 4.7in to 5in, the phone is bigger than its predecessor, but not awkwardly so. It's taller, for sure, but in the hand it doesn't feel much different.

It's a 1920 x 1080 Full HD screen with a pixel density of 441ppi. That's a slight drop from the original One, which offers 468ppi, but you'd never notice. The screen is gorgeous - sharp, with a vibrant, well judged colour palette and not a pixel in sight.

The level of fine detail in the picture is up there with the best, with crisp edges and a great sense of texture and depth, and contrast is superb, really nailing the handling of deep blacks and bright whites.

It uses a similar panel technology to an IPS (in-plane switching) display, which means viewing angles are really good.

Those extra few inches on the screen really help to make this feel like a great size for watching movies on the go too.

When it comes to storing all those movies, many might be put off by the single 16GB on-board storage option available in the UK. The good news is that HTC has listened to the criticisms of its predecessor and included a microSD card slot, capable of boosting the memory by a whopping 128GB, instantly turning this into a multimedia powerhouse. That really is quite something.

The original's left-hand side placement of the power button was another grumble, so it's now switched to the right for easier access. Sometimes it's the little things.

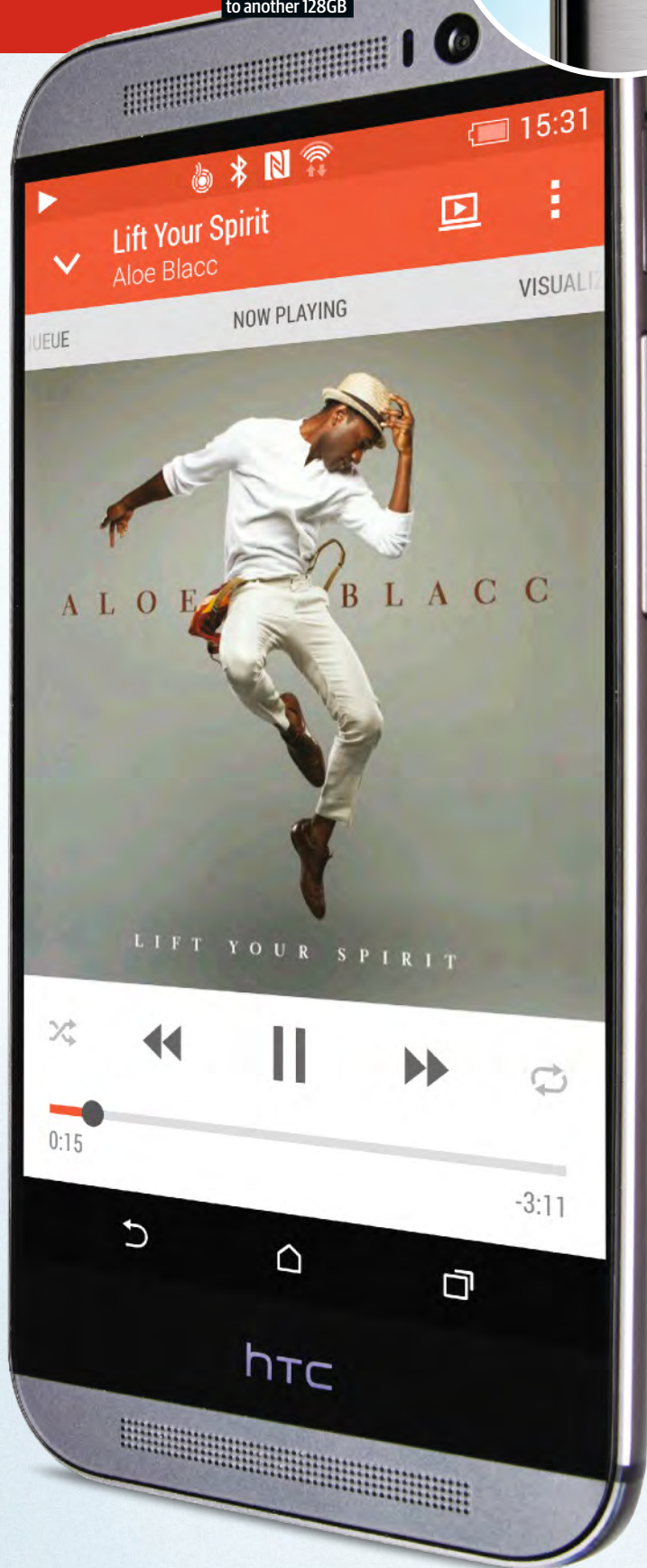
Bigger, better sound

When it comes to sound, HTC has not rested on its laurels. The Boomsound stereo speakers that sit above and below the screen have had their speaker chambers redesigned, allowing the One (M8) to be 25 per cent louder than its predecessor.

There's also a redesigned 'multi-phase' amp, which allows the One (M8) to amplify different parts of a track independently,



The microSD card slot (right) can be used to boost memory by up to another 128GB



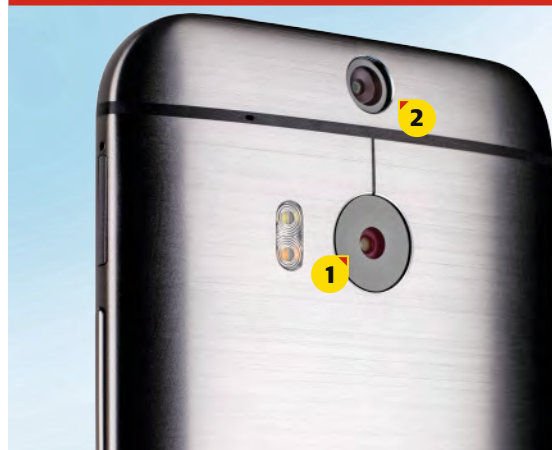
The One (M8) sounds good over headphones, but we'd upgrade the bundled buds



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



In (and out of) focus



1 One of the talking points of the One was its shunning of megapixels for Ultrapixels – bigger pixels that HTC said improved low-light performance. That configuration returns here.

2 The 4.1 Ultrapixel lens is joined by a second lens, which HTC has dubbed the Duo Camera. It doesn't take snaps, but instead captures all the depth information of every shot, allowing you to adjust the focus of the photo from the edit menu and introduce an artsy, blurred-background effect.

giving it the ability to boost soft vocals without overdoing the bass, for example.

There are improvements to be heard here, particularly through the Boomsound speakers. It's able to go noticeably louder, there's better stereo separation, and detail levels are up as well. Plug in a pair of headphones and the improvements are a little more subtle. It doesn't match the likes of Sony's Xperia Z1 or the iPhone 5s, but with some decent buds (ie not the bundled ones) there's a perfectly listenable sound.

There's no getting away from the fact that the revised camera on the HTC One (M8) does suffer from a lack of resolution, and there are occasional hiccups with overexposure in variable light conditions too. That said, it does take and focus photos extremely quickly, and in good lighting conditions you'll get generally good shots.

During testing we found the Duo Camera, post-shot focusing effect (see panel, above) to work best in situations where subjects were very obviously in the foreground and background.

HTC has taken the metal-rich design of the original HTC One and run with it further to create a super-sleek, curve-laden device of real beauty



This depth information allows for a handful of other features, all of which feel infinitely more gimmicky, including the ability to replace the bokeh effect with a handful of dramatic filters.

Making good use of the juice

When it comes to battery life, the HTC One (M8) does perfectly fine. There's a jump to 2600mAh (up from the original's 2300mAh), which we found to comfortably last us the day but not much more – about the same as its predecessor, really.

What has changed is the introduction of the Extreme Power Saving mode, which can really help if you get caught out without a charger. By just giving you access to core functionality, this mode can give you up to 30 hours of standby time with just 10 per cent battery remaining. A handy feature.

The HTC One (M8) is a resounding success, building on one of the best phones of last year and making it even better. The few camera grumbles can't take away from an excellent bigger picture – we like this phone a lot. There's plenty of competition approaching in the coming months, but until then this is the phone to beat this year.

TECH SPECS

Screen size 5in • **Resolution** 1920 x 1080
PPI 441 • **Processor** 2.3GHz quad-core
 Qualcomm Snapdragon 801 • **RAM** 2GB
Camera 4.1UP main/5MP front • **Storage**
 16GB (expandable by up to 128GB)
Connectivity 802.11a/b/g/n/ac, NFC, aptX
 Bluetooth, 4G • **Battery** 2600mAh, •
Operating system Android 4.4 • **Dimensions**
 146 x 71 x 9mm • **Weight** 160g

In detail



Notification light One look at this LED can tell you if you have pending notifications, and will also warn you about low battery.



IR Blaster The IR blaster along the top edge of the phone allows the HTC One (M8) to control your TV.



SIM card slot The HTC One (M8) uses the smaller nano SIM, as found in the iPhone 5 onwards.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Flawless functionality; superb build; fantastic picture quality; nice screen

AGAINST Photos lack fine detail

VERDICT As gorgeous on the inside as it is on the out, the One (M8) puts very few feet wrong



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

REVIEWER'S NOTES... 5 THINGS ABOUT THE HTC ONE (M8)

1 This phone is ridiculously good-looking, but that's nothing to when you pick it up. It's so lovely to hold, the whole office is queueing up for a go.

2 The 16GB on-board storage just won't cut it for our movie and music addiction, so the ability to boost it by a huge 128GB via microSD card, is terrific.

3 The Boomsound speakers aren't just a design touch, they give a serious improvement to any sound played out loud – way better than the competition.

4 We fire up a film on this phone and we're instantly drawn in. The colours and contrast are superb and fine detail is up there as the best we've seen.

5 There are better camera phones out there, but the One (M8) still impresses with its speed and colour balance. It has some interesting features too.

Bowers & Wilkins



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In time, everything changes. That's progress. The new 600 Series brings 19 years of Bowers & Wilkins engineering advances, including the new Decoupled Double Dome tweeters for amazingly precise treble. But one thing hasn't changed: the new 600 Series offers the same amazing value now as when the award-winning original launched in 1995.

www.bowers-wilkins.co.uk

Wharfedale Vista 100 | Soundbar | £150

Bass weighs too heavily on Wharfedale



Bluetooth

Everything seems to have Bluetooth these days, and this is no exception. It has a 10m-range, set-up is simple, and while you lose quality compared to a wired connection, the compromise is okay for convenience.

We have been extolling the virtues of soundbars as a solution to the declining quality of flatscreen speakers for a long time - and suddenly there are so many of the things, it's almost impossible to keep up with what's what.

Given the new-found interest in them, it's little wonder that even traditional hi-fi companies such as Wharfedale are keen to get a piece of this tasty pie. But what is surprising, given its reputation for audio quality, is that Wharfedale's first offering in this growing field is such an affordable one. The only other £150 soundbars we've seen have been pretty poor - and surely even Wharfedale can't produce something that sounds good for such little money?

Or can it? Perhaps in the future it will... because the Vista 100 gets a huge amount right. Unfortunately, it also gets one thing quite badly wrong.

Smart, matt-black styling

The good news starts with the build. This isn't the slimmest soundbar and could be an issue in terms of placement, but it is a nice-looking, 1m-wide unit. Also, it's more solid and feels more premium than you'd expect for this sort of money: with smart, matt-black styling and subtle silver bands, topped with touch-sensitive controls.

Behind the grilles are six drivers driven by a 60W amp, which Wharfedale claims is enough to create a muscular, room-filling sound. The claims are spot-on.

For a soundbar, let alone one costing just £150, this makes a big noise, especially in one of the EQ modes, which apparently use Absolute 3D technology from a company called Sonic Emotion. Use the 'Movie' mode while watching a film and - while you lose a bit of focus and clarity from voices - the weight is mighty impressive, as is the dispersion of sound. Surround effects never truly envelop the listening position, but they push well into the room along the left and right sides of your soundfield.

Some will prefer turning the 3D mode off, especially for TV shows and the more

dialogue-heavy movies out there. You still don't lose depth or solidity here, but the narrower soundstage is more focused and a little bit clearer.

The problem is that the system tries a little too hard to be bassy, and when you feed it the really deep stuff it struggles. You can watch a whole movie and hardly notice. Perhaps you will get the odd bit of blowing from the drivers during a particularly massive explosion, but that's easily dismissed or ignored. If your music collection is relatively tame it's also entirely possible that you will never encounter an issue, but play something properly bassy and you're in for a shock.

SBTRKT's debut, eponymous album makes us worry: tracks such as *Trials of the Past* have so much distortion and audible

SBTRKT's debut has so much distortion and audible vibration we were convinced the unit was faulty. It was not the case

The Vista 100 isn't the slimmest soundbar but it is a nice looking, 1m-wide unit with smart, matte-black styling and subtle silver bands

vibration that we were convinced the unit was faulty. A replacement unit proved it was not.

You can turn the bass level down using the bundled remote, but while that reduces the amount of bass it doesn't improve the quality of it, and that means the issue is still clearly audible.

Essentially it rules out a big section of music that you might want to listen to. And while a soundbar might be considered by many to be geared more towards movies and TV shows than music, there's also an expectation that these are do-it-all devices - and that makes the problem impossible to ignore and hard to forgive.

Some tweaking

It's a great shame because on first listen we were convinced that the Vista 100 was head-and-shoulders above its similarly priced rivals.

We suspect that with some tweaking Wharfedale could still pull that off, but we can't recommend the Vista 100 as it is, without this one, major caveat. You should look elsewhere for your soundbar.

Rating ★★☆☆☆

FOR Looks nice; good build; muscular, weighty sound; 3D EQ modes spread the sound nicely

AGAINST Very deep bass causes unpleasant vibration noises

VERDICT A good soundbar, held back by one major problem

Also consider

Philips HTL5150 £250 ★★★★★

If you want a soundbar that's great you will have to stretch to this Philips

Round the back

1 Without HDMI...
...the coaxial and optical connections are your best connections for sound quality.

2 Connect directly
If you have only a few sources you can connect them directly rather than through your TV.

3 The connection...
recess is neat and the downward-facing connections are no problem unless you've chunky cables.



CONVERT ORDINARY TO EXTRAORDINARY



DAC-V1 Digital to Analogue Converter



Using our unique digital signal processing technology the DAC-V1 can transform your computer into a high-resolution music hub. It can also unleash the sound of digital sources like your TV, games console, and hard disk player/server too. Listen directly through headphones or add our matching NAP100 power amplifier and speakers to create a compact, high-end hi-fi system.

If, like us, you really care about music, the new DAC-V1 is for you.

Discover more online: naimaudio.com/dac-v1



Nakamichi AV1/AVP1 | Home cinema amplifier | £900

Is this blast from the past past it?

Mention the name Nakamichi and we bet most audiophiles still associate the brand with exquisite high-end cassette decks. Yet decks like the legendary Dragon went out of production decades ago.

Over the years the brand has gone through various management changes and its product mix has changed radically. The last time we remember reviewing anything from Nakamichi it was an all-in-one style system built to battle Bose. But that was years ago, so imagine our surprise to be confronted by this, the AV1/AVP1 processor/power amp combination.

Superbly finished

On the surface this pairing seems almost too good to be true. It's smart, easy to use and finished to a high standard. So high that we couldn't believe the company could sell the combination at £900. We'd have guessed a figure at least double that.

Checking the specifications, though, throws up a few omissions. There's no network streaming ability or internet tuner (due imminently), and the AV1 processor won't pass through a 4K signal. While 4K is in its infancy we would expect most receivers to accommodate such a signal. Nakamichi plans to launch a suitable video scaler in due course, but there are no firm dates. Oddly, there are no analogue video inputs either. These are no longer essential for many, but it's still a surprise omission.

The AVP1 power amplifier is a real powerhouse, delivering 7 x 110 watts. It's a

showing few of the flourishes the likes of Yamaha or Denon manage - but they do get the job done. Much the same can be said of the remote handset. It looks smart enough, but isn't particularly luxurious.

This Nakamichi combination sounds a little crude at initial switch-on. We leave it running for a few days before judging it seriously. The extra time helps noticeably,

This is a beautifully constructed pair of boxes, giving a really premium feel

delivered with a great deal of conviction either, pointing to restricted dynamics and a general lack of agility.

Moving on to the Blu-ray of Stevie Wonder's *Live At Last* the amp struggles to take a firm grasp of rhythms, leading to a slightly ponderous feel to songs. There's plenty of solidity behind basslines and the ability to raise replay levels close to that of the real event, yet we're still missing a chunk of atmosphere and enjoyment.

Stereo performance mirrors that heard in a surround set-up. It has lots of muscle and balanced tonality, but could do with an extra dose of finesse and rhythmic ability.

Ultimately, for all its authority this Nakamichi pairing doesn't entertain as much as the best. It needs greater insight and more expressive dynamics before it can worry the class leaders.

We are impressed with the Nakamichi's solidity and power. It sounds really authoritative and delivers high volumes with impressive ease. The sound field is pleasing too

chunky unit, weighing in at 32kg, so get help if you ever need to move it. Even when pushed hard it doesn't get too warm, but it's still worth making sure you leave enough room around it for air to circulate.

Apart from the misgivings mentioned, overall connectivity is good. There's a decent range of analogue and digital audio connections, and the ability to output stereo signals to three additional zones. An aptX Bluetooth dongle is supplied, which opens up the processor to use with smart phones, computers and tablets. Handy.

The units can be connected via single-ended or balanced leads. Most of our listening was done using balanced.

Getting started is straightforward. There's the usual automated speaker set-up - it adjusts size, distance and level, but does it with a fair bit of fuss. Once done, though, the results are accurate enough. The rest of the set-up menus are a touch basic,

with the presentation gaining refinement and losing its hard edge.

We start off with *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug* on Blu-ray and are impressed with the solidity and power. It sounds really authoritative and delivers high volumes with impressive ease. The sound field is pleasing too. It may not be the most expansive, but it remains convincing as the dragon thumps around.

Easy to match with speakers

Nakamichi has got the tonal balance pretty much right too - enough to make speaker matching relatively painless.

It's not all good news though. There are a number of areas where this package falls short of the best at this level. Detail resolution is decent but no more. There are nuances in voices and textures to the instrumental back-drop that the Nakamichi overlooks. Crashes aren't



All mod cons?

The Nakamichi has a curious set of connections. A Bluetooth dongle is included for streaming from devices, but there's no network streaming option or 4K passthrough, and no analogue video inputs.

Rating ★★☆☆☆

FOR Good build and finish; powerful and authoritative presentation; simple to use

AGAINST Lacks insight, timing and dynamic finesse; limited features

VERDICT It has its strengths, but this pairing has too many flaws to compete with the best

Also consider

Pioneer SC-LX57
£1200 ★★★★★



Pricier than the Nakamichi pairing, but notably more capable sonically. It's much better equipped in most respects too.

Acoustic Energy 103 | Stereo speakers | £550

AE's new babies lack a little grip

The **103 floorstanders** are our first sniff of the 1-Series, Acoustic Energy's latest entry-level range.

The British manufacturer used to have good form in this field, but that was years ago and it's struggled to deliver results of late. So the new series marks a fresh effort to regain its reputation in this market.

As well as the 103 floorstanders, the range is made up of standmounts, a centre speaker and subwoofer.

The company claims the 1-Series has similar capabilities to its mid-market 3-Series, but in a smaller package and at a lower price. We liked what we heard of the earlier series, so we have high hopes.

Much carry over from the 3-Series

The 11cm aluminium-core mid/bass drivers have been carried over into the 1-Series, and are hard-anodised for rigidity and dampening. The 28mm soft-dome tweeters stick too, with the crossover remaining the same. The cabinet's slotted port design is also similar. It's put on the front panel to make the speakers less fussy about placement.

AE has kept the easy-to-mount magnetic grilles with the 103s, which prevent any ugly puncture-wounds in the baffle - although the finish of the speakers is not as sleek as the 3-Series. The 103s are available in ash, walnut or a high-gloss white vinyl wrap. They still look impressive however, with their sloped baffle and silver-trimmed cones within the compact design.

The 103s are 85cm tall and 19cm wide, so they are practical: if your house is tight on space, then they're a good option. AE says the speakers were designed with smaller rooms in mind, and their slim build makes them easier to accommodate than most rivals.

There is no bi-wiring on the 103s, but they do come with spiked feet that can be attached - and we would, as they offer

It's single-wiring only for the 103s - and we would urge you to use the supplied spikes

Good for a small room

These AEs are rare in the world of floorstanders by sounding better balanced relatively close to a wall. They could, therefore, be a decent choice if space is tight in your listening room.

optimal performance. As for that performance, well, the sound is even and clean - there is precision and detail to be found here.

Stereo imaging is an asset of the 103s too. Supertramp's *Give A Little Bit* gives good placement to the acoustic string ensemble and, while Eminem's skits are usually something we skip, the 103s bring the narratives to life, with sirens and footsteps well imaged.



The leading edges of notes are crisp on the 103s, although they do lack fluency. The intro piano on Daft Punk's *Within* feels stop-start. The speakers can sound thin and could do with more warmth and smoothness in their sound - despite running them in for a week, our music was still somewhat undernourished during the test.

Placing the 103s close to a wall, say, makes a significant difference. You lose the spacious soundfield, but the sound fills out a bit and you get a more rounded feel, thicker vocals and more convincing midrange in return.

A slightly erratic tempo

Fiddling with placement can't cover over all the cracks however. The 103s' poor grip on timing fails to communicate the pace of music as well as class leaders manage. Rimsky-Korsakov's *Flight Of The Bumblebee* is delivered with an erratic tempo and the 103s just can't keep up with the orchestral interlude's momentum.

Sat next to our Award-winning Q Acoustics 2050iis, the 103s are dwarfed in the shadows of their towering pillars - but the issue here is not just size. The 2050iis handle rhythm better, have a richer presentation and more pep.

The 103s can't provide quite the dynamic reach of some either - nor is there quite as much room around instruments. They can sound a little congested next to the best rivals.

A decent, not great start

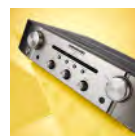
The 103s are by no means a bad start for Acoustic Energy's 1-Series, but they could undoubtedly perform better.

The 2050iis outperform them in most aspects, and are £100 cheaper as well.

USE IT WITH

Marantz PM6005

This amplifier has the refinement to make the most of the 103s' abilities



Rating ★★☆☆☆

FOR Articulate; precise stereo imaging; smart, compact design

AGAINST Poor timing; lacking in fluency; thin presentation

VERDICT A compact, practical design, but not the talented 3-Series-like performance

Also consider

Q Acoustics 2050i £450

★★★★★

Everything the AEs have, but better and for less



Cambridge Audio Azur 851D | Digital-to-analogue converter | £1000

Cambridge graduates with honours



Cambridge may be best known for talented budget kit, but its upmarket 8-series products have shown the brand is capable of delivering at the higher end too. The new Azur 851D digital-to-analogue converter is a new addition to their stable.

This DAC impresses the moment we unpack it. It's big - built into one of the company's beautifully finished full-size 8-series cases - and features a large, clear display and an extensive range of features. We even like the remote; it's good quality and easy to use, bar some cramped buttons.

aptX Bluetooth connectivity

It's inability to play DSD aside, the 851D ticks all the boxes. It will play 24-bit/192kHz files from all inputs, including (unusually) optical. Inputs are what we'd expect: coax, optical and USB with the addition of AES/EBU and, more usefully, Bluetooth via a supplied dongle. The addition of aptX Bluetooth opens up the DAC for use with smartphones, tablets and computers.

We're pleased to see a headphone output and that the 851D can be configured as a digital preamp, with a variable output that can be connected directly into a power amp or active speakers. This is a great idea if you only have digital sources and want an arguably more audiophile set-up with a simpler signal path. Analogue outputs are in both single-ended and balanced XLR.

Initial listening impressions are good - the 851D delivers a nicely balanced sound with even tonality and detail. Play Orff's *Carmina Burana* (CD rip) and the Cambridge shines with an agile sound, lacking nothing in scale or authority. Instruments are rendered with precision and delivered with suitable solidity. We're impressed by the large-scale dynamics and the DAC's punch during crescendos.

We're pleased with the soundstage too. It's wide, deep, and nicely layered. Imaging stays stable when things get busy - not always the case with some rivals. The Cambridge's tonal balance is convincing. There's no shortage of refinement either - the 851D sounds silky and fluid. There's a range of digital filters, and choice will come down to system or your taste.

In our reference set-up - Naim NDS/555ps streamer, MacBook (with Pure Music media-playing software), Bryston BP26/4BSST2 amplifier and ATC SCM50 speakers - we prefer the 'Minimum' phase option, which sounds organic in our set-up. Change to something like a 24-bit/96kHz recording of *Snowflake* by Kate Bush, however, and a few cracks show in the 851D's performance. There's insight, agility and body, but the DAC is less successful communicating the nuances of the piano or the emotion in Bush's vocals. Compared with Chord's QuteHD or Naim's pricier

The DAC is built into one of Cambridge's beautifully finished full-size 8 series cases

DAC-V1, there's less dynamic expression at low levels and less security.

Pairing via Bluetooth is easy and, while the sound isn't up to the usual hi-fi inputs, it's a welcome option. We also like the DAC's performance through the headphone output. Such outputs are often compromised, but not here - using Grado SR325s we find the same insight and transparency as with the analogue outputs.

The Azur 851D is a fine DAC. It may not match the best in outright entertainment but it still sounds good and combines talent with a useful range of features. Add fine build into the mix and you have a worthy product.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Impressive build; good features including aptX Bluetooth connectivity; refined, tonally balanced presentation; detail and refinement

AGAINST Lacks rhythmic drive and could do with more low-level dynamic expression

VERDICT A good proposition; worth a look

Also consider

Naim DAC-V1
£1300 ★★★★★

The Naim is pricier, but a notably more communicative unit.



System builder total build £3000

Computer
Mac laptop
From £1000

The Cambridge will work well with most computers, just make sure they have high-quality files.



Amplifier
Cyrus 8a amplifier
★★★★★ £1200

This amplifier has a really insightful and dynamic sound. It's upgradable too.



Speakers
KEF LS50 speakers
★★★★★ £800

These KEFs are one of our favourite sub-£1000 speakers and have a sound packed full of detail.





1SERIES

Acoustic Energy have always been associated with audio excellence. Since the original AE-1 monitor speaker was launched in 1988, their products have represented the best audio performance and product reliability available for the price. These principles continue with the new **1-Series**. Consisting of a floor-standing speaker with angled front, compact book-shelf speakers, a centre speaker and a powered subwoofer. The **1-Series** from Acoustic Energy offers unrivalled performance at a price you would not believe.

Stunning Hi-Fi speakers from £199.00



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Sony SRS-X9 | Wireless speaker | £600

How to hit the high-res hot spot

Sony has been a real supporter of the high-resolution revolution, and the SRS-X9 wireless speaker is one of the most exciting additions to its high-res range so far. Three years in the making, it's certainly been worth the wait to get it as good as this.

Combining quality with convenience, the SRS-X9 is capable of streaming files wirelessly via aptX Bluetooth and AirPlay, packs DLNA for wireless networked streaming and is, of course, capable of high-resolution 24-bit/192kHz playback via the speaker's USB-B port. It supports DSD files too. As for other inputs, there's a line-in and standard USB port around the back, plus an ethernet socket for hardwiring to your router.

Quite the box of tricks then, and it's been designed to look the part too, with its premium minimalistic styling. Its glass top panel features a number of touch-sensitive buttons for controlling volume and source, with a proximity sensor that will only light them up when you get close to them.

Armchair operation

If you prefer to make your selections from afar, you can always employ the long, thin remote, which duplicates all the controls that you'll find on the unit in the box.

Behind the removable aluminium grille is a large, centrally placed woofer and two supporting passive radiators, two of Sony's midrange Magnetic Fluid drivers and two tweeters, with two more located on the top panel to help disperse the sound.

These seven drivers are supported by an eight-channel S-Master HX digital amplifier, which Sony has developed specifically for high-res audio, aiming to reduce noise across a wider frequency range. The result is an output of 154W, which just pips the B&W A7 for pure on-paper power.



Connecting to the speaker is really easy. There's a WPS button for a quick connection with compatible routers, but Sony has also created an app called Songpal that helps you get your SRS-X9 speaker onto your wireless network in a few easy steps, as well as control the music you're listening to.

To do this, you'll first have to connect to the speaker via Bluetooth, which is a simple case of searching and pairing (or via NFC with compatible devices), then boot up the app to share your wireless network details. It took us less than five minutes to be up and running, and that's when the fun started.

Once you have a track playing, you're then able to control playback, volume and

Songpal: a friend indeed



The Songpal app is pretty comprehensive, and has a really easy-to-use interface that will allow you to select your source, browse the music on a networked NAS or USB drive and jump into all manner of streaming services, including Spotify, Deezer and TuneIn Radio.

equalisation through the app. We'd say that anyone considering the Sony SRS-X9 should certainly download Songpal to really get the most from their speaker.

Play-it-all capability

There isn't a file format you can't throw at this thing - AAC, MP3, WMA, WAV, AIFF, FLAC and DSD will all play nice, so you shouldn't have a problem playing your whole digital music collection.

We first hooked up our laptop to try out the headline high-res capabilities, and were instantly surprised by the sound that this reasonably compact speaker is capable of. There's a lot of power here, and those tweeters on the top really help to disperse the sound - we tested it in a reasonably large room and it had no problem with making its presence known.

The sound is an impressive one too, with a great sense of scale and a rich, full-bodied tone that is instantly likeable.

In particular, the SRS-X9 shows an expert handling of the lower frequencies, reaching



Behind the front grille a large subwoofer forms the centrepiece of a seven-driver array

There isn't a file format you can't throw at this thing - AAC, MP3, WMA, WAV, AIFF, FLAC and DSD will all play nice, so you shouldn't have a problem playing your whole digital collection

Keeping track of DSD

Direct Stream Digital is a digital format originally developed for archiving purposes. It's also the way music is encoded on SACD discs and is on the rise as a format for downloads



really deep into any bassline without ever compromising on precision and detail.

It's got a decent sense of rhythm too, and is able to switch between tempos and genres with aplomb.

Listen to *Billie Jean* by Michael Jackson at 24-bit/176.4kHz, and that famous pulsing bassline is packed with warmth, punch, texture and weight, and is never heavy-handed. In fact, the Sony is pretty well-balanced across the board, save for an occasional brightness to the treble when really pushed in the volume department.

Playing a 24-bit/88.2kHz FLAC recording of the Rolling Stones' *Gimme Shelter*, for example, we found the opening guitars and percussion to have a slightly harsh edge. Knock the volume down just a few notches from the top though, and the problem is largely solved for most recordings. There is a difference to be heard between high-res and more compressed formats, despite the built-in DSEE HX digital sound-enhancement engine, which Sony says will upscale compressed music to near high-res.

Spot the difference

We found 320kbps streams from Spotify lacked the subtlety, dynamic handling and timing of higher-res material. That hard treble rears its head a little more often at this quality too.

That's not to say things sound bad at this level - far from it. The SRS-X9 offers a seriously listenable, enjoyable sound across the board of file formats and sample rates,

USE IT WITH**MacBook Pro**

You'll want to make use of the SRS-X9's high-res smarts, and Apple's MacBook Pro is a superb laptop with plenty of space to keep tracks stored

but compared with high-res music over a wired connection, there are always going to be some sacrifices to be made for that wireless convenience.

We'd say the B&W A7 just pips the Sony for rhythmic handling, but then the SRS-X9 does much more for £100 less (the A7 is AirPlay only). All of a sudden, that £600 price tag doesn't seem so bad.

The Sony SRS-X9 speaker wasn't three years in the making by accident. It's a carefully considered product, and a multi-talented one at that, all wrapped up in a stylish package. When you buy it, you're not just buying into high-res but into a superb wireless speaker than can pretty much play whatever you want, however you want, and sound superb in the process. It really is a true wireless wonder.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Superb connectivity; big, spacious sound; good file-format/sample rate support; detailed

AGAINST A harsh edge can occasionally creep in at top volumes

VERDICT A do-it-all speaker that puts superb sound quality at the top of its list of priorities

Also consider**B&W A7**

£700 ★★★★★

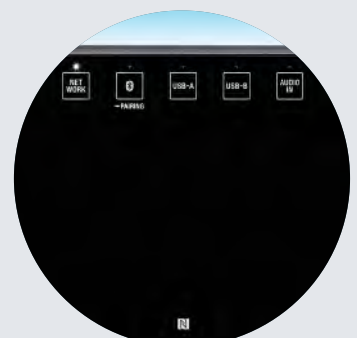
If AirPlay is the most you'll be using, this is a confident performer

**In detail**

Aerial The built-in aerial will help boost the speaker's connectivity strength when wirelessly streaming.



Inputs The two USB ports allow you to connect to all manner of devices, from laptops and tablets to smartphones.



Touch-sensitive buttons A proximity sensor means these touch-sensitive controls appear invisible until you get close to them.



NFC The SRS-X9 packs NFC connectivity, so you can pair compatible devices over Bluetooth using one touch.



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



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made for music and movies



www.Qacoustics.co.uk



Multi-room audio

Multi-room goes mainstream

The world went wireless in 2013, now a raft of new products suggest this year it's all about multi-room

Wireless music - hot on the heels of the digital music revolution - has become one of the most popular product categories on the market as people embrace the convenience of streaming music.

Now it looks like the next logical step, multi-room music, could be set to move into the mainstream in 2014. New products are queuing up to challenge the existing players, with specialist companies and big-hitters both set to bring

systems offering new features and functionality in an effort to ride the multi-room music wave. So what's it all about and what do we have to look forward to?

Getting in on the act

Plenty of new players are poised to enter the market. Samsung started the year by unveiling its M5 and M7 wireless speakers, which can be used to create a multi-room system.

More recently we've seen the launch of Musaica - brainchild of ex-Cambridge Audio engineering head Matthew Bramble. Musaica's system comprises wireless

speakers placed around the home, using wi-fi to stream audio. Elsewhere, Bluesound's high-definition system arrived in the UK, having been rolled out across the US by NAD and PSB's parent company, Lenbrook.

And Naim is rumoured to be readying a multi-room music system, teasing the launch of 'a new kind of system'.

A competitive market

All this means more multi-room choice - a good thing if you're a consumer, making it more likely there's a wireless streaming solution for you.

Arguably the most basic way to get started is with AirPlay or Bluetooth, with systems such as the Arcam rCube and Pure Jongo

offering you varying degrees of multi-room functionality.

After a more advanced system? Since 2002, Sonos has been our go-to system of choice for 'wireless hi-fi', and remains the company to beat: Sonos's huge success has acted as a key catalyst for the new competitors we're seeing.

Sonos is the answer?

Of course, Sonos doesn't have all the answers. There's no AirPlay or Bluetooth, nor any sign of high-res audio support.

The firm has declared 2014 its 'year of software', saying it's unlikely we'll see new Sonos hardware. Could the lack of any new products or connectivity options open the door to rivals?

Sonos has expanded its multi-room product range since it formed in 2002



Streaming apps and services

Island of the streams...

Not only is there more choice if you're looking to sort yourself out with a multi-room music streaming system, but there are also plenty of options when it comes to the streaming apps and services currently available to you.



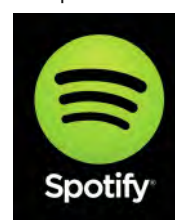
streaming providers to consider, including BBC iPlayer, iHeartRadio and TuneIn.

When you come to decide which wireless multi-room system is for you, it might be wise to have a think about which online services you

In our last issue we took a look at the main players in the world of online music streaming. But, of course, there's also internet radio

want to or already use and make sure they are supported or even integrated from the start.

Sonos has now added Google Music Play to an impressive roster of music services that



includes the likes of Spotify and Rdio.

Newer products may well lag behind on specific apps, so it's worth checking before you take the plunge with a particular product.

* More time to catch up

You'll soon have 30 days to catch up with your favourite BBC programmes with iPlayer
www.whfcm/iPlayer30Days



* Lumigon's new T2 HD

Danish firm launches new high-end smartphone with B&O audio technology
www.whfcm/LumigonT2



Bluesound's system is one of the newest additions to the multi-room market



New rivals, new features?

If wireless music is one of the biggest hi-fi trends of 2014, then high-resolution audio is another. It's certainly gaining momentum and - already - there are systems offering 24-bit/192kHz playback. This feature, and a general focus on high-end sound quality, could be a key differentiator for new products.

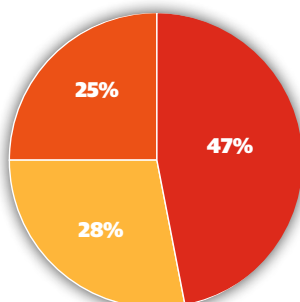
Bluesound's high-res music support is front and centre of the company's plans, while the likes of Mosaic and Simple Audio also support superior sound formats. Marrying multi-room music and high-res audio certainly combines two key trends.

Lighting the way?

High-res capability is just one way in which multi-room systems can stand out, and already there are signs of designers innovating yet further.

Mosaic, for example, promises to integrate your lighting, letting you to set the mood to the music.

Our House - where do we listen to our music?



47% living/family room
28% bedroom 25% other

* Consumer Electronics Association, April 2014

One thing we can be sure of is that multi-room music is growing in popularity - see chart above.

If multi-room music continues its ascent during 2014, it will be no shock to see new and established manufacturers move into the market. We can also expect more innovation as systems look for a selling point that sets them apart as the wireless battle heats up.

The market is now more congested and that will mean more choice - a good thing if you're a consumer, making it more likely there's a home wireless streaming solution out there for you

Going wireless? The alternative options



Bluetooth Speakers

Perhaps one of the most affordable alternatives to getting a multi-room wireless system is a Bluetooth speaker.

They're particularly useful if what you're looking for is a greater sense of flexibility and portability for your music - just hook up an enabled device like a smartphone/tablet.

There's even a multi-room Bluetooth option with Pure's Jongo speakers: www.whfcm/BluetoothSpeakers



Beep

A curious little gadget at first glance, this is a device that will plug in to your existing system and turn it wireless.

It's described as an audio version of Google Chromecast - once you're plugged in, a free iOS and Android app lets you play your music through powered speakers, whether direct from your device or streamed from the internet. It also promises integration with a range of online services.

Music servers

There's no denying that a dedicated separates system will deliver better sound quality. If that's something you'd rather have over the flexibility of a system like Sonos, a NAS device will stream music to a networked player or client such as Cyrus's Stream XP2-QX or Naim's NDS/555 PS (right). Want more rooms? You'll need more streamers. It's expensive - but think of the quality.



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

* Inspired by its loudspeakers, Klipsch has unveiled the new Reference R6 and R6i in-ear buds. <http://whfcm/KlipschR6>



1 Finlux 4K TVs from £2000
Finlux has announced three new, budget 4K TVs. Screen sizes on offer are 50in, 65in (left) and 85in. The £3000 65in is a passive 3D set and comes with eight pairs of glasses while the £15,000 85in comes with a wi-fi dongle and 2D-3D conversion. Specification for the 50in model has yet to be released. The TVs were officially unveiled at The Gadget Show Live at the NEC in Birmingham. Release dates have yet to be announced. Head to <http://whfcm/Finlux4K> for more information.

TOP 5 New launches



3 Amazon Fire TV \$99
The Fire TV is Amazon's answer to Apple TV and the Google Chromecast HDMI dongle. It offers access to Amazon Prime Instant Video, Netflix, Flixster and more. Music streaming services include Pandora and TuneIn Radio. It kicks out 1080p video and supports Dolby Digital Plus surround sound. It's available now in the US; UK pricing and availability is yet to be announced. Check out <http://whfcm/1dNtOdC> for more.

2 Sonus Faber Extrema speakers €30,000
The Extrema speakers mark a 30-year anniversary for Sonus Faber. The unique cabinet design is made from a mixture of carbon fibre and wood, along with a touch of metal. The tweeter uses a beryllium dome coated with a diamond skin, and an adjustable passive radiator allows users to fine-tune bass performance. Only 30 pairs of these speakers will be produced, so be sure to get your pre-order in quick! For more information, head to <http://whfcm/SFExtrema>



4 Samsung Galaxy S5 £tbc
The long awaited Galaxy S5 is finally here. Its 5.1in Full HD screen sits within an 8.1mm thick plastic body, with a soft-touch back panel. Under the hood you'll find a 2.5GHz Snapdragon 801 processor with 2GB of RAM. A range of Samsung features are included, such as health and fitness apps. A 16MP camera is on board, along with a 2800mAh battery. For the full review, head to <http://whfcm/S5phone>

5 Sony MAP-S1 £700
The MAP-S1, or Multi Audio Player System 1, is the latest addition to Sony's range of High Resolution Audio products. It features a 100W amplifier, CD player, tuner, Bluetooth and Apple AirPlay. It handles 24-bit audio files and a range of standard formats. Sony's S-Master HX Audio Amplifier is on board to reduce noise and distortion. A pair of speakers is also available. Want to know more? Head to <http://whfcm/SonyMAPS1>



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Easy Listening

Forget wires – stream your music to these speakers. The only difficult bit is deciding which pair to buy

Wouldn't it be great if you could simply link your smartphone to a pair of stereo speakers, and just press play?

With these seven pairs of wireless speakers, you can do just that. For those wanting a hi-fi-style set-up for your smartphone and laptop-based music collection, these speakers are designed for your convenience. They have their own amplification built in, and they all have Bluetooth streaming on board.

We think there's something for everyone in this test. There are big speakers, little speakers, simple speakers and feature-rich speakers. All seven pairs are jostling for a place on your desk – but which will you pick? It's time to find out.



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



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whf.cm/playlist2014

Listen to our favourite tracks every month!

WHATS ON TEST

Audio Pro Addon T8
£250 [page 28](#)

Blue Aura X30
£290 [page 29](#)

Philips Fidelio E2
£300 [page 30](#)

Pure Jongo S3
£340 [page 32](#)

Q Acoustics Q-BT3
£350 [page 33](#)

Roth OLI POWA-5
£250 [page 34](#)

Ruark Audio MR1
£300 [page 36](#)



Audio Pro

Addon T8

£250



Bind 'em fast

Make sure the connecting wires are fastened tight in their binding posts, as they had a habit of slipping out in our test even when we thought they were secure



The Pros turn a deft hand to any song, confidently playing delicate vocal-led tunes from Kimbra in the same breath as synthesiser-heavy industrial rock from Nine Inch Nails

"They're tiny!" Those were the first words we uttered when unboxing the new Audio Pro Addon T8s - the latest wireless speakers from Swedish hi-fi manufacturer Audio Pro. They're petite and beautifully finished, and once we start streaming songs over Bluetooth we're hooked by their lively and confident sound.

The T8s are punchy and energetic. They're more powerful and dynamic than their small stature suggests, and are driven by a 36W per channel Class D amp inside the master speaker (with all the connections). We don't expect a huge spread of sound from such small speakers, but the T8s go fairly loud, and confidently.

There's a sparkle to the sound that holds our attention, with plenty of detail and zippy timing keeping us engaged as we stream song after song from our Spotify playlists. The piano notes tinkle fluidly in *Life on Mars?* while David Bowie's voice reaches clear, strong highs. There's decent weight to the sound, although the rumbling bass could be a touch tauter and deeper to match the low-end prowess of the rival Ruark MR1s.

Confidence across the board

The Audio Pros turn a deft hand to any song, confidently playing delicate vocal-led tunes from Kimbra in the same breath as synthesiser-heavy industrial rock from Nine Inch Nails.

They're not quite as expressive and insightful as the Award-winning Ruarks, though, which have set the performance standard for small desktop speakers.

Small and beautiful

Standing just 16cm tall and 10cm wide, the T8s take up about as much space on your desk as a large cup of coffee. And they can be pushed up against the wall without affecting the sound too much.

The finish is impeccable: clean and crisp Scandinavian design with no clutter. The finely built cabinets are available in white or black, and the matt lacquer finish is smooth to the touch.

The remote control also gets a quality finish. Milled out of a solid piece of aluminium, it's a far cry from the flimsy plastic remotes you often get at this price. It looks classy, feels reassuringly weighty, and has responsive buttons.

Bluetooth is the main connection here, with the higher-quality aptX codec boosting the streaming quality. Pairing takes a few seconds, and we don't experience any dropouts when streaming from a smartphone.

There's a pair of RCA inputs and a 3.5mm input for other sources, (MP3 players that don't have Bluetooth, for example) and a subwoofer output.

There's no optical input, but the T8s can be used as TV speakers by connecting to the analogue inputs. A single LED light changes colour depending on the input chosen: blue for Bluetooth, red for the RCA inputs, green for 3.5mm. It's a shame the USB port can't be used for charging smartphones or tablets; it's reserved solely for plugging in an optional Audio Pro wireless receiver (RX100; £85, or RXD200; £150) for linking to wi-fi.

Included in the box is a pair of rubber feet that angle the speakers upwards. It's a nice addition, although we found the T8s sound just as capable without them.

There may be speakers with greater subtlety, better rhythm and more refinement, but the Audio Pro Addon T8s are great for their size and price. Their punchy detail and lively character are enjoyable, while that stunning finish and petite size will garner many fans.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Punchy; plenty of detail; upbeat sound; stunning finish; size; quality remote

AGAINST Rivals are subtler and more articulate; bass could go deeper and be tauter

VERDICT They're not perfect, but these lively, beautifully built speakers are enjoyable



Classy, responsive alloy remote feels reassuringly weighty

Blue Aura

X30

£290

★★★★☆

Up against it

At 145mm deep, the X30s are unlikely to give you a problem with space. But if you need to shove them against a wall, they won't mind. In fact, the sound improves



The build, design and size of the Blue Auras are all spot-on for speakers of their kind, but these X30s face fierce competition from well-established, more talented rivals

The Blue Aura X30s are yet another petite pair of £300ish Bluetooth stereo speakers, but this time they're from a brand we haven't reviewed before.

Founded in 2010, this Cambridgeshire-based audio company specialises in wireless and Bluetooth speaker systems, with ease of use given as much prominence as sound quality.

The X30s look promising: compact, well built, and with a good spread of wireless and wired features. But can they match the class-leaders?

Simple set-up

Bluetooth is the main method of playing, and pairing with an Apple iPhone 5S is swift and easy. The Blue Auras also have NFC (Near Field Communication), and a quick tap with the Google Nexus 5 gets us connected with minimal fuss.

Play *Didn't It Rain* by Hugh Laurie and the Blue Aura X30s sound pleasant. They have a smooth presentation - perhaps a touch too smooth - that lends itself nicely to low-quality streams from Spotify. The X30s do have the higher-quality aptX codec to help boost Bluetooth streaming, and while that improvement is apparent in rivals such as the upgraded Roth OLi POWA-5s, the X30s aren't quite as distinct.

Neutral Milk Hotel's *In The Aeroplane Over The Sea* sounds quite muffled and cloudy and, coupled with a limited

dynamic reach, the overall soundfield can get rather congested. Voices are smooth and direct, but they're not as natural or expressive as on the Ruark MR1s. We would have liked a clearer and more articulate sound.

That lively bass in *Didn't It Rain* isn't quite as punchy and agile as we'd like, either. The low end doesn't go that deep, and it can plod along somewhat. On the other hand, the top end is well behaved and has a sweetness to it. Timing might not be all it could be, but there are no harsh edges with the Blue Auras.

These speakers are the ideal desktop size, similar to the dinky Audio Pro Addon T8s. They're small enough to sit unobtrusively next to a laptop without taking up too much space.

Quality finish

Build quality is sturdy, while the faux-leather finish gives a soft but tough texture. The X30s are available in three finishes: graphite, sahara, or arctic white. Inside each speaker is a 20mm soft-dome tweeter and a 3.5in paper cone, while the master speaker houses a 25W-per-channel class D amplifier.

Bluetooth streaming is the highlight feature here, but wired connections haven't been forgotten. A pair of RCA

inputs (for analogue sources) and a digital optical input (to connect to a TV or laptop) are situated on the master speaker's back panel. There's no 3.5mm input, which strikes us as an odd omission - those with non-Bluetooth MP3 players won't be best pleased.

A USB port for an optional wireless receiver is provided, as is a subwoofer output should you want to add some much-needed oomph to the X30s.

The remote is small and basic, but we like the big buttons, and it's responsive.

Pleasant as they are, the X30s aren't the subtlest or most involving listen. The similarly petite Audio Pro Addon T8s deliver a clearer, livelier sound, and cost £40 less than the Blue Auras' £290.

The build, design and size are all spot-on for speakers of their kind, but the X30s face fierce competition from well established, more talented rivals.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Pleasant listen; decent, smooth treble; petite size; good build and finish; easy to use

AGAINST Sound could be cleaner, subtler and more organised; needs a tauter, punchier bass

VERDICT Blue Aura got it half right: great size and features, but the sound isn't the best



One of the smaller, simpler remotes, but we like the big buttons

Philips

Fidelio E2

£300

★★★★☆

Up front and all around

Artificially induced 'surround' effects in stereo set-ups often compromise sonic cohesion, but that effect is minimal with the E2s and the soundstage is more open

The E2s are wonderfully pleasant to listen to. There's plenty of detail to bring out the delicate plucked strings, piano notes and quirky vocal range of Regina Spektor's *Fidelity*

The Philips Fidelio E2s aren't just Bluetooth speakers. They're a desktop stereo system, a soundbar alternative, and a smartphone charging station too.

That's a whole bunch of features that you don't usually expect from a £300 pair of wireless speakers. Add in the elegant design and smooth detail, and it's no wonder they grab our attention amid all the other talented contenders.

Elegance in any setting

These speakers are designed to look good just about anywhere in the house: standing next to our flatscreen (or curved) TV, forming the main stereo system in our living room, or perched on our desk next to a laptop or smartphone.

They're quite tall though, and could be deemed bulky, especially next to more compact designs such as the tiny Audio Pro Addon T8 and Ruark MR1s.

We're particularly fond of the E2s' 'rocker' control design. The polished wood top cap on the master speaker subtly rocks as you tap the sides to control power, volume and input. Our one niggle is that there's a second's delay between command and effect.

AptX Bluetooth is expected; HDMI input with ARC (Audio Return Channel) and Dolby Digital decoding is a bonus. The HDMI input further makes the case for the E2s to be used as TV speakers - they'll easily improve any flatscreen's

thin sound and give a surround-sound boost while they're at it.

An optical input, coaxial input and a 3.5mm jack are also available to connect multiple sources, and the USB port will charge your smartphone or tablet (but won't play music from it).

Bluetooth pairing is quick and easy, but you can also tap your NFC-enabled device against the NFC tag for an even quicker connection.

The supplied remote control (small, responsive) offers tonal controls, and an audio sync adjustment - a thoughtful touch from Philips.

Elegant in looks, elegant in sound - the Fidelio E2s are wonderfully pleasant to listen to. There's plenty of detail to bring out the delicate plucked strings, piano notes and quirky vocal range of Regina Spektor's *Fidelity*. It's a clear and open sound, one that spreads out easily and evenly across the room. There really is no need to employ the surround sound option when streaming music.

Smooth and easy

The sweet midrange and open treble deliver a smooth and measured sound, one with no hint of sharpness or roughness. The E2s have a decent, if somewhat laidback, rhythm and aim for

easy listening over long hours rather than immediate and constant excitement. There's nothing wrong with that - it's what makes us warm to the Philips speakers, after all - but rivals such as Q Acoustics' Q-BT3 and the Ruark MR1s deliver a snappier and punchier rhythm, and unearth subtler detail.

We have stronger reservations about the E2s' low end performance. The bass isn't as insightful as the Ruarks, and can sound a bit woolly. Stricter control and agility would give the sound some much-needed punch and excitement.

The Philips Fidelio E2s have plenty to sing about: the luxurious design, the healthy spread of connections (especially the enviable HDMI input), and versatile use. While they may not sound as transparent and enthusiastic enough to please everyone, we don't think they'll be short of admirers.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Smooth and easygoing rhythm; clear and open sound; great design; good features

AGAINST Direct rivals are subtler, punchier and have better timing; unconvincing bass

VERDICT Classy, versatile speakers that are well connected and very listenable



Philips has included audio sync adjustment on the neat remote

A box that knows no bounds.

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Pure

Jongo S3

£340

★★★★☆



Download the app

The free Pure Connect app, which you'll need to set up the S3s, gives access to internet radio and Pure Music; Pure's on-demand music subscription service



Since each Jongo has its own power, amplification and built-in battery, they're not restricted by cables connecting a pair, giving them another tick in the flexibility column

This is an interesting set-up. We're big fans of the Pure Jongo S3 - the small and colourful portable wireless speaker that comes with its own wi-fi, Bluetooth and battery. It's well designed, sounds great and, more importantly for this test, it can be paired with another S3 to create a stereo system.

It's a feature we've seen in other single-unit wireless speakers (such as the UE Boom), but we've never actually reviewed speakers that have it. Does it work? Do these two sound as capable as dedicated wireless stereo speakers, such as the Ruarks, Audio Pros and Q Acoustics in this supertest?

No connection without Connect

Set-up requires a bit of patience, a wi-fi connection and the Pure Connect app (free for iOS and Android). The app is crucial for pairing the two S3s together and assigning left and right speakers.

We stumble across our first hurdle once we're all paired up ready to go: we can only play music that's stored on the smart device being used, and only via the Pure Connect app. On one hand, the Connect app is neatly organised, fairly easy to use (barring some interface hiccups) and gives you access to the Pure Digital Connect streaming music and live radio service (£5/month). On the other hand, you can't play Spotify, BBC Radio, Deezer or any other streaming

service. And you can't use Bluetooth to stream to both speakers at the same time - you have to stick with wi-fi (and the app) to play music. The 3.5mm input can't be used in stereo mode, either. It's a frustratingly closed system.

This is the case at the time of writing. However, Pure has promised us that in late-April (ie by the time you read this) a software update will enable Bluetooth streaming to both speakers. This will solve all our problems, as you'll be able to stream from third-party apps such as Spotify. Sure, the app is still needed for the set-up, but this update offers a lot more flexibility. We've seen a brief demo of this new update in action, and are happy to report that it works.

Play Jimi Hendrix's *Voodoo Child* and we're struck by how big the S3s sound. Using a pair of Jongsos rather than one gives a wider, more authoritative presentation, and it easily fills the room with a strong delivery that also goes fairly loud (for the speakers' size).

What's more, the clever driver arrangement (four 19mm tweeters placed on each side of the cuboid speakers) integrates really well with the upward-facing 9cm subwoofer.

It's not the clearest and most precise sound, though. There's a surprising

amount of heft to the bass, but it doesn't have the agility found in rival speakers such as the Ruark MR1s, and the treble could do with a touch more bite.

Part of the Jongsos' appeal is just how small and sturdy they are. They feel reassuringly weighty and durable. The finish is smart (available in white or black), while the removable mesh grilles come in black, red, green or yellow.

Since each Jongo has its own power, amplification (20W for each) and built-in battery, they're not restricted by cables connecting a pair, giving them another tick in the flexibility column. The battery lasts for around 10 hours, too.

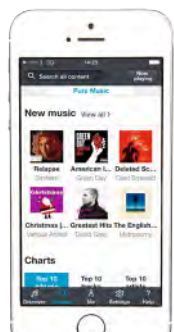
The imminent software update saves this Jongo S3 stereo set-up from a three-star rating, but we have to admit to being a touch disappointed with the sound; at this price level it needs to do a little more to challenge the class leaders.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Strong, dynamic sound; portability; battery life; compact, durable and smart design

AGAINST Needs a dose of clarity and subtlety; rivals are more refined; app can be a little fiddly

VERDICT A decent, flexible stereo system, but class rivals offer a more insightful performance



The Pure Connect app is free for iOS (as shown) and Android

Q Acoustics

Q-BT3

£350

★★★★★

The middle ground

The Q-BT3s might be larger than the tiny Audio Pro Addon T8s and Ruark MR1s, but they're more compact than the bulky Roths and tall Philips Fidelio F2s

Stream *Ones That Got Away* and the guitar strings have texture, the drums hit with satisfying impact, the bassline is funky and agile, and the piano notes glide effortlessly

The Q Acoustics Q-BT3s tick all the right boxes: they look smart, they're versatile, and they sound good. Who wouldn't be tempted?

Ever since we first reviewed these speakers a few issues ago, we've been itching to pit them against their peers. For £300, Philips Fidelio E2s, for example, offer a variety of connection options, while the Award-winning Ruark MR1s (also £300) pose the biggest threat in terms of sound performance. How will the Q Acoustics fare against their rivals?

Admirably so, as we found out. From the off, the Q-BT3s remind us why we were so impressed with them first time round. A clear and smooth presentation in an airy, detailed soundstage - these speakers are incredibly easy to listen to.

An engaging performance

Stream *Ones That Got Away* by Gabby Young and Other Animals over Bluetooth, and the Q-BT3s deliver an animated performance. The guitar strings have texture, the drums hit with satisfying impact, the bassline is funky and agile, and the piano notes glide along effortlessly. It's a wonderfully musical and engaging performance.

There's a great deal of detail on board, and the Q Acoustics stay poised and in control even when pushed. The midrange is richly detailed, and there's plenty of attack, too.

They do sacrifice a bit of aggression and transparency in favour of that smooth character, with whining electric guitars and bass notes rounded off a touch. The Ruark MR1s, in comparison, don't hold back: they're a bit more revealing and articulate when it comes to digging up subtle detail. But that doesn't take away from just how easygoing and enjoyable the Q Acoustics are to listen to in the long run.

Premium feel

Build quality is excellent. The cabinets are sturdy, reassuringly hefty and have a premium feel to them thanks, in part, to the smart matt finish, available in 'jet black', 'juice red' or 'urban white'.

You'll feel the need to clear space for the Q Acoustics, but these speakers aren't fussy with positioning. Connection options are numerous, too: along with Bluetooth streaming, there are optical, RCA and 3.5mm inputs on the back of the master speaker, plus an output for a powered subwoofer.

While the Philips and Roth speakers in this test have added extras (a USB charging port would have been nice here), the Q Acoustics remain a versatile pair of powered speakers. Use them as a TV soundbar alternative, or a

replacement for your old dock system. Hook them up to your games console, or give them pride of place on your desk to play your laptop-based tunes - you can fit them into just about any system.

The wafer-thin remote control is neatly laid out and easy to use, with a single source button cycling through all the inputs. The speaker automatically goes into pairing mode when Bluetooth is selected; the LED on the right speaker helpfully blinks green (analogue), white (optical) or blue (Bluetooth).

Amid rival speakers flaunting their features to get noticed, the Q-BT3s remain assuredly near the top of the class. Their feature-rich package and smart looks are attractive, and their sound doesn't let the side down. They're not perfect, but they deliver the kind of all-round smooth, composed, detailed performance we could listen to for days.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Plenty of detail; wide soundstage; smooth presentation; fluid dynamics; excellent build

AGAINST Rivals are subtler, punchier and more transparent; no USB charging port

VERDICT Performance and features that set the bar in this company - highly tempting



Keep it simple: the slim remote could hardly be easier to use

Roth

OLi POWA-5

£250

★★★★☆

Size matters

Desktop speakers? Possibly, but you'll need a pretty big desk. Wherever you put them, their high-gloss finish – in black, red or white – is sure to make an impression



Where the previous version of these speakers was rather boomy and in need of more refinement, the updated pair, with aptX coding, deliver a cleaner, more agile performance

When we reviewed these Roth speakers last year, we liked how undemanding they were to listen to. Since then, the OLi POWA-5s have been upgraded to include aptX coding for better-quality Bluetooth streams.

New and improved

Has it made a difference? Definitely. Where the previous version was rather boomy and in need of more refinement, the updated pair deliver a cleaner, more agile performance. It's an altogether more grown-up sound, with a decent amount of detail – plus the solid, chunky character that we liked still in place. The Roths happily charge along, delivering a huge-scale and airy sound powered by a respectable 80W class AB amplifier.

They've got a bit more bite and kick to them now. The treble shines without any harsh edges, but can stick out somewhat. You might be tempted to tone it down using the remote's tonal controls, but don't – that just dulls it down, robbing these speakers of their newfound excitement. While they're no longer as boomy as before, we'd still advise giving the Roths plenty of space to breathe.

Voices are strong (and pushed a little forward), but a little more clarity and subtlety would fully flesh out the emotion and attitude in vocals.

There's a hint of brashness going hand in hand with the Roth's new upbeat

sound, which rears its head with songs with a prominent basslines and heavy drum beats. Nelly Furtado and Timbaland's *Promiscuous* sounds overly aggressive and cluttered, but switch to a gentler, simpler arrangement, such as Adele's *Someone Like You* and the Roths calm down and sound more balanced.

The POWA-5s sound bigger than any other speakers on test here, but the Q Acoustics Q-BT3s are more composed and balanced, and the Ruark MR1s more nuanced and tightly controlled.

Not just a pretty fascia

The Roths are every bit as chunky and solidly built as before, although the fascia has been smartened up with a circular disc for the LED display. We do wish the cheap-feeling volume control had been redesigned as well – it's at odds with the rest of the quality finish.

Given their size (27 x 18 x 21cm), we would advise putting the Roths on stands for a cleaner, more organised sound. Prop them next to your TV and they're a decent alternative to the thin sound that plagues most flatscreen TVs.

These are among the most well-connected wireless speakers we've come across (although the Philips Fidelio E2s and their HDMI input are giving

everyone in this test a run for their money). Alongside the Bluetooth connection, the Roths offer two pairs of optical inputs (for connecting TV and laptop), a pair of RCA line inputs, a 3.5mm input, and a subwoofer output. Twin USB charging ports is generous.

The small, plastic remote control is crowded with buttons and controls, but it's straightforward enough to use.

We're glad the OLi POWA-5s were given a second chance to spread their wings. The pleasant performance is bolstered by a more upbeat, snappier and exciting sonic upgrade, and their varied connectivity is enviable, particularly for just £250

The Roth OLi PowA-5s are not quite as nimble as the Audio Pro Addon T8s, nor as precise and detailed as the little Ruarks, but if you like the look of them, we'd recommend an audition.



Lots of buttons, but this remote is clear and easy to operate

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Decent detail; powerful, weighty sound; huge scale; robust build; excellent connectivity

AGAINST Need a hint more refinement and detail; bass can get too excited; very large

VERDICT Better than before, but the sound still falls a little short of a five-star rating

Panasonic

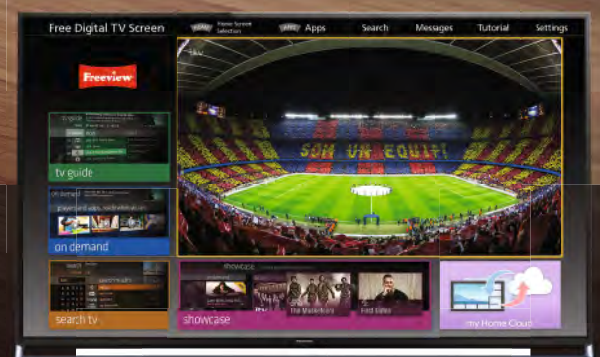
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Ruark Audio

MR1

£300

★★★★★

Keep it natural

You can buy the MR1s with a lacquer finish in black or white, but we think there's something special about the beautifully crafted walnut option



You can hear every detail, every intake of breath, the raspy edges and warbling power chords - it's startlingly intimate and raw, as if the artist were singing in the room with you

Throughout this Supertest we've encountered speakers that sound bigger than these Ruarks, more open, smoother or richer, or that offer more versatile features. But none of them deliver the depth of subtlety or the astonishingly revealing, powerful sound of the MR1s.

Digging for detail

The amount of detail unearthed by the Ruarks is staggering. Take the way voices are delivered; you can hear every detail, every intake of breath, the raspy edges and warbling power chords - it's startlingly intimate and raw, as if the artist were singing in the room with you.

The vocals are seamlessly integrated with the rest of the musical arrangement. Instruments are precisely placed in an immersive (if not particularly spacious) soundfield. The Ruarks may not be as large-scale as the Roths or as elegant as the Q Acoustics, but they're more dynamically subtle. Play Sbrkt's *Wildfire* and there's plenty of space left over even after the treble has reached its clear highs, and that gorgeously squelchy bassline goes incredibly deep and is full of rich texture - it's a thoroughly satisfying sound.

The Ruarks have a strong hold on rhythm: they're agile, punchy and the edges of notes stop and start with precision. The Dead Weather's *60 Feet Tall* is a stern test of any system, but the

Ruarks convey the brooding tone, the build up of tension, and the space between instruments with confidence and ease. There's controlled power coursing through the Ruark's veins, too, as Rage Against the Machine's *Killing In The Name Of* clearly shows.

The beautifully crafted wooden enclosures are the ideal desktop size, and will easily fit into most small or cluttered spaces. We'd suggest placing them close to a wall to add more weight and punch to the bass.

The radio-like power and volume dial on top of the right speaker is another great design touch. The volume changes are subtle and instant, and a press on the dial initiates Bluetooth pairing mode (or you can use the slim remote control). Connection is swift and stable.

Bluetooth or 3.5mm

If you're after multiple connections, you're going to have to look elsewhere. The Ruark MR1s operate solely by Bluetooth (with the popular aptX codec for higher-quality streaming), and a 3.5mm input. And that's it.

To its credit, you can connect various audio sources, such as an MP3 player, laptop and even a TV, to that single analogue input. But it's not as

convenient as having dedicated RCA or optical inputs, as you'll need to invest in separate cables and adapters.

There is a subwoofer output, although we find the Ruarks talented enough in the bass department. You can also turn the MR1s into a portable wireless system by adding a £50 battery pack.

If we were to compare features and connections across the board, the Ruark MR1s would come up short. But we're not hankering after extra inputs, not when these speakers sound so capable and detailed using just Bluetooth and an Apple iPhone 5.

Despite the presence of more versatile and large-scale speakers in this test, we keep coming back to these Ruarks. Every song we listen to just sounds more exciting, more detailed and interesting through the MR1s. In terms of pure sound performance, they're sublime.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Stunning detail; articulate and revealing; subtle dynamics; deep bass; lovely finish

AGAINST Limited connectivity; rival speakers have bigger, more spacious soundfields

VERDICT If you're after the best-sounding desktop speakers, look no further



The slim remote sits neatly in your hand and works seamlessly

Here comes summer

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TEST VERDICT

THE WINNER

Ruark Audio MR1

£300 ★★★★★



While some dazzle with features, the diminutive **Ruark Audio MR1s** concentrate on sound quality and deliver a captivating blend of power and detail that's good enough to see off the best of a talented bunch

If there's one thing we've learned from this supertest, it's that these wireless stereo speakers are a multi-talented bunch.

They're not merely content to sit as desktop speakers; they're now moving into your TV room and flaunting their skills as soundbar replacements. Or they're lounging in your garden or kitchen, ready for whenever you want to stream some tunes. There are speakers here that are seriously impressive in the sonic department, and wouldn't look out of place as the centrepiece of your hi-fi system.

With multiple connections finding their way into these solidly built (some stylishly so) speakers, there's a world of possibilities for using these versatile boxes.

Versatility, size, build quality and range of features are all under scrutiny here, but it was pure sound quality that won out in the end.

It's those Ruark MR1s. They won our Best Desktop Speaker Award last year, and it looks like they may just hold on

to that title for yet another year. No other speakers here come close to the depth of detail, dynamics, or sheer raw vocal talent that the Ruarks deliver – and do so with such power, grace and confidence. Admittedly, they're feature-light, but we reckon that's an acceptable price to pay for that gorgeous finish and hi-fi-grade sound.

Close, but no cigar

The Q Acoustics Q-BT3s came close to taking the win. With their smart-looking finish, good spread of connections and clean, smooth detail, they have pretty much every box ticked. They define 'easy listening', but the Ruarks edge forward with a punchier, more faithful and captivating listen.

The easy-going – and good-looking – Philips Fidelio E2s have the distinction of being the only speakers here with an HDMI input, and the surround-sound option clearly points to its TV and AV intentions. A little more pep and snap would have them worrying the Ruarks.

The updated Roth OLi POWA-5s sound leaner, tighter, and more exciting than before; a touch more refinement would work wonders. They're the biggest speakers here – in size and sound – and are more suited to being placed on stands rather than on a desk.

At the other end of the scale, the tiny Audio Pro Addon T8s are full of energy and sparkle, and just a layer of insight away from worrying the Ruarks.

With their compact, portable design and multiroom streaming features, we were excited to put the Pure Jongo S3s in a stereo set-up. It wasn't quite the effusive performance we were expecting, though. They sound integrated and expansive, yet not as clear and concise as a solo S3.

Bringing up the rear are the Blue Aura X30s. They're similar in size and style to the Audio Pros, but lack the sonic grades needed to pass that three-star barrier.

This is a diverse collection of speakers, but when you've got £300 to spend and sound quality is a top priority, the Ruark MR1s get our vote every time.


Audio Pro Addon T8
£250 ★★★★★

Powered Yes • **Inputs** RCA, 3.5mm • **Bluetooth** Yes – aptX • **USB charging** No • **Power** 72W • **Finishes** 2 • **Dimensions (hwd)** 160 x 100 x 140mm

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


Blue Aura X30
£290 ★★★★★

Powered Yes • **Inputs** RCA, optical • **Bluetooth** Yes – aptX • **USB charging** No • **Power** 50W • **Finishes** 3 • **Dimensions (hwd)** 175 x 110 x 145mm

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


Philips Fidelio E2
£300 ★★★★★

Powered Yes • **Inputs** RCA, HDMI, optical, coaxial • **Bluetooth** Yes – aptX • **USB charging** Yes • **Power** 100W • **Finishes** 1 • **Dimensions (hwd)** 305 x 160 x 160mm

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


Pure Jongo S3
£340 ★★★★★

Powered Yes • **Inputs** 3.5mm, wi-fi • **Bluetooth** Yes • **USB charging** No • **Power** 40W • **Finishes** 2 • **Dimensions (hwd)** 130 x 130 x 140mm

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


Q Acoustics Q-BT3
£350 ★★★★★

Powered Yes • **Inputs** RCA, 3.5mm, optical • **Bluetooth** Yes – aptX • **USB charging** Yes • **Power** 100W • **Finishes** 3 • **Dimensions (hwd)** 240 x 150 x 230mm

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


Roth OLi POWA-5
£250 ★★★★★

Powered Yes • **Inputs** RCA, 3.5mm, 2x optical • **Bluetooth** Yes – aptX • **USB charging** Yes (x 2) • **Power** 80W • **Finishes** 3 • **Dimensions (hwd)** 270 x 175 x 205mm

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

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
TEST WINNER

Ruark Audio MR1
£300 ★★★★★

Powered Yes • **Inputs** 3.5mm • **Bluetooth** Yes – aptX • **USB charging** No • **Power** 20W • **Finishes** 3 • **Dimensions (hwd)** 170 x 130 x 130mm

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

THINGS TO CONSIDER:
aptX

Promising higher-quality streams over Bluetooth, this increasingly popular codec shows that manufacturers are serious about delivering better wireless sound quality. Make sure your smartphone supports the codec.

Size

What size speaker you choose depends entirely on your personal preference and available space.

Connections

Bluetooth is the easiest, but wired connections open up more uses for stereo speakers. Make sure they have a pair of phono inputs or a 3.5mm plus an optical input for connecting laptops, MP3 players or TVs.

SYSTEM BUILDER


Smartphone
HTC One M8
★★★★★

Ample power and storage make HTC's flagship perfect for Bluetooth streaming



Music player
Sony NWZ-ZX1
£550 ★★★★★

A talented player with fine headphone output and wide file compatibility



Laptop
Apple MacBook Pro
£1000

While any laptop will do, the MacBook has a great storage capacity

The Special One

Tannoy Revolution DC6T SE



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2012

STEREO SPEAKERS

BEST FLOORSTANDER £700-£1500

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

STEREO SPEAKERS

BEST FLOORSTANDER £800-£1500



TANNOY®

tannoy.com

Transfer windows

Digital-to-analogue converters can be the key to boosting your music files and here we're on a scouting trip to test four of the best. So which one is the game changer?



Arcam AirDAC
£400 [page 43](#)

Denon DA-300USB
£330 [page 43](#)

Myryad Z20
£395 [page 45](#)

NAD D D 1050
£399 [page 45](#)

From phones and laptops, to CD players and streamers, DACs are everywhere - but the job they do isn't always quite up to scratch. Opting for a dedicated external DAC, at a level to suit your system, is a good way of getting the most from your music, from low sample rates all the way up to high-resolution tracks. They come in all shapes and sizes, with some including extras such as headphone stages and wireless connectivity. We consider four contenders in a similar price range to see which one comes top of the pile.

ARCAM *airDAC* £400



1 It's fair to say Arcam has put its airDAC in a rather tricky position. At £400, it comes in at the same price as the company's excellent five-star irDAC - but compare the two and, well, the irDAC wins every time in terms of pure audio prowess.

However, the airDAC's big selling point is right there in its name - it offers Apple's AirPlay technology, bringing wireless connectivity to your system in a simple one-box solution. Set-up is reasonably pain-free, and requires you either to hardwire the airDAC directly via ethernet, or access a simple web interface. Step-by-step instructions show how to register it on your network.

Access Point Mode

For real ease, you can also choose the 'Access Point Mode' and hook up to the airDAC by finding it in the list of available wireless networks on your desired output device. Just make sure the music you play is offline, as you can't surf the web at the same time.

There's one seemingly glaring omission on the connections front: a USB

input. It seems a little naïve of Arcam to assume that this can be replaced by wireless connectivity, when we've all dealt with the frustrations of flaky signal and stop-start music. Wired connectivity is covered instead by just single coaxial and optical digital ins, with outputs including both analogue and digital outs.

All inputs are capable of playing lossless files of up to 24bit/96kHz, and music streamed in Access Point Mode can hit this quality too. AirPlay, on the other hand, currently limits its file playback to a maximum of 16bit/48kHz.

Something to consider

This means you are limited in terms of the level of high-resolution music that you can play - something to consider for those with lots of content above 24bit/96kHz.

For everyone else, the airDAC proves to be a precise performer, offering plenty of fine detail from top to bottom.

Throw a big orchestral track at it, like *Harvey Two-Face* from the *Dark Knight* OST, and you'll hear every single instrument, nicely placed and well

integrated, with a level of detail, texture and depth that you just don't hear if you listen to the source alone.

It could do better with timing and handling of dynamics, but there's little to complain about with presentation. It puts weight behind the rumbling bassline of Run the Jewels' self-titled track, and it prevents the cymbals in Florence and the Machine's *Rabbit Heart (Raise it Up)* from sounding harsh. Choose to stream and you will lose a layer of subtlety and detail, however.

The airDAC is good, but falls short of greatness because of a couple of obvious oversights. If wireless streaming is important to you, this is one to consider. If not, there are better options out there.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Lively rhythms; clear, subtle and detailed; stereo imaging; connections; price

AGAINST Connections for USB, Bluetooth and 3.5mm would have been useful

VERDICT Good sound quality on a budget for analogue and digital music

DENON DA-300USB £330



2 Denon is no stranger to the world of hi-fi, but the DA-300USB is its first crack at the affordable DAC market.

At £330, the DA-300USB undercuts a lot of rivals at this level, and with a spec list that means it's equally at home on a desktop as it is as part of a larger system.

Although a largely plastic construction, the DA-300USB feels solid and well made. Denon has thoughtfully included a stand that allows horizontal or vertical placement for those short on space, with its OLED display adjusting automatically for each position.

Lack of cables

Perhaps not so thoughtful is its lack of bundled cables - you get a pair of RCA leads for connecting to an amp or CD player, but you'll need your own for the rear-mounted asynchronous USB-B socket, one coaxial in and two optical digital inputs. On the front you'll find a 6.3mm headphone socket and volume control, doubling up the DA-300USB as a headphone amp as well as a more traditional DAC. It's here that you'll

select your source too, by tapping a touch-sensitive icon. The bright OLED display will then show the source selected and the music bitrate.

All inputs can handle all files up to 24-bit/192kHz and support both PCM and DSD files natively. The DA-300USB uses the same Advanced AL32 signal processing and digital-to-analogue conversion found in Denon's top-of-the-range CD/SACD players.

Squeezing such high-end tech into a device at this price is admirable and shows in its performance, which is assured and well balanced. Play *Angels* by The xx through our reference system via coaxial and the wonderfully stripped-back production is handled beautifully, with the vocals front and centre, full of expression and emotion.

The DA-300USB is on the relaxed side in its character though, meaning it can lack the impact and edge needed for more lively tracks. Timing can feel off compared to the best, and bass kicks are on the soft side. Play *Elephants* by Them Crooked Vultures and the aggressive guitar riff doesn't have the same feeling

of grit to it, while the drums that underpin it lack punch. If your music is of a heavy sort, there are better options.

Similar character

We found all inputs to have a similar character, including the headphone stage, which worked wonders in bringing new levels of detail to our Spotify collection. Don't forget you'll need an adapter if your headphones feature the standard 3.5mm jack though.

The Denon DA-300USB is an easy-to-listen-to DAC offering detail and a good selection of inputs for the majority of setups. But it won't be for everyone. The softness in the bass and the timing issues means can't make five stars.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Well-made product; detailed, composed performance; DSD compatibility; great headphone amp

AGAINST Needs more punch; timing is lacking

VERDICT A great first DAC from Denon, if on the over-friendly side



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



MYRYAD Z20 £395



3 We'd hoped for more from Myryad's first attempt at adding a DAC to its extensive range of AV and hi-fi kit - especially as the Z20 has the same chip-set as its high-end MX Series CD players.

Understated in its design, there's no flashiness here: a simple line of LEDs shows what's playing and its sample rate, alongside two physical buttons for power and source selection.

'Simple and functional' is all well and good - design-led kit isn't for everyone - but the Z20's sound is similarly plain, and failed to leave a lasting impression on us during testing.

No headphone socket

There are three inputs, one each of optical, coaxial and asynchronous USB-B, each capable of 24-bit/192kHz. There are also two sets of standard RCA line outs, but no headphone socket for desktop use. Also mounted on the back is an input and output for Myryad's 'My Link' system - a communications bus allowing you to link other Myryad kit so they'll operate together.

We hook up a MacBook Pro via USB and play Lorde's debut album at 24-bit/48kHz. Playing *Tennis Court* demonstrates a clean and detailed character, with direct vocals, and a tonally neutral presentation.

However, the unforgiving metronome-like beat punctuating the verses shows up the Z20's less-than-perfect timing, particularly when compared with the beautifully rhythmic NAD D 1050.

Dynamically it's not as subtle as the NAD either, failing to demonstrate the changes in tempo between the verses and chorus quite as adeptly, and there's just not the same punch.

The major problem with the Myryad is everything it does is 'just okay'; there are no serious grumbles of note, but no flashes of brilliance either. This is most obvious when you compare it with any of its testmates and realise how good it could be. We tested its performance via the other inputs too and found it to be largely the same: when connected to our reference £12k Naim NDS streamer via coaxial, it didn't sound much different to our MacBook Pro over USB. Better DACs

would show more difference between these sources. The Myryad is out of its league a little.

Levels we'd expect

While it performs adequately and offers a well-balanced and ultimately inoffensive sound, it doesn't push sound quality to the levels we'd hope for. Nor does it provide anything extra, like a headphone stage or wireless connectivity, to help its cause.

Existing Myryad owners may well consider adding the Z20 to their system because of its ability to communicate easily with other kit but, for us, it doesn't do enough to stand out from the increasingly competitive crowd.

Rating ★★☆☆☆

FOR Clean sounding; decent detail; tonally neutral; can be linked with other Myryad kit

AGAINST Lacks attack; dynamics could be better; not transparent enough; timing is off

VERDICT The Z20 struggles against excellent competition, it's shown up as average

NAD D 1050 £400



4 The NAD D 1050 comes from a very talented family, and this model is happily maintaining that prestigious reputation. Earning a five-star review late last year, the NAD D 1050 came into this test faced with new competition, and has still shown the rest of them how it should be done.

The D 1050 certainly looks distinctive. Designed to be placed upright, with the none-too-subtle volume control protruding from the top, it could divide opinion if judged on looks alone. But one listen to it and you'll remember what really matters here.

Instantly drawn

Play music through any of the inputs - and you won't be left wanting, with twin pairs of coaxial and optical inputs and an asynchronous USB-B socket to choose from - you'll instantly be drawn in to the NAD's engaging manner. It's a fluid yet focused listen, with a superb sense of positioning and organisation.

Play something that requires a bit of oomph, and the D 1050 isn't shy about showing what it's made of. The hefty

bassline of Kanye West's *Black Skinhead* is delivered with plenty of punch and weight, and offers a serious feeling of attack and excitement.

There's a touch of low-end emphasis here (which only adds to an enjoyably rich, full sound) and a great sense of scale too - it makes some of its test competition feel lightweight in comparison. The treble is well handled too, with cymbal crashes crisp and precise, without being harsh or sharp.

While the D 1050 does big, showy pieces well, it also shows a wonderful way with more intimate, simpler tracks. Play Kate Bush's *Among Angels* and the level of detail and subtlety the D 1050 picks out is fantastic. Piano notes have depth and texture, and you feel every wavering note of the expressive vocal.

As for sample-rate support, the D 1050 is capable of up to 24-bit/96kHz via the optical sockets and up to 24-bit/192kHz through the coaxial and USB.

Outputs are available in the form of balanced XLR outputs and standard RCA sockets, while on the front there is a 3.5mm headphone jack for using the

NAD as a headphone amp too. Plug in your choice of cans here and the D 1050 brings a similar class to its headphone stage: stacks of detail, a wonderfully warm bassline and a thoroughly listenable presentation that stays true to the original recording.

Seriously capable

The NAD D 1050 is a seriously capable DAC at this price, and plays the skilful veteran in the company of not-quite-there newbies. There may be others out there that could get the better of it for out-and-out precision, but the competition in this test don't come close. The NAD D 1050 is a serious operator flying the brand flag with flair.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Entertaining, full-bodied sound; rhythmic; great attack; doubles as a headphone amp; good connectivity

AGAINST Emphasis on bass may be off-putting

VERDICT Design might divide opinion but its performance shouldn't - a superb all-rounder



Listen to our favourite tracks every month!



Aria 900

Innovation Extraordinaire.

Focal research has led to
the creation of a new
breed of loudspeaker.



Flax Technology

Aria's unique speaker diaphragms consist of a layer of Flax encased in an ultra-thin fiberglass skin. This hybrid material is as rigid as Kevlar and twice as light as traditional polyglass, making it an excellent choice for sound quality.



Performance

Aria drivers feature a new Zamak (zinc/aluminum/magnesium/copper) basket and tweeters are suspended using Poron, a 'memory foam' material developed for the reference Utopia range which reduces distortion three-fold in critical areas of the audio spectrum.



Choice

Suitable for all, the full range comprises 5 equally stunning size formats. All are available in Walnut or Black High Gloss finishes with real leather front panels. Designed and manufactured in the heart of France.



Focal UK info@focal-uk.com 0845 660 2680 www.focal.com



TEST VERDICT**THE WINNER****NAD D 1050****£400 ★★★★★**

The distinctive **NAD D 1050** may be the veteran of the test but it shows the new kids on the block how to do it with its full-bodied sound, unique design and superb connectivity

NAD's D 1050 wins our test because it has all the things that we think are important in a DAC at this price range. It offers superb sound quality first and foremost, with its rhythmic, detailed and full-bodied performance markedly better than its testmates. It's good on the basics too.

The D 1050 has a great selection of inputs and outputs, the ability to handle any sample rate and a headphone stage, which is a nice bonus.

Denon includes a headphone stage on its DA-300USB too, and it looks the part: it's a headphone amp you'd want on your desk, and its versatile placement is a nice touch. Format fans will also be happy with its support for PCM and DSD files - and at a price that undercuts every other DAC on test. However, performance-wise, it fell just

short - we would have liked more punch and attack, plus better timing.

Joining the Denon on four stars is the Arcam airDAC. While Arcam is to be applauded for bringing wireless connectivity to a DAC at this price, it has come at a cost. Inputs are limited to 24-bit/96kHz and the lack of a USB input is a big oversight for this market. Sound could have been better too, particularly when we know what Arcam can produce from the excellent (and same-price) irDAC. While precise and detailed, it lacked dynamic subtlety.

Completing the test was the Myryad Z20 at three stars, dropping marks for its far-from-remarkable sound quality. While it made no mistakes in its tonal balance or overall presentation, in comparison to the competition we found ourselves wanting more from it.

SYSTEM BUILDER

Three partners that will help make sure you hear the NAD D1050 at its best



Laptop
MacBook Pro

Apple's MacBook Pro is a great performer, and our go-to laptop for all our digital music needs.



Headphones
Philips Fidelio M1
£125 ★★★★★

Endlessly listenable with a rounded, refined presentation, the Fidelio M1's will sound even better through the NAD's headphone amp.



Amplifier
Arcam A19
£650 ★★★★★

The Arcam delivers a transparent, faithful and staggeringly open sound. Superb at this price.

Total build £760



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

Facts & figures**Arcam airDAC****£400 ★★★★★**

USB In 0 • Coaxial digital in 1 • Optical digital in 1 • RCA out 1 • XLR out 0
Wireless Yes • Headphone 0 •
Dimensions (hwd) 4 x 19 x 12cm

**Denon DA-300USB****£330 ★★★★★**

USB 1 • Coaxial digital in 1 • Optical digital in 2 • RCA out 1 • XLR out 0 •
Headphone 1 • Integrated No •
Dimensions (hwd) 6 x 17 x 18cm

**Myryad Z20****£395 ★★★★★**

USB 1 • Coaxial digital in 1 • Optical digital in 1 • RCA out 2 • XLR out 0 •
Headphone 0 • Integrated No •
Dimensions (hwd) 19 x 6 x 21cm

**NAD D 1050****£400 ★★★★★**

USB 1 • Coaxial digital in 2 • RCA out 1 • XLR out 1 • Integrated No • Optical digital in 2 • Headphone 1 •
Dimensions (hwd) 19 x 6 x 21cm

Now you can be in the chair.
Now you can control the
schedule. No more bowing
to the whims of TV listings
or missing your favourite
programmes in frustration.
Now is the time for you to
sign up for video streaming
...and we'll help you choose
the service that's just right

Be your own Director General

ON TEST

Amazon p50
Blinkbox Movies p51
Google Play p52
iTunes Store p54
Knowhow Movies p55
Netflix p57
Now TV p58
Wuaki.tv p59

Forget the listings. These days it's all about video streaming. For as little as £5.99 a month, you can control TV for your every viewing whim. We've gathered eight of the biggest services available, some of them subscription based, some purely on-demand, and the others, a bit of both. Read on and find out which ones are worthy of your time and money.

Compatibility key



Amazon
Kindle



Android



Desktop



Games
Consoles



iOS



Smart
TVs



Streaming
devices



Windows
Mobile





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



Interface

It looks good and works well on portable devices and consoles, but the website is confusing. That's because it's listed like every other Amazon product. A dedicated video site would be nice.

Amazon Prime Instant Video

Subscribe from £5.99 a month/On demand £13.99 ★★★★★

Amazon. LoveFilm. Prime. Instant. Prime Instant. Video. No, we've not lost the plot - it's just hard to keep up with these two brands and their baffling rebranding exercises.

These days, Amazon owns LoveFilm. The service formerly known as LoveFilm Instant is now Amazon Prime Instant Video, and £5.99 gets you unlimited streaming of its film and TV catalogue.

Something of a maze

There are a number of price options (see panel) for the service, although they are something of a maze - it took us an hour to work through the various options.

And this is before we even came to Amazon Instant Video: the on-demand purchase and rental part of the website, streaming the newest and best goodies not included in Prime.

Confused yet? We are. Amazon doesn't seem to have decided what it wants to do. Visit the website and you'll find 'Instant Video' in the same list as Gardening and Groceries; hardly accessible. It's a pity, because once you get past the confusion, Amazon Prime Instant Video is pretty good.

The film selection is one of the best in UK subscription services. The site boasts

2107 titles. That's good, not great, but it has quality. The range of genres is wide, with a nice split of old and recent. Some titles hit Blu-ray six months ago.

No premier titles

The TV offering isn't as strong. Amazon Studios has started producing its own content (*Alpha House*, *Bosch*), but it has some way to go before it can catch up to Netflix's original offerings. Elsewhere, there's a decent number of popular shows (*Sherlock*, *Castle*, *Parks & Recreation*) but no premier titles like *Breaking Bad* or *Game of Thrones*.

The best and latest content is reserved for purchase or rental only, outside the Prime catalogue, at the average prices. A new film in HD costs £13.99, or a TV series for £24.99. They do vary depending on age: *The Amazing Spider-Man* (2012) is £6.99 in HD.

The streaming quality is excellent. Amazon offers a video resolution of up to 1080p as well as Dolby Digital 5.1 surround sound where possible. One account can stream to two devices at the same time, with each video limited to one device at a time. The same two-device deal applies to downloads of purchases, or one device for rentals.



Compatibility

The service runs on most computers and all current and last-gen game consoles, as well as select TVs and Blu-ray players from LG, Samsung and Sony. Amazon Prime Instant Video also runs on Kindle Fire devices and iOS, although iPad video quality is not great. No Android support is disappointing.

Price Options

■ **Annual** £79 package gives you one year of instant video, plus speedy delivery and Kindle book rentals.

■ **Prime** £5.99 per month gives you unlimited streaming of the Prime Instant video catalogue.

■ **On demand** TV series and movies can be purchased for up to £13.99 per HD film. ■ **LoveFilm** by post. Unlimited DVDs and Blu-rays (two at a time) for £7.99 per month.

Overall, we like Amazon Prime Instant Video. Sure, there are issues: the services, pricing and branding needs to be simplified. The iPad app needs fixing, and there really needs to be Android support. But these are small quibbles, easily outweighed by everything else. We like the video quality and the catalogue of films, and the TV offering is only going to get better.

For the money it's a tempting proposition, especially when you get a free one-month trial. There is no excuse not to try it.

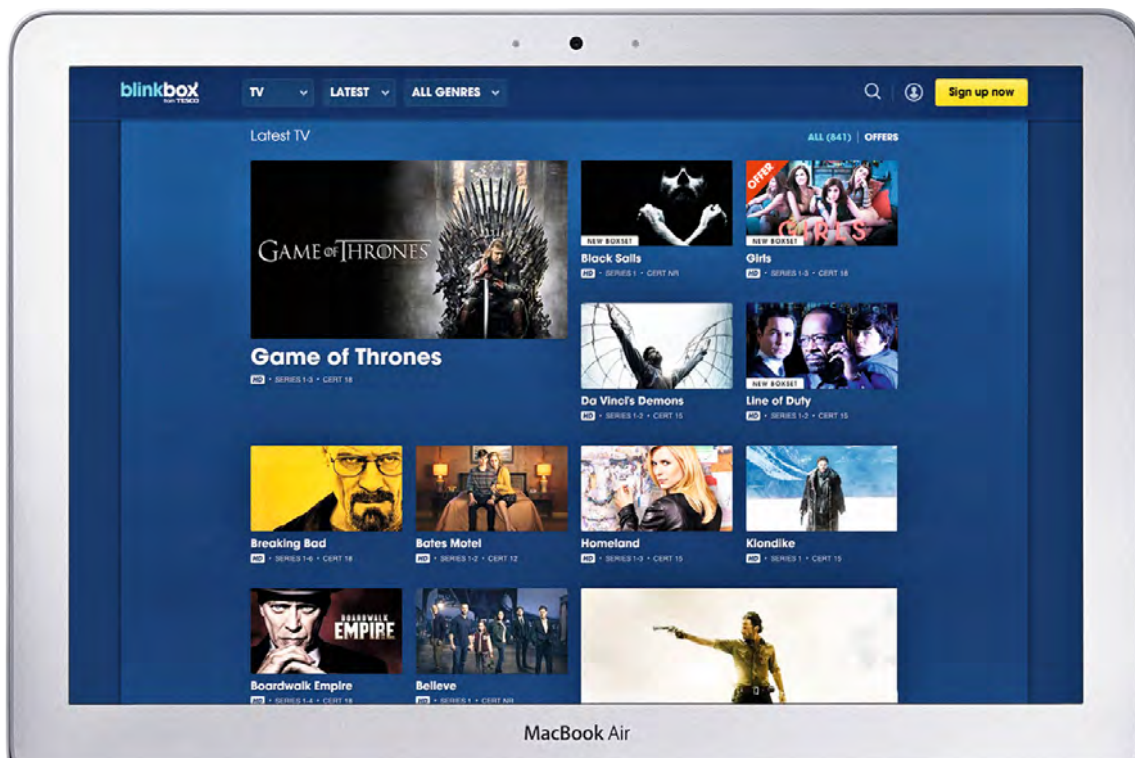
Rating ★★★★★

FOR Strong film library; wide platform support; nice interface; Full HD resolution

AGAINST Confusing packaging; poor iPad app; no Android support

VERDICT A very good video subscription service, with a quality film selection

The streaming quality is excellent, offering a resolution of up to 1080p as well as Dolby Digital 5.1 surround sound where possible



Interface

The interface is attractive and easy to use on most platforms. The iPad app is fairly basic, though, and only allows playback. There's no such problem on the Android, however.

Blinkbox Movies

On demand up to £13.99 ★★★★★

Blinkbox is the on-demand video service from Tesco – one of the last things we'd expect from a supermarket megabrand, but it's pretty good and does the job. Blinkbox offers some of the latest releases, including some titles that have yet to be released on disc.

No monthly contract

The deal here is simple: no contract, no monthly ties. You pay for what you rent or buy. Rentals are yours for 30 days, and you have 48 hours to finish anything you start. Purchases are stored in your Blinkbox digital locker, and you get to keep them 'forever'.

Prices are the norm for on-demand services (see panel). For TV series it's a bit more unpredictable because of the varying running times and number of episodes. Individual episodes tend to be £2.49 in HD and £1.89 in SD. We've seen HD box sets priced at £25, but the final season of *Breaking Bad* was £17.99.

As an offshoot of Tesco, there are benefits for Clubcard holders. You get one point for every £1 you spend, and there are exclusive offers including discounted (or even free) content. Choice is excellent, particularly when it comes to the latest releases. Films are

available on the same day as the Blu-ray and DVD – some times even earlier. We've spotted films online two weeks before their disc debut. That's months before they are likely to appear on any other subscription service.

Variety

The TV series offering is almost as good – not in quantity but in variety. You'll find older BBC and ITV titles along with some of the latest from Sky and HBO, including all of *Boardwalk Empire* and *Game of Thrones*.

You will be able to use the service on an impressive number of platforms: computers, Xbox 360, PS3, and select Blu-ray players and TVs from Samsung, LG, Philips and Toshiba. There are tablet apps on Android, iOS and even Windows. No smartphones, however.

Downloads are only available on PC, so you'll have to stream on all other formats. One account can register up to five platforms at a time – try to register a sixth and you'll be invited to ditch one of the others. You can do this three times in 90 days. Each purchase can only be watched on one device at a time.

Mostly good so far, but Blinkbox loses some steam towards the finish line:



Compatibility

Available on a number of platforms: computers, Xbox 360, PS3 and select Blu-ray players and TVs from Samsung, LG, Philips and Toshiba. There are tablet apps on Android, iOS and even Windows. No smartphones, though. Downloads are only available on PC, so you will have to stream on other formats.

Price Options

■ **HD** prices are the norm for films, typically £13.99 for new releases and £10.99 for SD.

■ **Rentals** are around £4.49 (HD) and £3.49 (SD), while there's an Offers section with HD films for £5.

■ **TV** prices are varied – episodes tend to be £2.49 (HD) and £1.89 (SD); the final season of *Breaking Bad* was £17.99.

■ **Tesco Clubcard** holders earn a point for each pound they spend.

video resolution is only up to 720p, and sound is in stereo. It looks good enough not to distract, although it is softer than a 1080p feed from Google Play. And to make things worse, you only get 720p on computers and Xbox – it's standard definition everywhere else.

Overall, it's a strong effort. We like the catalogue. We like the interface. The platform support is impressive. It's the video quality and lack of mobile support stopping us from awarding the five stars. However, if your priority is getting latest releases, you will be perfectly happy.

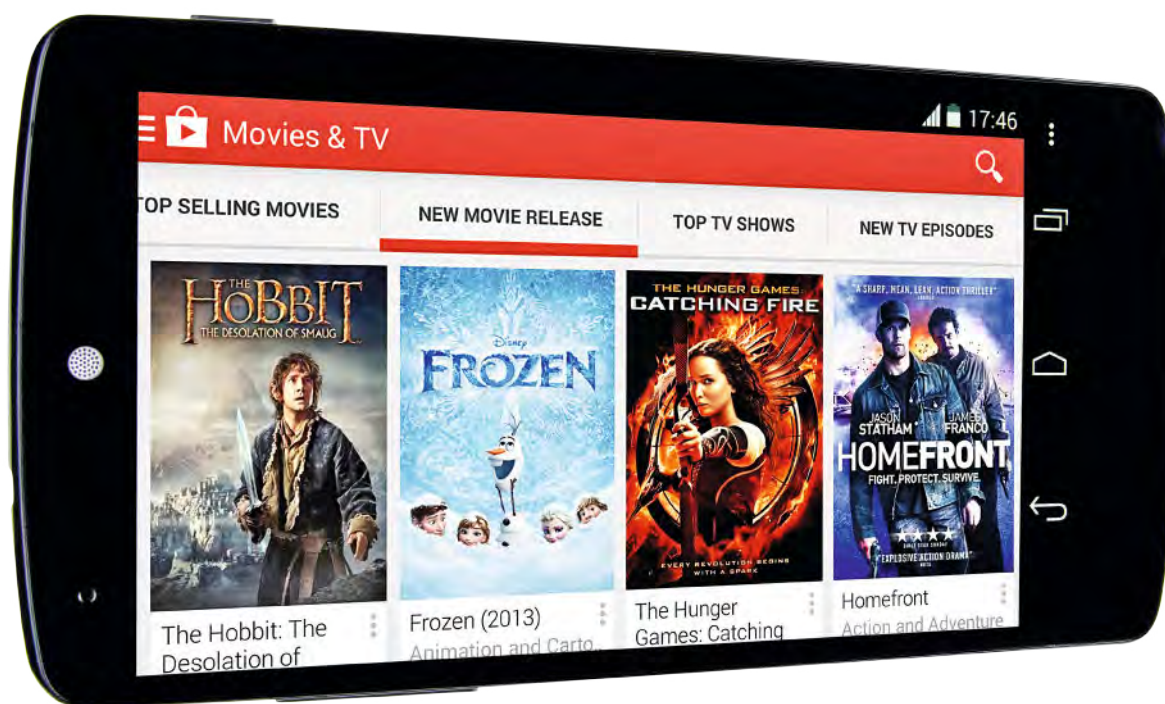
Rating ★★★★★

FOR Good library with early releases; platform support; nice interface; Tesco Clubcard integration

AGAINST Limited to 720p and stereo sound

VERDICT A strong on-demand service for anyone who wants the newest releases

As an offshoot of Tesco, there are benefits for Clubcard holders: one point for every £1 you spend and discounted, even free, content



Interface

Built on Android, Google Play runs beautifully on a vast array of tablets and smartphones. We were surprised to find there's even an iOS app. It's only for playback, though.

Google Play

On demand ★★★★★

The Google Play store is a one-stop shop for apps, games, books, music – and of course video too. Google has a finger in every technological pie we can think of, so it's no surprise it also provides films and TV programmes. Well-equipped and effectively organised, this is a legitimate alternative to buying Blu-rays and DVDs.

No monthly obligation

It's a straight-up, on-demand service, so there's no monthly obligation. You buy or rent films and TV shows when you want. Purchases are kept in your account 'forever', while rentals expire in 30 days (or 48 hours once you begin watching).

The library is pretty good. Recent films releases are available on the same day as Blu-rays and DVDs and there are a healthy number of older titles too. The same can be said of TV series: *Girls* Season 3 was out before the DVD/Blu-ray release. There's also lots of old content from BBC, Channel 4, Sky and HBO.

We're quite happy with the number of devices supported by Google Play: PCs and Mac computers are included, though we wouldn't really expect otherwise. It forms the heart of every Android device (phones as well as tablets), so you won't have any issues there.

It may be surprising to find a Google presence on iOS devices, but it's true. Google Play movies worked fine on our iPad Air. The caveat: the iOS app has no shopfront and only handles playback. Still, it's a comfort to know you can switch systems without ditching your purchases. At present, Google Play doesn't feature on smart TVs or games consoles. If you want to use a TV, the Google Chromecast streaming stick will see you right. Or you can hook up an HDMI cable, if your device allows it.

Offline viewing

Content can be downloaded for offline viewing on Android devices. Google recommends doing this for optimum quality, as 3G/4G data or wi-fi can cause the occasional stutter. Purchases have a five-device download limit, while rentals are restricted to one. Video resolution goes up to 1080p, and audio up to 5.1 surround sound. Only one in 10 of the films we flicked through offered 5.1 – the rest were stereo, so there's room for improvement in this department.

Specifications aside, the service is a joy to use. On each platform, it's easy to find your way around the neatly



Compatibility

For now, there's no GooglePlay app on any smart TV or games console. But there is a simple way of getting the service: the Google Chromecast streaming stick (£30). Or, if you've got a device with the output, you can use an HDMI cable. And content can be downloaded for offline viewing on Android devices.

Price Options

■ **HD** films are available for £11.99 or £9.99 for SD, and we found plenty of discounted titles for as little as £4.99.

■ **Rentals** are £4.49 (HD) and £3.49 (SD).

■ **TV streaming** has plenty of choice, with the newest boxsets, such as the latest season of *The Big Bang Theory*, priced at £24.49. Meanwhile, *Bates Motel* Season 2 was priced at a reasonable £16.49

organised catalogue. Once you make a purchase it's automatically shelved for you, showing up on any device with your account on it. Streaming is just a matter of pressing play, or click on the little pin icon and it will download. Google has nailed cross-device sharing.

This is everything we could ask from an on-demand video service. The catalogue is well stocked and easy to use. There's support for different platforms and it's easy to download purchases for offline viewing. A little more polish is the only thing we'd ask.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Good catalogue; lovely interface; up to 1080p resolution and 5.1 surround sound

AGAINST Platform support could be better; many purchases only have stereo sound

VERDICT An excellent on-demand video service that gets all the essentials right

Content can be downloaded for offline viewing on Android devices. Google recommends this for top quality, as 3G/4G data or wi-fi can stutter



IN ADMIRATION OF MUSIC

DALI KUBIK FREE

The New Active Speaker System



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WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
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March 2014



www.dali-speakers.com



Interface

Trust Apple to give you a good looking screen – it's nicely laid out and easy to sort through. We're not keen on some adverts though. 'Preorder this digital release'!? Why, are they're going to run out of downloads?

iTunes Store

On demand ★★★★★

This one needs no introduction. We all know Apple has an on-demand movie service. The iTunes Store has been at the heart of every iOS device (and Mac ones, to an extent) for so many years that it's virtually impossible to avoid. But does it have what it takes to hold off its new rivals, or is it in need of an update? We think it's a little of both.

Entertainment hub

Like Google Play, iTunes is less movie shop and more master entertainment hub. It also handles music and podcasts, but TV and movies take up a significant chunk. For what is essentially a shop, iTunes looks great. That's hardly surprising coming from Apple, but we really like way the system is laid out on desktop and portable devices. With a carousel of miniature billboards, to tiles of movie posters in various sizes, Apple has succeeded in breathing life into something inherently dull.

Then you go to use it. At this point it's less extraordinary – you get the typical neat lines (or categories) of films, and they are easy to flick through. These are occasionally interrupted by adverts suggesting you 'send iTunes gifts' or pre-order something that's months away

from release. Are they going to run out of digital downloads? We understand promotions but that's a bit much.

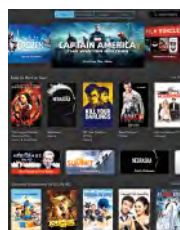
Back catalogue

The film selection is good. New releases come out at the same time (or before) they hit DVD. As for back catalogue, you'll find titles going back to the 1920s. The TV selection isn't quite so promising – with the exception of *Breaking Bad*, it's mostly older shows (*Lost*, *The Sopranos*) and lesser-known ones (*Fleming*, *Da Vinci's Demons*). There's no sign of *Game of Thrones* or *Boardwalk Empire*, and *Mad Men* is available only up to season four of a possible six.

What Apple does have is iTunes Extras, which works similarly to the bonus menu of a DVD. You get special features such as interviews and documentaries. This is available only on selected titles, though.

Video resolution goes up to 1080p. Here we'd advise checking your settings, because they may be set to 720p by default. Meanwhile the sound quality goes up to Dolby Digital 5.1.

Apple is known for its locked-down approach, and we're not surprised that it applies to iTunes. Your video is available



Compatibility

In comparison with some, Apple is poor in this department. It's well-known for its insular approach and this applies to iTunes as much as to everything else. Video is available only on computers, iOS devices and Apple TV. The open nature of Google Play and Blinkbox feels far more 21st century in comparison.

Price Options

■ On demand

iTunes' offering is strictly on-demand: no monthly payments, no subscription.

■ **Film** prices are the norm for new stuff: £13.99 for an HD film, £9.99 for SD. Rentals are £4.49 for HD and £3.49 for SD, while there are also film bundles to buy.

■ **TV shows** tend to be £2.49 (HD) and £1.89 (SD) per episode. Full seasons can range from £13.99 to £35, but cheaper if it's an older show.

only on computers, iOS devices and Apple TV. It feels... limited. In comparison, the open nature of Google Play and Blinkbox feels more welcoming, and forward thinking.

Apple's ecosystem

Overall, we think iTunes is a good service. We like the interface and its catalogue of movies and TV shows. If you've bought into Apple's whole ecosystem, there's little reason to look elsewhere. For newcomers, however, it could be more accommodating.

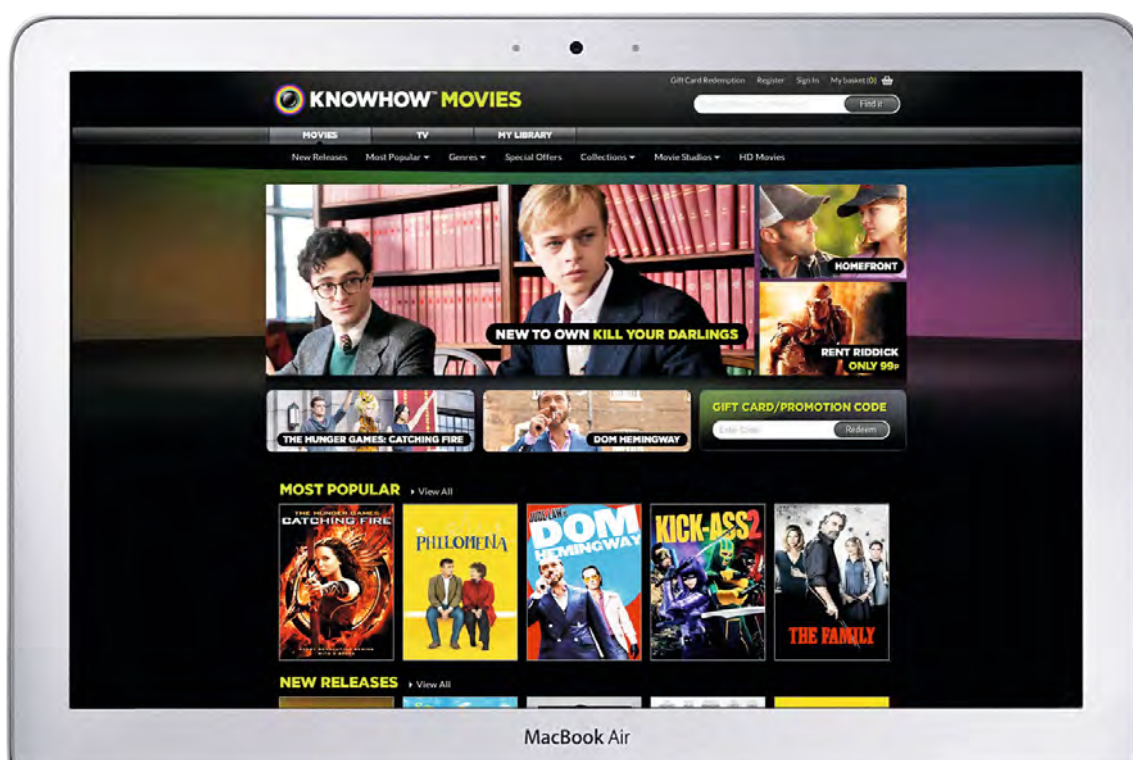
Rating ★★★★★

FOR Up to 1080p and 5.1 surround sound; shiny interface; good film catalogue

AGAINST TV offering could be better; limited platform support

VERDICT Apple is as strong as ever, but that locked-down approach is getting old

What Apple does have is iTunes Extras, which works similarly to the bonus menu on a DVD. This is only available on selected titles, though



Interface

It's a mixed bag. The website is fine, but the iOS app is playback only, so you can't buy anything. The Android app, if it works, can be a bit buggy. Also: some films have their genres muddled.

Knowhow Movies

On demand ★★☆☆☆

Visit the Knowhow website and the first thing you will see is a refrigerator. 'Knowhow is all about helping you solve those annoying issues,' says the official blurb. If that doesn't sound quite like a video service, it's because Knowhow was originally conceived to provide after-sales product support for Dixons-owned Currys and PC World.

Streaming competition

At some point, Dixons decided to join the video-streaming collective, and Knowhow Movies was born. It worked for Amazon and Tesco after all - and those guys sell coconut water. Sadly, Knowhow Movies isn't really that good.

We'll start with the money. Despite being a little player in a big game, Knowhow Movies charges more than the usual on-demand service. The latest films cost a hefty £16.99 in HD, or £12.99 in SD. Rentals are £4.99 and £3.99 respectively, although there is a handful of 99p rental offers. Episodes of TV programmes cost £3.99 in HD and up to £2.99 in SD. The usual rules apply: purchases are kept in a digital locker for 'an indefinite period of time', while rentals last for 30 days (or 48 hours once you begin watching).

Content is a mixed bag. There's a decent quantity and variety of films, although we'd classify these as fairly recent. With brand-new releases, Knowhow Movies keeps up with the competition in offering the necessary blockbusters. The TV side, however, is embarrassing. It consists of precisely the following: *Sherlock*, *Doctor Who*, *Ripper Street*, *An Idiot Abroad*, *Being Human*, *Top Gear* and *Red Dwarf*. That's it. Depressingly, the page is padded out with copies of the same posters.

Organisation is poor

The layout is easy enough to navigate, but organisation is poor. For example, when we think 'drama', the first films coming to mind tend not to be *Death Race: Inferno* or *Bullet to the Head*.

Theoretically the service offers 1080p resolution and Dolby Digital 5.1 surround sound. It's powered by Rovi, which uses clever DivX adaptive streaming software. The idea is to let video quality take a hit to reduce stuttering and buffering.

It's nothing new - Netflix and Amazon employ similar techniques - but it does ensure smooth playback. It's a pity, then, that HD playback is limited to computers running Intel



Compatibility

The service will run on computers and some devices running iOS or Android. It is also available on some TVs and Blu-ray players from LG and Samsung, but there is nothing on games consoles as of yet. Downloads are limited to PCs, so it's streaming only on other platforms, of up to five devices at a time.

Price Options

■ **Latest films** cost £16.99 in HD or £12.99 in SD. Rentals are £4.99 (HD) and £3.99 (SD), although there are some 99p rental offers.

■ **Television** programmes cost £3.99 (HD) and £2.99 (SD).

■ **Purchases** are kept in a digital locker for 'an indefinite period of time', while rentals are available for 30 days (or 48 hours once you begin watching).

Insider. It means, despite spending a small fortune on HD movies, you may not be able to play them properly on the majority of your devices.

It's not hard to see what Dixons is trying to do. Video streaming has taken off in a big way, and it makes sense to get in on a sure-fire trend while it's on the rise. But Knowhow Movies is hideously unprepared for the fight, and has a long way to go before it proves a viable alternative to established winners. In its current state, we'd struggle to recommend this service.

Rating ★★☆☆☆

FOR Adaptive streaming ensures smoother playback; 1080p resolution is possible

AGAINST Catalogue is lacking; restriction on HD playback; a poorly organised interface

VERDICT Limited and over-priced; a service unprepared for the stiff competition

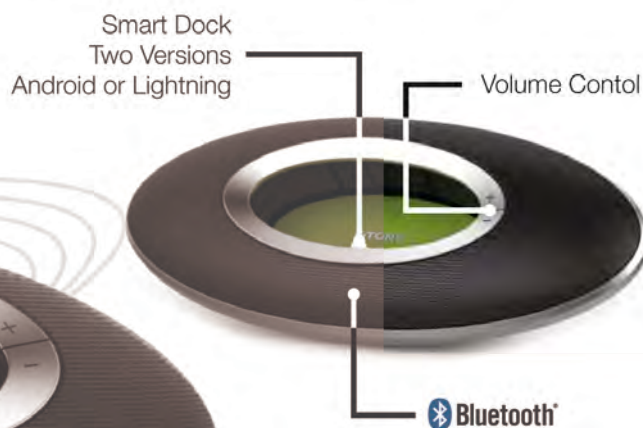
The TV selection is embarrassing. It consists of: *Sherlock*, *Doctor Who*, *Ripper Street*, *An Idiot Abroad*, *Being Human*, *Top Gear* and *Red Dwarf*

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*Available in either lightning for iPhone or Micro USB for Android



Interface

Across all platforms, Netflix offers an intuitive, clean-cut interface. The likes of movies are sorted by genre, popularity and suggestions based on your viewing history. We rather like the My List feature.

Netflix

Subscribe from £5.99/£8.99 ★★★★★

This is how you do it. Netflix is a perfect example of doing the right things well. It's without doubt one of the most satisfying streaming services we've used: fuss-free and easy to love.

And it's everywhere. Netflix runs on every platform we can expect: if you want to be universally loved, you have to be universal. Netflix understands this.

Simple and clear

It also helps that the offering is simple and clear. Netflix is a subscription-only, streaming-only service. You get unlimited access to films and TV shows for £5.99 per month. This allows you to stream to two devices at the same time. And if you want to use up to four devices, it's £8.99. Simple. It's a lot less confusing than Amazon's Instant/Prime/LoveFilm packages.

Netflix has the lion's share of TV shows when it comes to content: big hitters such as *24*, *The Killing*, *Sherlock* and *Battlestar Galactica*. Streaming *Breaking Bad* exclusively has no doubt significantly contributed to the service's meteoric rise. But Netflix isn't content just supplying shows - it's making them too. Exclusive content like *House of Cards* and *Orange Is The New Black* are

Netflix Original programmes, and more are currently being produced.

There are also a huge number of films. Netflix wouldn't specify how many, but they did say 'tens of thousands'. They're not the latest releases - Amazon has an advantage here - but it's safe to say there's more than you could ever reasonably expect to watch. The only issue is that films and TV shows sometimes disappear without warning whenever license deals expire.

Where possible, Netflix gives 5.1 surround sound and video in 1080p resolution. It's Full HD, but Netflix calls it 'Super HD', promising a higher bitrate and less compression than other Full HD streams. We can't deny the picture is sharp; it rivals Blu-ray quality.

4K is on the cards

And it's going to get better. Netflix is the only provider doing anything about 4K at the moment. We've been told that the company is ready with its 4K streaming, which will come as soon as TV manufacturers release the sets capable of handling it. Content will kick-off with *House of Cards* series two and some nature documentaries, and we've been told things will grow slowly from there.



Compatibility

Netflix runs on every platform we could reasonably expect it to: PC and Mac computers, video game consoles, Roku boxes, Google Chromecast, every big brand of smart TV, Blu-ray players from Samsung, Sony, Panasonic and LG, tablets and phones running Android, iOS... and even Windows.

Price Options

■ **Unlimited**
access to films and television programmes for £5.99 per month. This allows you to stream two devices at the same time.

■ **For more**
devices - up to four - Netflix charge £8.99 per month; a simple price plan.

Back in the here and now, we're very satisfied with Netflix - it's a joy to use. Across every device we've tested, the interface is simple and attractive. It's also practical: you can set up multiple user profiles, so video recommendations are catered individually. There's even a kid's corner. We love the massive catalogue of films and TV shows, and Netflix Original programmes are superb. Then there's the video quality, which is at the top end of what's available, with the promise of getting better. There's even a free one-month trial. Sign up, right now.

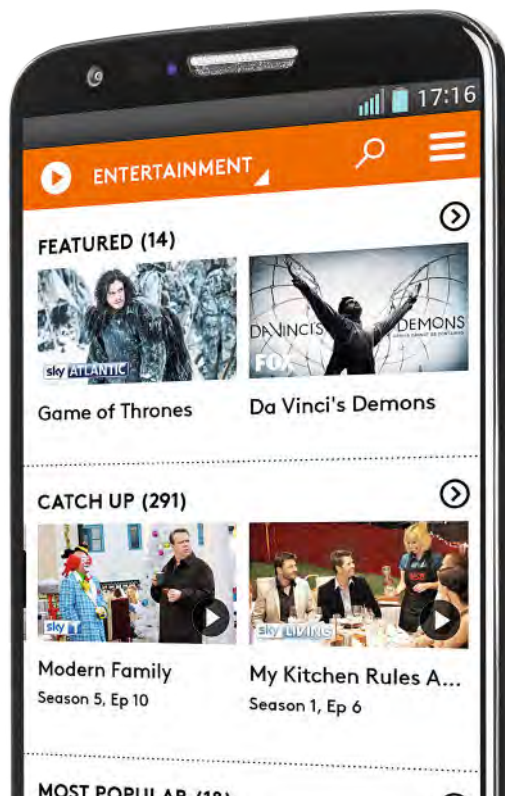
Rating ★★★★★

FOR Great catalogue and platform support; impressive video quality; lovely to use; clever features; forward thinking with 4K

AGAINST Films could be more up-to-date

VERDICT As complete a video-streaming service you can get

Netflix is the only provider doing anything about 4K streaming at the moment and content will kick-off with *House of Cards* series two



Interface

Big pictures help it look very pretty, but try to watch more than one thing and it's trickier than we'd like. Dividing TV shows into channels is a pain for browsing, and that search box is practically useless.

Now TV

Subscribe from £4.99 ★★★★★☆

Sky subscription has been a big thing for a long time, but it's never been the most accessible service. It's pricey for starters, and not everyone has access to a satellite dish. The company has had to fight harder than ever to keep customers defecting in the hunt for convenience.

Exclusive goodies

And so Now TV was born: a more affordable way to enjoy otherwise exclusive goodies, without the hassle of installation. It's a subscription-based service, with on-demand thrown in. Where Amazon and Netflix offers you a massive library, Now TV offers you 'passes' to different content (see panel).

The catalogue is an unusual beast. There are approximately 800 films, with an emphasis on more recent releases, although there are plenty of classics too. The unique selling point here is that you get the latest releases as they hit Blu-ray and DVD, long before 'regular' subscription services. *Django Unchained*, for instance, is nowhere to be seen on Netflix or Amazon Prime Instant Video.

The same applies to TV shows, only it's more enticing. Content is from major channels: Sky 1, Arts, Living and Atlantic; ABC and Comedy Central. Alongside the

entirety of big hitters (24, *Futurama*, *Modern Family*) you get some of the latest shows before they're on disc. At the time of writing, *True Detective* was available two months early.

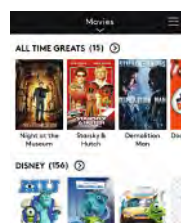
Sky package made easy

We also like the access to live TV – it's basically a regular Sky package made easy. Occasional licensing issues mean some programmes aren't available, but thankfully the latest *Game of Thrones* and *Mad Men* are not affected. In a way, it means you can watch similar content as people paying over £20 a month.

Time for some complaints. First off: the interface. It's attractive, but not easy to use. If a TV show doesn't happen to be on the home page carousels, you must scout around the channels.

There's a search box, but this is next-to-useless. Look for 24 and you're not given the excellent thriller starring Kiefer Sutherland, but instead episode number 24 of other shows. It makes the process more of a hassle than needs be.

Then there's the quality of streams. The most you get is 720p resolution and stereo sound. And that only applies when you stream catalogue content through a TV – it's standard definition



Compatibility

There is currently a deal in place for LG to have exclusive rights to the smart TV app.

Elsewhere, you will find it on computers, PS3 and Xbox 360 consoles, Android and iOS devices, Youview boxes, Roku boxes and Sky's own Now TV box. You can register up to four devices and use two at the same time.

Price Options

■ **Sky Sports Day Pass** £9.99 gets you 24 hours of access to all six sports channels.
■ **Sky Movies Month Pass** 30 days unlimited access to library of films for £8.99 – as well as live-stream movies.
■ **Sky Entertainment Month Pass** for an introductory price of £4.99, gives you 30 days access to TV programmes.
Note: all passes will renew automatically.

everywhere else. Live TV, meanwhile, is only in SD. It's worth noting that occasionally you get Sky adverts, typically one per TV episode.

Now TV has some brilliant ideas and a few daft ones, but ultimately it offers enough to differentiate itself from the pack. You get to choose between movies and TV shows, or take both and still pay less than a regular Sky subscription. And we love the early access to some of the best content around. Sky just needs to smooth out a few edges and this may become essential viewing.

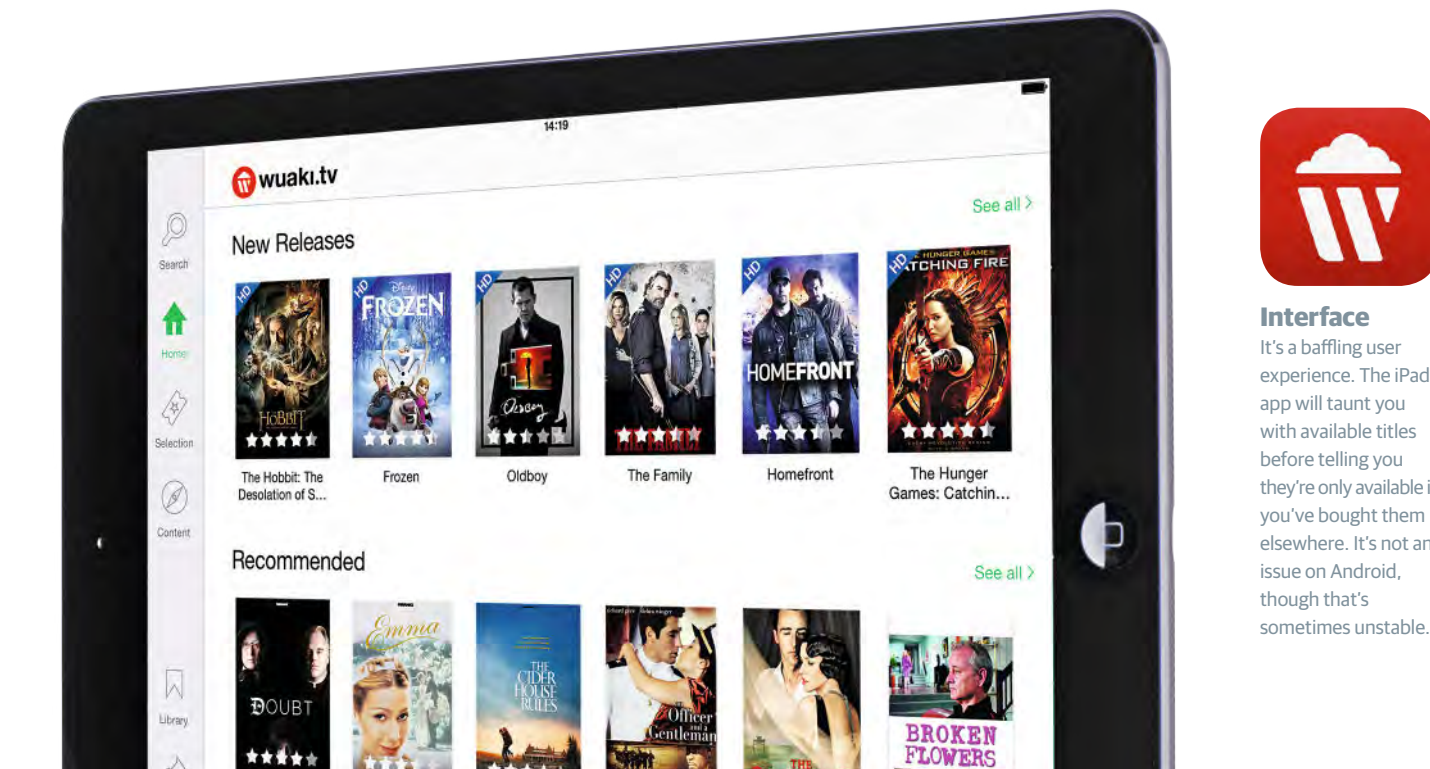
Rating ★★★★★☆

FOR Flexible packages; good catalogue of latest content; good platform support

AGAINST Daft interface; video quality could be better; occasional adverts

VERDICT Great way of getting latest content without expensive individual purchases

You get some of the latest shows with Now TV before they are on disc. At the time of writing, *True Detective* was available two months early



Interface

It's a baffling user experience. The iPad app will taunt you with available titles before telling you they're only available if you've bought them elsewhere. It's not an issue on Android, though that's sometimes unstable.

Wuaki.tv

Subscribe for £5.99/On demand £13.99 ★★☆☆☆

Don't worry if you've never heard of Wuaki.tv before. It's a Spanish video-streaming provider owned by Rakuten, owner of Play.com. It offers a mix of subscription and on-demand video in the same vein as Amazon. Sadly, Wuaki.tv is nowhere near as enticing.

Pay-as-you-go

At first glance, it's a regular pay-as-you-go video shopfront. You can buy or rent the latest releases at the same time as competitors like iTunes and Google Play. These can only be streamed - there are no downloads. Prices are similar to competitors (see panel).

While browsing the small print, we noticed that rentals are available for 48 hours. Most services give you 30 days, and 48 hours to finish watching anything you've started. The small print also says purchases are yours for a measly three years. We're going to come back to this...

The other side of the service is the streaming subscription called 'Selection'. It works much like Netflix. A flat fee of £5.99 per month gets you unlimited streaming, no questions asked.

So, why would you want to subscribe to this? The Selection costs as much as

Netflix or Amazon Prime Instant Video, except it doesn't have the numbers, variety or original programming.

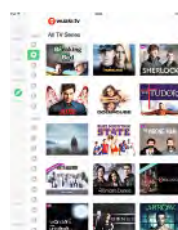
Films comprise mainly older titles, with one of the newest being 2010's *Toy Story 3*. There are a few classics here and there, but no exclusives. TV programmes aren't much better: Wuaki has reserved too many titles for its on-demand stock.

Video quality

Platform support is... fine (see panel). Video quality has a maximum resolution of 720p, and sound comes in stereo. But this applies only to Samsung TVs and Xbox 360. It's standard definition on everything else, even if a title has an 'HD' banner strewn across it.

The interface isn't great, either. Wuaki.tv's website is fine, if a crowded. It's the apps, though, that haven't been thoroughly thought through.

The Android app is unstable, and when it works it's a fairly basic series of lists. The iPad app looks very nice, with swiping pages that resemble a book - but it doesn't allow you buy anything, so having a large page of titles there merely titillates. You have to go elsewhere to buy a title, then go back to the iPad for viewing.



Compatibility

Platform support is more limited than we'd like. It runs on PC and Mac, as well as Xbox 360, Xbox One and some TVs from Samsung, LG and Panasonic. Portable devices are less straightforward: it works fine on iPads but less well on some Android tablets. You can use the same account on up to three devices at a time.

Price Options

■ **HD titles** to purchase are £13.99, or £10.99 for SD. Rentals are £4.49 (HD) and £3.49 (SD).

■ **Selection** is the streaming service and is similar to Netflix. A flat fee of £5.99 per month gets you unlimited access.

■ **Small print** we noticed purchases made on Wuaki.tv are only yours for a measly three years, whereas rentals are available for only 48 hours.

We are very frustrated with Wuaki.tv. Considering the limited catalogue, the poor user experience and sub-standard video quality, it seems cheeky to charge the normal prices. And when we factor in the three-year limit on purchases, the service seems ridiculous. It's not a purchase - it's a glorified loan.

We find no reason to recommend this service. The same money could get you more, and better. There's a free one-month trial of the Selection if you're desperate to give it a go. We wouldn't bother after this test.

Rating ★★☆☆☆

FOR Both on-demand and subscription

AGAINST Limited catalogue; limited video quality; limited platform support; poor user interface; three-year limit on purchases

VERDICT A poor video streaming service with few redeeming qualities

The Selection costs as much as Netflix or Amazon Prime Instant Video yet it does not have the numbers, variety or programming

TEST VERDICT



THE WINNERS

Netflix

★★★★★

Google Play

★★★★★

There are two winners here, because ultimately there are two distinct categories.

We'll start with on-demand video services, which tend to be the very latest titles, timed to coincide with - or even come out earlier than - the release of Blu-ray and DVD editions.

Most expensive

First up is Dixon's Knowhow Movies. It is by far the most expensive of the lot, but despite this you don't get to watch HD content on anything besides the latest PCs. Combined with a poorly stocked and badly organised catalogue, they finish bottom of the pile.

Above them we have Blinkbox from supermarket giant Tesco. The quality could be better, but we were impressed with its library, which often has titles before the disc release. Add Clubcard benefits and a friendly interface, and it's a very likeable service.

Apple's long-established iTunes is similarly good with early releases, but its catalogue is bigger and more varied. It also boasts Full HD, 5.1 surround sound and a nice shiny layout. Only an

insistence on limiting supported platforms denies it five stars.

For this reason, Google Play comes out on top. It's more open to supporting devices outside its immediate system, making it more accessible. Google's library isn't far off what Apple offers, the video quality is just as good, and titles are marginally more affordable.

Moving to subscription-based services, these tend to have films and TV shows months after disc and on-demand release - but the selling point is the unlimited access to a vast collection. Well, the best ones have a vast collection. Rakuten's Wuaki.tv doesn't. It also doesn't have great video quality, nor great platform support in HD. We like that it supports its subscription selection with the on-demand releases, but losing a purchase after three years is not cool. Significantly better than that is Now TV.

Its film-or-TV offering is refreshingly different, especially when it offers latest content without the usual Sky premium. If only video quality was higher, and its interface easier to use.

Clearly in flux

Amazon Prime Instant Video is clearly in flux at the moment, but get past the identity crisis and you have unlimited access to a good catalogue. It could do with a better selection of TV shows, but the company is working on that.

Finally we get to Netflix, which does nearly everything right. It doesn't have the latest films, and some disappear every now and then, but it makes up for this with a huge library. It rules supreme on TV shows, with exclusivity to some of the biggest titles, as well as Netflix Original content. And let's not forget the strong platform support, top-tier video quality, and 4K on the horizon.

Netflix does nearly everything right: it rules supreme on TV programmes, and let's not forget strong platform support and top-class video quality, with 4K content on the horizon

The In-betweeners

An interconnect is the crucial link between source and amplifier. Choose wisely...



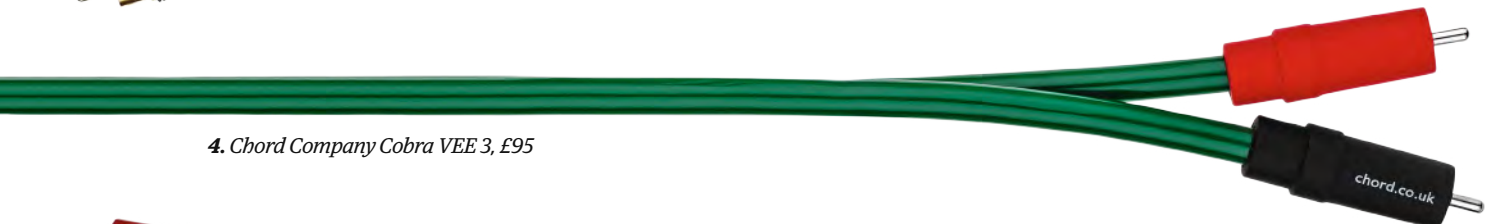
1. Atlas Element 75, £45



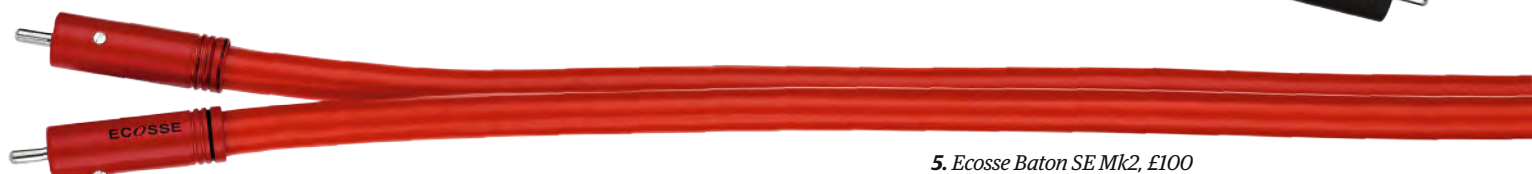
2. AudioQuest Red River, £85



3. Black Rhodium Twist, £36



4. Chord Company Cobra VEE 3, £95



5. Ecosse Baton SE Mk2, £100



6. QED Reference Audio 40, £85



7. Van den Hul The Bay C5, £85



8. Wireworld Luna 7, £40



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Listen to our favourite tracks every month!

1**Atlas
Element Integra 75****£45 ★★★★★**

We couldn't bring you a selection of interconnects without our current, two-time Award-winner: the Element Integra.

It's well-made, with sturdy, solder-free plastic plugs; Atlas claims that the lack of solder helps the music signal flow more easily through the cable.

Solid sound

And it's easy to understand why we're huge fans. These interconnects allow a punchy, solid sound. The Wireworld Luna 7 gives music a more relaxed vibe, but the Atlas gives a greater sense of determination and drive. The 75 gives music a bolder presentation, placing greater emphasis on solidity and weight, yet still sounds wonderfully balanced. The cable is also unfussy about the kit you use, making it a great all-rounder.

The Luna 7 allows detail and insight from a track to come through - it seems to capture the rhythm and vibe of Katy B's *Emotions* with greater ease than most.

2**AudioQuest
Red River****£85 ★★★★★**

AudioQuest cables are functional - and educational too. Some are named after snakes, others bridges, and this interconnect comes from a range named after rivers (there are two Red Rivers in the US: North and South). But enough of the geography lesson...

Space and dynamics

Plugged into our reference kit, there's immediately a greater sense of space and dynamics compared with budget cables such as the Wireworld Luna 7 and the Atlas Element Integra. Playing *Marshmallow Attack!* from *Frozen's* delightful OST, the AudioQuest promotes a broad soundstage and driving sound. The boldness makes for a slightly forward and at times overwhelming approach compared with others, but that's our only real criticism. The Red River doesn't have the refinement of, say, Van den Hul's the Bay C5, but what this interconnect lacks in smoothness and subtlety, it makes up for in scale and dynamic scope.

3**Black Rhodium
Twist****£36 (1m) ★★★★★**

Twist by name, twist by nature, Black Rhodium's entry-level interconnect is intertwined. Why? It's claimed this helps reduce the effects of any outside electrical noise. Tape secures the individual interconnects together at either end, and it's marked to indicate which direction the audio signal should travel.

Allows a lively sound

Hooked up to our system, the Twist transmits a lively sound. Play *Mombassa* from the *Inception* OST and the Twist doesn't hesitate in conveying its energy. The drums hit hard and with force, strings sound precise and dynamic. The pace and flow of the track isn't as accurate as it could be, though, and the soundstage can become cluttered and confused. There's a slight leanness to the sound too, so we wouldn't recommend using this in bright-sounding systems. But this doesn't rule it out for fuller-sounding set-ups. For the money, this is a decent option.

4**Chord Company
Cobra VEE 3****£95 ★★★★★**

The Cobra VEE 3 should have enough muscle and power to re-energise even the softest- or weakest-sounding systems.

It produces a clear and detailed sound - there's a greater sense of insight when compared with the likes of Van den Hul's the Bay C5 - it brings a very driven and focused feel to music.

Heart of the soundstage

The Cobra VEE 3 allows your system to lock on to the midrange and vocals of a track, thrusting them into the heart of the soundstage. Play Calvin Harris's *Under Control* and the vocal is front and centre. The track builds and explodes into life with a solid beat and uplifting electronica. The only downside to this forceful approach is the Cobra VEE 3 won't suit all systems - some may find it too imposing. It does allow for a great sense of timing and organisation though - you never get the feeling that the music is starting to unravel.

5**Ecosse
Baton SE Mk2****£100 ★★★★★**

First impressions of the Baton Mk2 are that the fit and finish don't match rivals such as the QED Reference Audio 40 or the Chord Company VEE 3. The Ecosse just doesn't have the feel of a £100 interconnect. But, we don't judge a cable on looks alone...

Decent amount of detail

To be fair to the Ecosse this interconnect does allow a decent amount of detail from mids and highs. During Lady Gaga's *Gypsy*, it brings insight to this foot-stomping track. The expressive vocal and catchy strings are dispatched with ease atop the extremely punchy beat.

But it's all a bit mid- and high-heavy for our tastes. *Gypsy's* pounding bassline lacks conviction and solidity. The lows don't delve particularly deep nor do they drive with as much conviction as the best at this money. The lack of weight and richness leaves tracks sounding cold: John Legend's *All Of Me* sounds shrill and unrefined.

6**QED
Reference Audio 40****£85 ★★★★★**

The Reference Audio 40 looks like a serious stereo interconnect. Build quality and feel are very reassuring - you're immediately drawn to the smart-looking 'Analoc' locking plugs. QED claims these give a higher-quality connection with your kit.

Depth and dimension

Well, the Reference Audio 40 certainly ushers through high-quality sound. You are made aware of a much broader and more expansive soundstage compared with the Ecosse's Baton Mk2. Play Drake's *Hold On We're Going Home* and the QED interconnect brings fantastic depth and dimension. Bass notes appear to plunge deeper and there's a meaty, mature tone to music, but not at the expense of control or agility. Tunes are engaging and balanced with an impressive level of detail. Lady Gaga's *Dope* has texture and refinement in the piano - the interconnect really expresses the dynamics and nuances of the track.

7**Van den Hul
The Bay C5****£85 ★★★★★**

For harsh, bright-sounding systems, the Bay C5 could be an antidote. The smooth-matt jacket, surrounding the interconnect, is matched by the cable's polished, glossy take on music. Play Tom Odell's *I Know* and his vibrant piano-playing sounds rich and full of warmth, as does his vocal.

Silky richness

Thankfully, all that silky richness from the Van den Hul doesn't suffocate or stifle a system's ability to sound dynamic and exciting. There's still enough tension and drama to be drawn from *Like A Dog Chasing Cars* from the *Dark Knight* soundtrack. As a listener you're still moved and engaged by what the cable imparts.

Our only criticism is that the Bay C5 doesn't have a great grip on track timing. Even music with a simple beat - such as John Newman's *Running* - can sound confused. The different elements don't knit together, with the track seeming to trip over itself.

8**Wireworld
Luna 7****£40 ★★★★★**

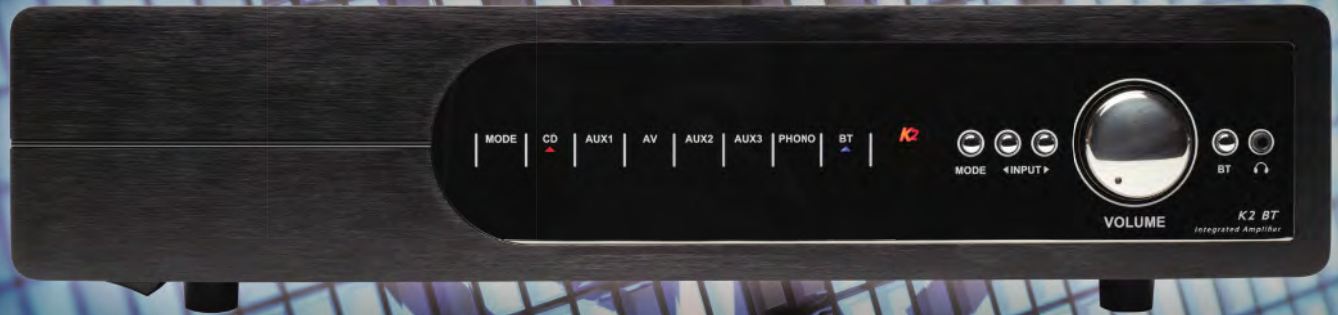
In your hand the Luna 7 doesn't look overly interesting (not that we expect all interconnects to wow us with their beauty). The blue jacket and lightweight plugs seem functional enough, though, and the odds are you'll be hiding this interconnect out of sight...

Won't be out of mind

But it won't be out of mind, because the Luna 7 gives a really enjoyable and likeable sound. For an extra fiver, there's greater body and weight to music compared with the Black Rhodium Twist. Play Ellie Goulding's *Anything Could Happen* and the Luna 7 has the track marching along with a confident and controlled delivery.

There's plenty of meat in the drums and also plenty of shine and sparkle to the glistening highs. There's no brightness or sharpness to speak of from the Luna 7, and although weighty there's no suggestion that bass notes sound overblown. However, the Luna 7 is a great option at this price.

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Acoustic Energy
3-Series
page 66

Dali Ikon MK2
page 67

Tannoy Revolution SE AV
page 71

Monitor Audio Silver 6 AV12
page 70

KEF R100 5.1
page 68

Power, precision, punch...

... premium packages are
practically perfect

When we first tested the Monitor Audio Silver 6 AV12 speaker package in March, we caused a stir by saying it could trouble our current Award-winning KEF R100 5.1. So it was only a matter of time before the two met on shared turf. After all, Awards season is fast approaching. This test pits the two alongside newcomers from Tannoy, Dali and Acoustic Energy. Read on to see which system rules supreme...



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

ACOUSTIC ENERGY 3-SERIES 5.1 £2425



We were more than happy to welcome back Acoustic Energy's 301 standmounts just months after they left our test rooms with an admirable five stars. This time they're joined by a 307 centre speaker (£350), 308 subwoofer (£800) and a pair of 305 floorstanders (£1000). Together, the ensemble is better known as the 3-Series 5.1 package, and will save you £150 on the price of the separates if bought as a whole.

The 3-Series marked the start of a new era for Acoustic Energy in 2012, bringing contemporary design to its well-established technology. Stylish yet simple, the package's six speakers have sturdy, well-built cabinets in keeping with the price. The glossy white finish of our review sample looks and feels

somewhere along the frontline for optimal co-operation with the speakers. The 308 sealed sub houses a downward-firing 30cm pulp-fibre driver and is powered by a 500W amplifier.

We start with *Skyfall's* pre-titles train chase on Blu-ray and the pulsating soundtrack is absorbing; there's plenty of realism as the train travels underneath tunnels. Punches are, well, punchy, and ample detail means subtleties are clear too. The sub is a gutsy performer: there's sufficient rumble when Bond plunges into water and explosions sound as devastating as they look.

AE has worked hard to voice-match the front three performers, and the results are terrific. Articulate, clear and direct – and dialogue blends in well too.

The package traces every shot, and unity across the frontline and between the front and back eliminate any holes in the soundfield. Lacklustre dynamics is what taints this package however; they are okay, but just lack a touch of drama and impact. We play a CD (Macklemore & Lewis's *The Heist* album) and again the dynamics disappoint. Tonal balance is good, while precision and stereo imaging are solid enough.

We're impressed by the 3-Series, though the slightly restrained dynamics of this package cost them a star. But if you want elegant, well-built surround sound with precision and authoritative bass, these are well worth considering.

Acoustic Energy has worked hard to voice-match the front three performers, and the results are terrific. Articulate, clear and direct, the dialogue blends in well too

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Impressive sub; precise and detailed sound; good integration; solid, clean build

AGAINST Dynamics lack energy; rear standmounts might be tricky to accommodate

VERDICT A fusion of decent build, looks and performance make an attractive proposition

polished (black gloss is available too). The front is clean, with nuts and bolts fixed through the back panel and magnetic grilles ensuring the cabinets are immaculate too: no ugly fascia holes here. At the base of the five speakers are front slot-ports, to control air turbulence and allow for flexible placement against a back wall.

Anodized for rigidity and damping

Higher up the baffles you'll find the 11cm spun-aluminium driver, anodized for rigidity and improved damping. A 28mm fabric-dome tweeter is consistent across the range too. The 305 floorstanders up front are three-way speakers, using twinned bass drivers. Their sloped baffle – found in the company's latest entry-level 1-Series tower too – is designed to help better time-align the frequencies. Around the back are single speaker terminals, so there's no bi-wiring – a feature across the entire range.

Taking centre stage between the towers, the 307 is a nicely compact speaker with twin drivers sandwiching the tweeter. The 301s are your backseat drivers. They're standard standmounters so don't have the slim build and easy wall-mounting potential of others. This means you have to budget for stands (and one for the centre speaker too).

While the guidelines for placing your subwoofer are less rigid, it should sit



DALI IKON 5 MK2 £2500



Dali has a fine reputation to uphold when it comes to speaker packages. You only have to look up 'Dali' under 'Speaker Packages' on *whathifi.com* to find its Award-winners. So can the Ikon 5 MK2 follow suit? The pressure is on.

A pair of 5 MK2 floorstanders are up front with a Vokal MK2 centre speaker and Sub MK2 subwoofer. A pair of On-wall MK2s complete the package as your surround channels. Dali's signature hybrid tweeter array - years in the making and inherited from its high-end speaker designs - has been a labour of love for the Danish manufacturer, and also features in the Ikon 5 MK2 range. The tweeter configuration is made up of a 28mm soft-dome tweeter and a 17 x 45mm ribbon tweeter, the latter

designed for - as Dali says - the 'super-high' frequencies. They give a smooth and wide horizontal dispersion.

The tweeters are similar right across the range, differing only in the smaller speakers (rear and centre) by the magnet used. Red-coloured 13cm wood-fibre mid/bass drivers tackle the lower frequencies. In the rear On-wall MK2's case, it's a slightly enlarged 16.5cm.

Each speaker has a dual-layer baffle bonded with vibration-dampening adhesive for extra stability and solidity. Black grilles sit atop to match, but beware - they prove easy to dislodge.

We test a black-ash vinyl-wrapped set (it also comes in light walnut) and the red-on-black contrast is striking. The Ikons look mechanical, with a clutter of

screws on show, and the cabinet's sharp edges don't fit its price tag. The best packages - and some cheaper ones - are finished more impressively than these Dalis.

Aesthetes may find satisfaction in the premium gloss-white finish, however - but that will set you back an extra £300.

The Dali is a modest-sized package if space is tight. The floorstanders are short and slim, and the rear speakers - which are relatively flat and about the size of a large encyclopaedia - simply require a hook on your wall. The centre speaker is unobtrusive too, but will need a quality support to sit on.

A monster subwoofer

The sub may be trickier to place. It's huge. It has a front-firing 30cm long-stroke woofer and is powered by a 325W amp.

All the speakers should be spiked for best performance, while the supplied toolbox is useful when mounting the wall speakers.

Toying with placement won't hurt. We found best integration across the front line came when the floorstanders are no more than a metre or so either side of the centre. The sub should also be within close proximity to them. It's the only part that lets the team down really - it's just a bit underwhelming.

Yet there's still plenty here to impress us, performance-wise, here. The *Fast & Furious 6* Blu-ray car chases are exciting; dynamics are agile and responsive, and sound effects are sharp. The Dali package unearths detail and has a cohesive sound that places you at the centre of the action. Integration between the speakers is first-rate too.

We finish the test with music - Michael Jackson's *The Way You Make Me Feel* - and rhythmically there's punch and timing, while the vocals are very clear too.

There aren't many speaker packages out there as exciting as this one - it will transform your movies and music. But a combination of the cheap-looking build and a below-par sub denies the Dali Ikon 5 MK2 that fifth star.

There's plenty to impress us here. Dynamics are agile and responsive, sound effects are sharp. This package unearths detail and its cohesive sound places you at the centre of the action



Rating ★★★★★

FOR Forceful, versatile sound; big, cohesive soundfield; clear and detailed

AGAINST Lacklustre sub; doesn't have the build quality of rivals

VERDICT Film and music fans will enjoy its thrilling sound and ability with rhythms

KEF R100 5.1 £2850

★★★★★

KEF R100s are the reigning heavyweight champions – our current Award-winners – and they have no intention of giving up their title, despite some fierce rivalry from Monitor Audio.

So what's what? The KEF R100 5.1 is made up of two pairs of R100 standmounters at the corners, a R200c centre channel and R400b subwoofer.

The absence of floorstanders in the set-up will delight those with limited space, although it means the possibility of forking out roughly £200 per pair of stands.

KEF's hallmark Uni-Q drivers are at the heart of the speakers – the offbeat configuration comprises a 25mm aluminium dome tweeter sat at the centre of a 13cm aluminium alloy mid/

the Moon Blu-ray and the scale is astonishing – especially considering their size. The system isn't fussy either: the cacophonous score and sound-effects perform with plenty of breathing space. We became totally absorbed in a normally unlikeable film.

All five speakers work together to create a unified soundfield – the film's sounds are dense, but the package handles the speed and immediacy of crossfire well, keeping tone consistent.

There are impressive dynamics too: hovercrafts move with definition and precision. Every sound has muscle.

The R100 5.1 has stacks of detail as well: glass splinters clearly and parachutes ruffle in the wind; a lesser system would lose such subtleties.

The centre speaker ties it all together, conveying the authority and texture of Optimus Prime's voice with superb focus, while the sub keeps up its end too.

Switching to music, with Stevie Wonder's *Live At Last* concert Blu-ray, the KEF is inspirational: again the centre speaker conveys the vocals with style, while the surround channels deliver atmosphere from the crowd without drowning out the on-stage ensemble.

We've said it before and we'll say it again: this is an impressive speaker package. Whether it's for movies or music, watching films as diverse as *The Notebook* or *The Transporter*, this piece of kit is worth every penny.

All five speakers work to create a unified soundfield. *Transformers'* sounds are dense, but the KEF handles the speed and immediacy of crossfire well, keeping tone consistent

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Amazing scale; excellent detail and dynamics; exceptional integration; fine build

AGAINST Need to budget for stands

VERDICT Proving to be the cream of the crop time and again, the R100 is a phenomenal package and worth every penny

bass driver. The Uni-Q's main strengths are that it delivers more consistent dispersion than traditional driver layouts and helps overall driver integration too. This latest iteration borrows from the company's high-end Blade design and features an improved waveguide over the tweeter and creases on the mid/bass (for improved rigidity) to push performance even further.

Resembling car alloys

With drive units resembling car alloys, the R100s have a slick, bold design and the quality finish you'd expect for the price. Coated with just as attractive high-gloss piano white or black, rosewood or walnut veneers, the cabinets are sturdy. It's a clean design too, with magnetic grilles meaning no need for unattractive fascia holes. It seems KEF has thought of everything: you find terminals at the rear of the speaker with screws to link/unlink for single- or bi-wiring.

The centre speaker is a three-way design with the Uni-Q tweeter/driver sandwiched between twin 13cm bass drivers. The subwoofer has two side-firing 23cm drivers powered by twin 250W Class D amps. The R100s may have dropped a fifth star recently in a stereo speakers *Group Test* (after being outpointed by B&W's new 683s) but they still work terrifically in a surround sound setting. We play *Transformers: Dark of*



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* Bordeaux finish shown

MONITOR AUDIO SILVER 6 AV12 £2875



This is a hugely talented speaker package. We've known that ever since it came out of a *First Test* earlier this year clutching a glowing report. Now, though, we have the chance to see just how much it can trouble our current Award-winning KEF R100 package.

Strapping build complements sleek-looking cabinets across the package, which comprises a pair of FX surrounds (£500), Silver centre (£375) and W12 subwoofer (£1000), headed by a pair of Silver 6 floorstanders (£1000). It can be yours in a range of finishes, including black or natural oak, walnut, rosenut, or glossy black or white lacquers.

The company takes pride in appearance, and we can't fault the handiwork that's gone into the 6 AV12.

orchestrations are given a big stage to perform on. Unfazed by the demanding soundtrack, the speakers convey strong dynamics and momentum, the sub deserving much of the credit for its impressive, controlled depth and clout.

It's equally scrupulous with quieter scenes too. Plunge into the bleak world of *Davy Jones' Locker* and the subtle sounds of scuttling crabs are clear, as is the chinking of Jack Sparrow's hair braids.

Integration between the front three speakers is exceptional. Insightful and expressive, the centre speaker does a fine job with dialogue. The FX surrounds do their bit too, giving more than a helping hand distributing sound.

Most of the time, presentation is very even-handed, although we heard a slight

harshness and edge in the collisions of swords in *Pirates*, so be cautious when matching the AV12 to partnering kit.

Polished with music

Play something in stereo, such as Kate Bush's *Hounds Of Love* album, and vocals are well-layered and precise. The polished sound and balanced imaging fills an open soundfield, although we could do with a touch more vigour.

If anything, this meeting has only raised our high opinion of the Silver 6 AV12 further. Given its performance and build quality, this is clearly one of the best packages for the money. But is it *the* best? Perhaps.

Take to the waters with *Pirates Of The Caribbean* and action scenes are loud and all-consuming.

If you're looking to juice up your movies, the 6 AV12 will supply carton after carton

If you want a showboat for your living room, this is it.

Uniformity isn't just in the looks, though. The speakers all have a 25mm ceramic-coated aluminium/magnesium alloy tweeter, gold-anodized for stiffness and damping. They share 15cm mid/bass drivers too, which achieve rigidity through dimpled, concave cones.

There's an extra bass driver on the 6s, and the Silver centre has twin mid/bass drivers flanking a central tweeter. The distinctive surrounds can be switched from bipole to dipole operation at the flick of a switch.

Before set-up, ensure the sub and floorstanders are mounted on the spiked feet, or plinth, for optimal rigidity. You'll also need a quality stand for your centre speaker, which could push you over the £3000 mark. Sure, that's a lot of money, but it will pale into insignificance - or at least lessen the blow - when you hear it.

Powerful stuff

The sense of power is staggering. Take to the waters with *Pirates Of The Caribbean: At World's End* and scenes of carnage as ships battle the thunderous weather and heavy-duty cannons are loud and all-consuming. If you're looking to juice up your movies, the 6AV12 will supply carton after carton.

The score is a potent aspect of the film, and Hans Zimmer's rapturous

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Seamless integration; convincing surround sound; loud, dynamic and authoritative; stunning build

AGAINST Requires care in system-matching

VERDICT A superb speaker package that impresses in more ways than one



TANNOY REVOLUTION SE AV £2400



This 'Special Edition' AV1 is the successor to Tannoy's Revolution DC6T package. When the Award-winning DC6T floorstanders were given the SE facelift, it paid off - a new stabilising plinth (among other changes) took performance to the next level, making them Award-winners too. And, when the DC6 standmounts received similar treatment, they emerged suitably revitalised. Both revamped models make up the outer speakers of the SE AV package, so we could be in for a real treat.

Far from sub-standard

Completing the set-up is the new TS2.12 sub, which also comes into this package with four stars from a past solo review. The teeny DC4 LCR centre speaker is the

only unit that's carried over from the original line-up into the new one.

As far as technology goes, the Scottish manufacturer's trademark dual-concentric drivers feature - a titanium-dome tweeter lodged in the throat of a pulp-cone driver - is designed to improve integration and dispersion.

Centre channel apart, this is a chunky package. The brawny floorstanders sit loud and proud at the front, and the trapezoidal standmounts are pretty big for rear channels too. If you have room for them, though, these will make welcome additions to any home cinema set-up. Build is good and the unfussy façades are handsome.

Usually we'd expect a choice of two or more finishes, but here we're fans of the

sole veneer (espresso): it's a smart proposition that should appeal to most people. Unusually, the sub is mismatching, available only in dark grey vinyl or, like our review smaple, black gloss finish.

We've praised the DC6T SEs for their forward, refined stance and exciting way with music, so it's no surprise when *The Stone Roses: Made of Stone* Blu-ray sounds great. The band has a bolshy, aggressive style on stage but the floorstanders rise to the occasion, charging along to heavy riffs and capturing the electrifying energy and rhythm of the catchy tunes.

The package's knack for movies is equally impressive. We watch *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug* (not all 161 minutes, mind) and are blown away by the detail and dynamic aptitude. Neutral presentation is well maintained, and never edges towards hardness. In fact, sounds mostly feel solid and rich.

This is a chunky package. If you have room for these speakers though, they will make welcome additions to any home cinema set-up. Build is good and the unfussy façades are handsome



All-consuming experience

When it comes to battle scenes, you feel you're getting the whole picture. This is thanks to the rear speakers working their magic too. The SE AV envelopes you with background information, - when echoes reverberate around the castle ruin, for example. Integration between the two speaker pairs helps perfect that. Of course, we'd expected good things but, as The Travelling Wilburys proved, sticking good performers together doesn't necessarily mean they'll gel as one.

The outsider here is the centre speaker, which doesn't always feel well connected to the flanking towers. Its dynamically compressed sound struggles to match the expressive, exciting floorstanders. The sub is effective, but is light on attack and could do with being a bit tauter.

On paper, Tannoy's latest offering should be good - and it is. Aside from a few issues with the centre and subwoofer, it ticks all the boxes and is a worthy contender for those six precious spots on your living room floor.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Detailed, dynamic and exciting; enveloping sound; great with rhythms; handsome build

AGAINST Sub is lacking in attack; centre is inconsistent with the floorstanders' sound

VERDICT Perhaps not as 'special' as we'd like, but there's ample zest to spice up your movies

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TEST VERDICT**THE WINNER****KEF R100 5.1****£2850 ★★★★★**

Despite being surrounded by some big hitters in our test, the **KEF R100 5.1** keeps its crown for the champion sound

It looked like we could have had a new champion, but KEF has defended its title valiantly - not even the brilliant Monitor Audios could knock it off its perch. Our current Award-winning KEFs have dominated this higher price point with their scale and detail, punchy dynamics and seamless integration - and all in one attractively compact offering. This has everything we want from a speaker package (even if it might mean skipping a few nights out to afford extra stands).

The runner-up, Monitor Audio package is not far behind. Detailed, dynamic and authoritative, it's a marvel with movies, and its enveloping sound

owes a lot to the surrounds' bipole/dipole configuration. It will be a worthy addition to your home cinema.

There are no chumps in this test. The other three contenders sit on the cusp of greatness. The Dalis are fast and exciting with a big, cohesive sound, but a lacklustre sub lets them down. With the Tannoys, the centre speaker is the weak link, though its Award-winning front and rear speakers demonstrate agile dynamics and attention to detail.

Acoustic Energy is last but by no means least. In joint-third place, its precise, insightful and well-integrated delivery only confirms our high regard for the 3-Series.

SYSTEM BUILDER

Three partners that will help make sure you hear the KEF R100 5.1 package at its best

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

A great projector from Sony - delivers crisply pictured details packed with subtlety

**Blu-ray player****Marantz VD 7007 £700 ★★★★★**

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**Amplifier****Pioneer SC-LX57 £1200 ★★★★★**

This amplifier has plenty of punch combined with strong dynamics and impressive precision. Works superbly with the KEFs

Total build £7550

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

Facts & figures**Acoustic Energy 3-Series 5.1 £2425 ★★★★★**

Dimensions (hwd) Front: 90 x 18.5 x 30cm, Surround: 30 x 18.5 x 25cm, Centre: 18.5 x 45 x 26cm **Power handling** 150W • **Finishes** 2 • **Subwoofer Power** 500W • **Driver** 30cm • **Type** Sealed • **Inputs** 2 • **Dimensions (hwd)**: 36 x 36 x 36cm

**Dali Ikon 5 MK2 £2500 ★★★★★**

Dimensions (hwd) Front: 81 x 15 x 28cm, Surround: 37.5 x 27 x 15cm, Centre: 15 x 57 x 26cm • **Power handling** 150W • **Finishes** 2 • **Subwoofer Power**: 500W • **Driver**: 30cm • **Type**: Ported • **Inputs**: 2 • **Dimensions (hwd)**: 45 x 41 x 46cm

**KEF R100 5.1 £2850 ★★★★★**

Dimensions (hwd) Front: 28 x 18 x 29cm, Surround: 25 x 31 x 12cm, Centre: 17 x 53 x 31cm • **Power handling** 100W • **Finishes** 4 • **Subwoofer Power** 250W • **Driver** 22.5cm • **Type** Sealed • **Inputs** 2 • **Dimensions (hwd)**: 37 x 33 x 35cm

**Monitor Audio Silver 6 AV12 £2875 ★★★★★**

Dimensions (hwd) Front: 81 x 15 x 28cm, Surround: 25 x 31 x 12cm, Centre: 19 x 50 x 24cm • **Power handling** 85W • **Finishes** 6 • **Subwoofer Power** 500W • **Driver** 30cm • **Type** Sealed • **Inputs** 2 **Dimension (hwd)**: 23 x 16 x 14cm

**Tannoy Revolution SE AV £2400 ★★★★★**

Dimensions (hwd) Front: 95 x 20 x 25cm, Surround: 37 x 20 x 25cm, Centre: 15 x 31 x 16cm • **Power handling** 125W • **Finishes** 1 • **Subwoofer Power** 500W • **Driver** 30cm • **Type** Sealed • **Inputs** 2 • **Dimension (hwd)**: 44 x 43 x 38cm

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What can I watch?

Streaming is the best way to access ULTRA HD 4K. If you're on Amazon Instant

or Netflix, there's increasing amounts of 4K – both services have filmed homegrown content such as *House of Cards* in the format. And there's the small matter of a final in Brazil that's being shot in 4K...

Great! So what's it like to watch?

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UB950V

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UB850V

ULTRA HD 4K • Smart TV with webOS™ • 2.0 Ch Speaker System • CINEMA 3D • Integrated Camera • 4K HEVC Decoder • Magic Remote • IPS Panel • Sizes available: 55" and 49"



UB980V

This is the TV for those with a massive desire for wall-sized screen immersion – 84", 79" and 65" sizes.
 ULTRA HD 4K • Smart TV with webOS™ • Multi-Channel Speaker – up to 5.2 Ch 120W sound • CINEMA 3D •
 Integrated Camera • 4K HEVC Decoder • Magic Remote • IPS Panel • Sound Designed by Harman Kardon



Product shown: UB850V

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TEMPTATIONS

“There's much to be said for a forgiving attitude”

■ **Aesthetix Romulus** CD Player/DAC

■ **£6500** ★★★★★☆

Aesthetix is one of the brightest stars of high-end amplification. We've loved every single piece of kit we've heard from this American brand, but still approached its first foray into the digital domain with a sense of trepidation. We needn't have worried. While not flawless, the Romulus CD player is a great piece of kit. It's apparent from the first few seconds of listening.

Serious listening

Our usual practice is to let test equipment warm up overnight before starting serious listening. Our review sample wasn't new, so running-in wasn't an issue. We normally don't take much notice of the sound at this point, apart from making sure everything is working properly. The Aesthetix had other ideas.

The first few bars of Eminem's *Bad Guy* is enough to get us hooked. This

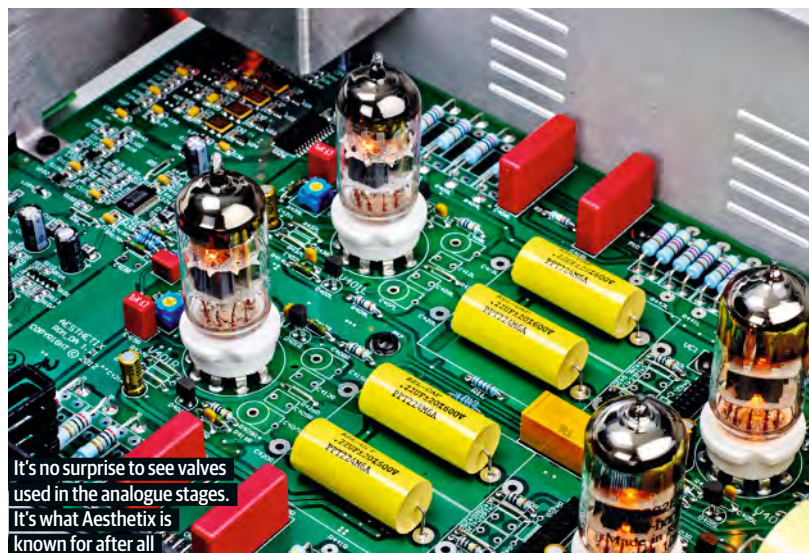
recording can easily sound hard and thin, but that isn't the case here. The Romulus delivers sound with a wonderful sense of space and ease. And detail? There's loads, as the player uncovers subtleties with considerable skill. At this point we're impressed, but we leave the player on repeat and come back to listen the following day. We wonder how the sound will change once the circuitry settles at operating temperature. The answer? A fair bit, all of it good. Listening to the Eminem track again, the presentation proves even

clearer and more fluid. There are gains in transparency and top-end sweetness. Scale improves too.

Communicating the aggression

The Romulus does a pretty good job at tracking rhythms and communicating the aggression in the recording. There's an element of rounding off the edges, though, which makes recordings seem a little easier on the ear than they should be. If you're a rock or hip-hop fan, that may be an issue, but for the most part this Aesthetix delivers enough bite.

The Romulus delivers sound with a wonderful sense of space and ease. And detail? There's loads. The player uncovers subtleties with considerable skill



It's no surprise to see valves used in the analogue stages. It's what Aesthetix is known for after all

Switch to Van Morrison's *Moondance* and the Romulus sounds right at home. It captures the jaunty feel of the song brilliantly, rendering that lovely bassline with real dexterity. Tonally, things edge towards richness, but not enough to jar. Instead, the presentation is smooth yet still entertaining. It's a balance that has become something of a trademark for the company's products.

The Romulus isn't just a CD player, either. It's equipped with digital inputs too, as is becoming common. There's the usual option of USB, optical and coax, and the less-common AES/EBU connection too. The USB can be switched between Class 1.0 and 2.0 modes at the press of a little button on the rear panel. Using Class 2.0 - as we did for most of our test - extends the input

TECH SPECS

Type DAC
Inputs Coaxial digital, Optical digital, AES/EBU, USB
Outputs XLR, RCA
CD text No
Memory No
Display off Yes
Finishes 1
Dimensions (hwd)
11 x 46 x 45cm

If we're being picky, those distinctive triangular buttons feel imprecise to use

See overleaf for more detail...



capability to 24bit/192kHz music files. Macs with OS X version 10.6.4 or higher will work right away, but if you have a PC you'll need dedicated software drivers.

Bodes well for sound quality

USB Class 1.0 should work with most computers as standard but limits the input data streams to a 96kHz sampling rate. Regardless of mode, the USB input works asynchronously - so the DAC, rather than the computer connected to it, has control of information flow - which usually bodes well for sound quality.

We play a range of music from our MacBook (which runs a Pure Music media-playing software) with really good results. There's the same large-scale, spacious presentation that we hear when playing CDs, and similar levels of

resolution. We're impressed by the Romulus's refinement and its ability to make low bitrate files listenable - there's much to be said for such a forgiving attitude towards recordings. But, give it something really well-recorded like a CD rip of Nick Cave's *Push the Sky Away* or a 24-bit/192kHz rendition of Mahler's *Symphony No.4* and it shines.

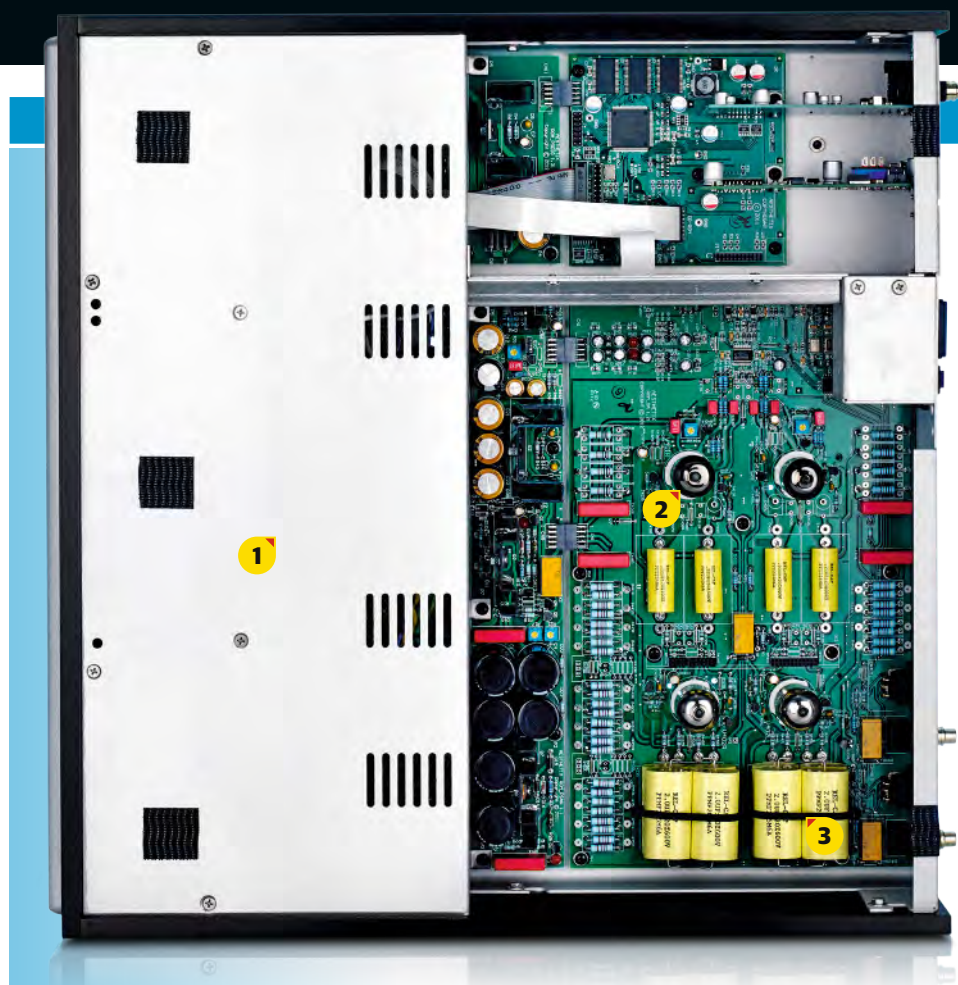
Comparing the Aesthetix to a top-class, stand-alone high-end DAC such as Chord's QBD 76 is interesting. The Chord certainly shows that more timing precision is available and delivers dynamic contrasts in a more

forceful manner. It even digs up a touch more detail, but the Aesthetix counters with its more spacious presentation, a nicely layered sound stage and a much more forgiving attitude.

Moving away from sound, there's much to be impressed with here. Build quality is terrific, as it has been with all Aesthetix products we've seen. The

The unit's aluminium casework feels solid and is finished to a high standard





In detail

1 Power supply arrangement

A capable power supply is the foundation of any talented hi-fi component, and this one is no different. It uses three transformers: one each for the analogue and digital sections, leaving the third to power the control circuitry. Isolating the sections in this way reduces interference and improves sound quality. The power supply (along with the CD transport) is shielded for the same reason.

2 Valves, obviously

Aesthetix is well known for making great-sounding valve-based products, so it comes as no surprise to find them in the audio stages of this CD player. It uses a combination of two 12AX7 valves (fed straight from the DAC section) and a pair of 6922s in the output stage. These are relatively low-power valves so they don't tend to get particularly hot. They should have a long life too, if you don't leave the player powered on all the time.

3 High-quality internal components

The Romulus uses highly-regarded Rel-Cap polypropylene capacitors and Roederstein metal film resistors to get the most performance from the circuit layout.

Behind the music Jim White founder



Early in my career I worked for a well-known, high-end digital audio company. When I left and

formed Aesthetix in the early 1990s, I could have produced a DAC then. But I decided that every Aesthetix product had to be truly special and unique, so over the next decade I amassed ideas that would eventually be realised in the Romulus and Pandora DAC (which is essentially the Romulus with the disc drive removed).

Universal product

My concept was for an adaptable, universal product that contained unique and unforeseen technologies, which would break new ground in natural reproduction from digital audio. As we progressed in our development work and the prototypes were being created, I could see my vision being gradually realised, as the technology was implemented.

unit's aluminium casework feels solid and it's all finished to a high standard.

If we're being picky, those distinctive triangular buttons on the front panel feel imprecise to use. We'd like a slicker drawer operation too: it feels no classier than many a budget player. The same thing can be said about the remote handset.

Faraday cage

Take a look inside and you'll be greeted by neatly laid-out circuit boards. It's no surprise to see valves used in the analogue stages (after all that is what the brand is known for) and we're impressed by the high-quality internal components. As is usual for a product at this level, attention is given to preventing damaging interactions between the digital and analogue sections. This extends to the TEAC-sourced transport, which is enclosed in a Faraday cage to isolate it electrically from other parts of the player.

The power supply is suitably elaborate and makes use of three transformers: one for analogue, the second for digital and the third for the control circuitry.

If you fancy having a stripped-out system, you can even connect the Romulus directly to a power amplifier or

a pair of active speakers. To do this you'll need to specify a version with a built-in volume control (our review sample didn't come with one) which adds another £950 to the price. That's a large chunk of money, but does mean you won't need to stump up for an even pricier dedicated pre-amp.

Dive right in

The Romulus is a talented machine. It's a very fine CD player and a talented unit if used as a DAC. If its refined, yet still entertaining, approach to playing music appeals, dive right in - and enjoy a smooth and elegant sound.

Consider if You want a high-quality CD player with digital inputs

Highlight We love the Romulus's sonic refinement and spacious sound stage

Rating ★★★★★

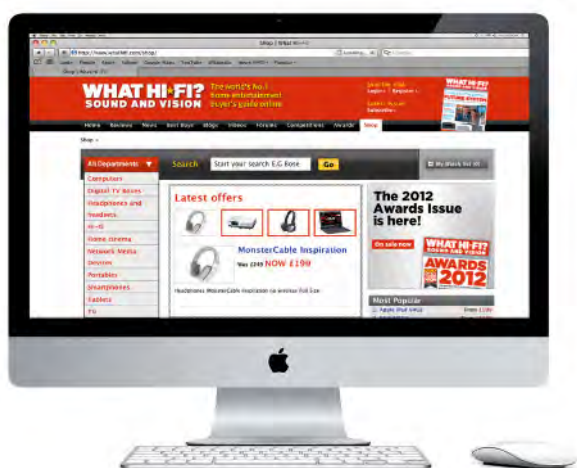
FOR Refined yet still entertaining sound; full-bodied presentation; terrific as a DAC

AGAINST Lacks a little timing precision; remote could be smarter

VERDICT The Romulus is a fine performer that draws in the listener

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**Oh ... I Wasn't
Supposed To
Eat Them For
Lunch?**



Meaner, smoother, more
dynamic, and not hungry ...
at least for a little while.

DragonFly v1.2 £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 & Vision, February 2014

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audioquest.

“You’d have to spend £1000s on speakers to get this detail”

■ Shure SE846 Headphones

■ **£950** ★★★★★

How much? High-end, in-ear headphones have a real problem when it comes to perceived value and it’s hardly surprising because they look barely different from alternatives at a fraction of the price. An aura of luxury is usually missing and these Shure SE846s are no different.

Finding talented sources

Even if you’re prepared to overlook this, there’s still the problem of finding suitably talented sources and amplification. Top-class performance and true portability are a hard combination to find, even with a

generous budget: Sony’s NWZ-ZX1, the best portable music source we’ve come across, still isn’t good enough to make the most of these headphones.

Most of our listening for this test is done using high-quality files from our MacBook, loaded with Pure Music media software. Amplification switches between Chord’s superb-sounding Hugo portable DAC and Naim’s mains-powered DAC-V1.

Then the SE846s really begin to shine. There’s impressive engineering inside the transparent, plastic shell. The SE846s use four balanced armature drive units, which work in a three-way configuration with twin bass drivers.

TECH SPECS

Type In-ear
Closed Yes
Wireless No
Surround Sound No
Weight (g) 36
3.5mm connector Yes
6.3mm connector No
Cable length (m) 1.2/1.6

These bass units are loaded by a clever tuning system that Shure says extends the low-end response considerably.

Shure also allows fine-tuning by supplying three interchangeable filters, in the form of small coloured tubes. These adjust the tonal balance.

You’ll need the supplied tool to swap them around, but it only takes a minute. Their effect is subtle. We use the ‘standard’ option, which delivers the most neutral tonal balance, but we like the ‘bass’ option too, with its warm and smooth presentation. We didn’t take to the treble-boosting filter, which proves unforgiving with less-than-perfect recordings and makes listening tiring.

Connectivity



1 Balanced armature drive The heart of the SE846s. All four of its balanced armature drivers fit into this assembly. Also incorporates the bass-tuning system, giving an impressively powerful, yet still controlled, low-frequency performance.

2 Filter options The tonal balance can be adjusted, though in a subtle way. They come with three filter options: Bass, Neutral and Treble. We used Neutral the most, but like the Bass option too. Changing the filters is relatively quick and easy.

3 Choice of buds The performance of in-ears depends on the quality of the seal of the buds. As is usual, the SE846s come with options to suit different ear shapes. It’s worth taking the time to get this right to hear what these ‘phones can do.

Comfort is all

In-ears live or die by how well they fit. Without a proper seal between the unit and ear canal, the sound will be thin. The SE846s come with a range of buds, and it’s vital to take time in choosing the right set. We found the SE846s comfortable once we got a good seal, and the smooth, curved shape of the enclosure sits nicely against the ear. The signal cable is stiff at the headphone end to allow it to wrap behind the ear for extra security and this works very well.

The SE846s may not look glamorous, but they’re among the most comfortable in-ears we’ve tried. And we’ve tested hundreds, so that’s some compliment.

Perceived value is an issue, but if you’re judging these Shures on sound quality, then they’re excellent. You’d have to spend thousands of pounds on speakers before you find as much detail. These ‘phones give the impression of delivering every last nuance, and do so in an appealingly natural and



The SE846s may not look glamorous but they are among the most comfortable in-ears we have tried. And we have tested hundreds of them, so that is some compliment

understated way. They don't highlight treble detail artificially (as many do) to give the impression of resolution. Instead, the leading edges of notes are naturally drawn and harmonics beautifully differentiated. There's not a hint of hardness or overstatement.

These qualities are apparent listening to Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*: the Shures render its harmonic complexity correctly and deliver the piano's dynamic envelope with confidence. There's a convincing sense of solidity and scale to the presentation too, and plenty of power when required.

At no point is there the feeling the SE846s are overstating things to sound

Performance will depend on taking the time to get the right fit for your ears

impressive. They concentrate on an honest approach to music replay.

We try Gil Scott-Heron's *Me and the Devil* and the Shures' enthusiasm in delivering the hard-charging rhythm and their punch at low frequencies impress. The bass-tuning design works very well here and gives these in-ears a solid kick at low frequencies. Scott-Heron's gruff vocals are delivered with passion and precision too.

A grand is a lot of money for any headphones, but given an appropriately talented system we think the SE846s are good enough to justify that kind of outlay. It's fair to say they're the most capable in-ears we've heard.

Consider if You want true high-end sound quality from in-ear and budget isn't an issue.

Highlight Quality and fantastic comfort

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Stunning detail; tonally balanced; strong dynamics; great comfort; secure and solid

AGAINST Look little different from some of Shure's cheaper in-ears; lacks the aura of luxury

VERDICT Put performance first, and the SE846s are superb. The trouble is finding sources good enough to do them justice

PLAY LIST

The movies, music and games to test your system

Out this month...



Loud, rocking and raucous? It's Pixies

PIXIES
Indie Cindy
 Download, CD, vinyl
 Out now

★★★★☆



Available formats

- CD: One disc/12 tracks, or two discs including a 13-track live performance
- Vinyl: Two 180gm discs/12 tracks or four discs including a 13-track live performance and a 40-page hard-back book
- Download: either as 12 or 25

In truth, there aren't many bands who call it a day at the right time. There are fewer still who know when to leave well enough alone, who understand the concepts of legend and legacy. Even a band as near-perfect as Pixies (who enjoyed the sort of critical traction that could pull a planet out of orbit) couldn't get it done without sticking out a patchily so-so final album. And now, after the most tentative and protracted comeback in the history of popular(ish) music, Pixies have delivered their first album in 23 years.

For the uninitiated, Pixies built a reputation based on three violent, thrillingly visceral and menacing albums (1988's *Surfer Rosa*, 1989's *Doolittle* and 1990's *Bossanova* from 1990). Each was leavened with some sweetly melodic surfadelic pop'n'roll, but fundamentally Pixies made a dynamic, biblically corruscating

indie-rock noise while a fat, bald man either screamed about incest and amputation or crooned about honeyed surfer girls. No matter how hard bands tried (and, from Nirvana on down, they tried), no one attacked it like Pixies.

Cuts an implacable swathe

Pixies got fully back into gear in late 2013, releasing three four-track EPs in short order after a decade of occasional download-only songs, some fairly consistent touring, and the departure of both original bassist Kim Deal and her replacement. *Indie Cindy* is those three EPs in rejigged order.

Produced by Gil Norton (the producer of *Doolittle* and *Bossanova* as well as 1991's ho-hum swansong *Trompe Le Monde*), *Indie Cindy* cuts an implacable swathe, like a band really trying their hardest to sound like Pixies.

On the likes of *What Goes Boom*, *Silver Snail* or *Blue Eyed Hexe* Pixies demonstrate a sort of relentless battleship mentality, where every punch is an uppercut and every chord is a power-chord. There's the same sort of muscle-bound mass even when the band attempt a little light and shade in *Greens And Blues* or *Ring The Bells* (the latter of which sounds uncomfortably and inexplicably like The Shins).

That aside, there's little new or unexpected about *Indie Cindy* - it sounds as you'd predict it might no matter whether Pixies had enjoyed a two-decade sabbatical or had been putting out an album a year since 1991. It's loud, dense, abrasive and Rocking with a capital 'R'. Guitars crunch and squeal, bass throbs, drums pound oppressively and the larynx shreds itself gamely. Does it add to the legend/legacy of Pixies? Not really.

Spotify highlights [Join us on Spotify whf.cm/playlist2014](https://whf.cm/playlist2014)



Route 94: My Love

Ably assisted by Jess Glynne, Rowan Jones (for it is he) makes a concerted effort to get the summer started.

Lyres: Don't Give It Up Now The dictionary definition of 'spasmodic', Lyres have been around, on and off, since 1979. If you're uninitiated, this is a great place to start.

Ernie Halter: Black Coffee In Bed The Burial-sampled and Bieber-covered self-styled 'Cuboslavian' here gives the high-taste lo-fi treatment to an authentic Squeeze classic.

The Doors: Peace Frog "Indians scattered on dawn's highway bleeding/Ghosts crowd the young child's fragile eggshell mind." They don't write them like that any more.

Music

GAMES, MOVIES
& FORTHCOMING
RELEASES
p84



Download, CD, vinyl



THE AFGHAN WHIGS Do To The Beast

Out now

★★★★☆

In what's turning into a vintage month for fans of the venerable rock-outfit comeback, The Afghan Whigs have delivered their first album since 1998's *1965*.

In fairness, there was always a bit more about The Afghan Whigs' sound than that of most of their one-trick pony Sub-Pop grunge-era contemporaries. No strangers to the LOUDquietLOUD abandon eventually patented by Pixies, there was nevertheless a consistent and overt blue-eyed Muscle Shoals-y soul aspect to The Afghan Whigs

recordings – once through 1992's *Congregation* or *Gentlemen* from 1993 illustrates the scope of the band's ambition.

A contemporary sound

Do To The Beast manages the by-no-means straightforward trick of sounding like The Afghan Whigs while simultaneously managing to sound vaguely contemporaneous rather than like a tribute act. There's a sheen of 2014 modernity to the sound, a tasteful surface gloss, but at their core, songs like *Algiers* and *The Lottery* owe as much to Curtis Mayfield or girl groups like The Crystals as they do to anything minted in the 21st century.

So there's superior songwriting, creative arrangements, a suggestion of familiarity in melody lines and, happily, a solid hi-fi aspect to *Do To The Beast*. It's a dense mix at times, and your system will have to separate, focus and stage with confidence if the likes of *Royal Cream* are to enjoy some breathing-space.

Specifications

Duration 40m 52s

Standout track *Matamoras* The tricky balancing-act between then and now, in microcosm.

Download, CD, vinyl



PLAID Reachy Prints

Out May 19th

★★★★☆

Plaid (the Welsh for 'party' rather than the American for 'tartan') have been movers, shakers, remixers and collaborators in electronic music circles for well over two decades now. That *Reachy Prints* is their 10th 'proper' album only tells part of the story – there have been more Plaid EPs, compilations and Peel Sessions than you can shake a stick at.

It's no good pretending time has been kind to Plaid, though: for all that *Reachy Prints* has the necessary squeal and squelch, the necessarily impenetrable titles (*Slam*, *Tether* and

Liverpool St are among the more coherent, *Ropen* and *Nafovanny* are not), the necessary low-frequency emphasis and attack, it's just not very original. At its best it sounds like the sort of stuff Boards Of Canada might turn out if they were hangover-afflicted; at its worst it sounds like Jean Michel Jarre out-takes. Neither of those comparisons should be construed as complimentary.

Short of charm

That's not to suggest it's without merit as a test disc, though (even if it's comprehensively short of charm otherwise). There's the sort of low-end fetishism that will examine the very limits of your speakers' bass-driver excursion, and there's enough clatter and glitch to keep your tweeters busy. The mix is in very wide stereo, so soundstaging and focus get a worthwhile workout too. And there are transients and fine details galore. There's just not much else to get excited about.

Specifications

Duration 40m 33s

Standout track *Wallet* We don't mean to labour the point, but this sounds *exactly* like Boards Of Canada.

Listen to it this way

The system

Marantz PM6005 £300 ★★★★★

The best-sounding budget Marantz amp yet – and that's saying something..

Marantz CD6005 £280 ★★★★★

As smoothly integrated in aural terms with its partnering amp as it is visually

Dali Zensor 3 £300 ★★★★★

Cheerfully upbeat, dynamic speakers that work a treat with the equally gregarious Marantz amp



This system may be relatively budget, but it's got talent in spades

Listen to it this way

The system

Rega RP3/Elys 2 £550 ★★★★★

Fuss-free, great-sounding and a superb all-rounder. You can't go wrong

Rega Brio R £480 ★★★★★

Stunningly musical amp that sounds a deal more expensive than it is

Wharfedale Diamond 121-£230 ★★★★★

More than capable of holding their own in this sort of company, the 121s are an exuberant listen



A superb mix of old-school charm and modern drive

Movie shorts

12 Years A Slave

A powerful, harrowing masterpiece of uncompromising brutality. You'll only ever want to sit through it once, but you won't forget it any time soon.

47 Ronin

Keanu Reeves is Samurai Jesus in this irreverent take on a Japanese legend. It's indecisive, and needs to be a lot more silly – or a lot less.

All Is Lost

A survival story with no dialogue and just one character, in which Robert Redford fights the sea. Effective, and just about memorable.

Frankenstein and The Monster From Hell

The last of the Hammer Frankenstein saga finally hits HD in the UK. It's a gruesome mess, lovingly restored with all of its, er, colour.



On-screen

System tester



American Hustle Blu-ray Out now

★★★★★

"Some of this actually happened," says the bit before the film kicks off. That's the vibe of *American Hustle*: a serious-enough premise with a light-hearted approach.

It's loosely based on the Abscam operation of the late 1970s and early '80s, in which the FBI stung some corrupt politicians. History be damned: much of that stuff is buried (or concocted) along the way.

Director David O. Russell is far more concerned with creating a gloriously retro caper. There's much focus on grease, perms, combovers and costumes – which makes for eye-catching HD material.

The cast is scintillating. Jennifer Lawrence is deliciously unhinged. Christian Bale once again amazes with his physical transformations. Robert De Niro's brief appearance is arguably his best since *Goodfellas*.

It's not as slick as it wants to be, but it's hard to knock anything with this much exuberance and some genuinely funny moments.



Watch it this way

The system

Q Acoustics 2000i

£600 ★★★★★

Great for multichannel and stereo

Epson EH-TW5910

£900 ★★★★★

The best sub-£1k projector around

Sony BDP S5100

£140 ★★★★★

Astonishing value for money. A star

Sony DN1040

£500 ★★★★★

Our AV amp Product of the Year

Games

Child of Light

PC, PS3, PS4, Wii U, Xbox One, Xbox 360 Out now

★★★★★

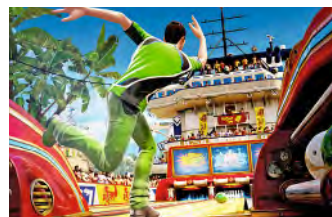


Child of Light's beautiful, hand-drawn look is unlike anything since *Journey*, and it's undeniably the most appealing part of the game. But that's not the only thing – the bloodless, turn-based combat is fairly deep, as are the RPG elements, and who doesn't love a rhyming couplet? Fun and only £11.99.

Kinect Sports Rivals

Xbox One Out now

★★★★★



Microsoft's vociferous defence of forcing Kinect upon every Xbox One buyer is made to look even shakier with the launch of *Rivals*, the entirely motion-controlled Wii Sports-alike that while pretty and occasionally fun is also annoyingly imprecise far too often and generally too shallow.

Mercenary Kings

PS4 Out now

★★★★★



Eight-bit graphics, side-scrolling shooting, local and online co-op and deep weapon customisation all sounds like a recipe for nerdy success. It almost is, but the carnage can be confusing, especially in co-op, while unkind restarts combine with respawning enemies to make death too much of a downer.

The Elder Scrolls Online

PC Out now

★★★★★



Skyrim gone multiplayer is a tantalising prospect, but despite the setting, beautiful graphics (if your PC's got the power) and open-ended questing, *ESO* doesn't do enough to improve the old MMO formula introduced by *World of Warcraft* 10 years ago. It costs £9 a month on top of the game price, too.

What we are waiting for...

Movies (Cinema) Godzilla (15 May) For once, a reboot sounds like a great idea. This looks epic, and may be just the thing we need to forget Roland Emmerich's 1998 monstrosity.

Movies (Cinema) X-Men: Days of Future Past (22 May) As if *X-Men* wasn't confusing enough, there's now time travel. Double the cast means double the fun, right? Right?

Music (Download, CD, vinyl) The Roots - ...And Then You Shoot Your Cousin (13 May) More meta hip-hop from Philadelphia's finest. We're excited by the prospect.

Music (Download, CD, vinyl) Little Dragon - Nabuma Rubberband (12 May) It only need be half as good as 2011's superb *Ritual Union* to be a contender for Album of the Year.

May in Hi-Def

The best on the box



Our favourite villains, the Lannisters, are under threat, and Daenerys's dragons are growing bigger and more uncontrollable

Drama

Hannibal

Sky Living HD - Tuesdays, 10pm

We've been waiting on tenterhooks for a second helping of this sublime show, where cannibalism is plated up more sumptuously than a *MasterChef* final. Gruesome yet artful murder may be on the menu, but it's the psychological tango between Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham that serves up the most chilling course of events.

As Will begins to peel away the layers of Hannibal's manipulation, he has a hard time convincing everyone that Hannibal is the elusive Chesapeake Ripper - everyone, after all, thinks Will is the insane serial murderer.

Hannibal, meanwhile, continues to entertain the oblivious FBI with questionable dinner and terrible cannibal puns. Seriously, his name rhymes.

Game of Thrones

Sky Atlantic HD - Mondays, 9pm

After the game-changing events of the Purple Wedding, Westeros is in uproar (again). Our favourite villains, the Lannisters, are under threat from House Martell (who want revenge for the murder of Princess Elia Martell), the Iron Bank of Braavos (wants its money back, with interest), and anyone they've wronged (half the realm).

As Daenerys's dragons grow bigger and more uncontrollable, Bran Stark heads north of The Wall propelled by visions. We're most looking forward to Arya and the Hound merrily hacking their way through the lands, slaughtering anyone who comes between them and some tasty chickens.

Penny Dreadful

Sky Atlantic HD - May

A host of Gothic Victorian literature's most celebrated characters - Dorian Gray, Dracula,

Dr Frankenstein and his creature - flung together in a new horror series that's gory, sexy, shocking and stylish at all turns. There's a serial murderer on the loose (everyone's blaming the vampires), and an investigation led by witchy socialite Vanessa Ives (Eva Green in all her scenery-chewing Gothic glory) takes us into the bloody, dark denizens of smoke-choked Victorian London.

24: Live Another Day

Sky 1 HD - Wednesdays, 9pm

Four years after the events of series eight, Kiefer Sutherland is back on our screens in this 12-episode revival of 24.

It's set and shot in London, and Jack Bauer is up against the clock to save the US President from a drone attack. Chloe O'Brian and Audrey Raines return, while the new cast includes Stephen Fry as the Prime Minister, Michelle Fairley as a terrorist's widow, and

Benjamin Bratt as the CIA chief hunting down the once-again-fugitive Bauer.

Almost Human

Watch HD - Tuesdays 9pm

A new series set 35 years in the future. Detective John Kennex (Karl Urban) wakes from a 17-month coma with a bionic leg. His mood isn't improved when he's paired with a 'synthetic' - an android named Dorian (Michael Ealy). Much of the show's success hinges on the antagonistic buddy cop chemistry between Urban and Ealy - Kennex really doesn't like androids - while (naturally) there are hints of a larger conspiracy at work.



Hannibal: back for a second helping of manipulation and mind games

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BUYER'S GUIDE

NEW

Part two of our look at the tweaks you can make to optimise your **home cinema system**. Get your kit sounding its very best.

Don't miss our overview of **Google Chromecast**: what it is, how it works and a rundown of the very best apps you can get



QR (quick response) codes

For full reviews, get a barcode scanner app on your smartphone. Scan these little squares and they'll take you to the relevant section on whatifit.com

All the latest kit, all the latest ratings...

Welcome to the **UK's best guide** to TVs, hi-fi, home cinema and mobile, with star ratings for more than **1500 products**. Where other magazines rely on isolated

writers reviewing in a range of locations, our star ratings are decided by an **expert team** of reviewers working together, in a **state-of-the-art testing facility**.

Within this guide you'll find all our favourite **four- and five-star** products - including **Award-winners** - to help you pick the best kit for your budget.



Kobina Monney, Buyer's Guide Editor

Exciting new additions...



Q Acoustics Concept 40

"It's the kind of presentation we could listen to for hours on end."

p140



Philips Fidelio E2

"Their slick design and performance makes them an attractive proposition for a TV, desktop or music set-up."

p140

Inside

LCD, LED & plasma TVs	96	RADIOS	115	SOUNDBARS	137	DIGITAL INTERCONNECTS	146
Home cinema		HI-FI SPEAKERS	116	Network systems		ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS	147
BLU-RAY PLAYERS	99	STEREO AMPLIFIERS	124	MEDIA SERVERS	138	MAINS PRODUCTS	148
PROJECTORS	100	PREAMPS	125	MEDIA STREAMERS	138	SPEAKER CABLES	148
AV RECEIVERS & AMPLIFIERS	101	POWER AMPS	126	Set-top boxes	140	SPEAKER STANDS	150
SUBWOOFERS	102	iPOD DOCKS	130	Smartphones, tablets & MP3 players		AV & HI-FI RACKS	150
SURROUND SPEAKERS	104	WIRELESS SPEAKERS	131	MUSIC/VIDEO PLAYERS	141	HEADPHONE AMPS	151
HI-FI		Headphones	132	TABLETS	142	PHONO AMPS	152
CD PLAYERS	112	All-in-one systems		SMARTPHONES	143	CARTRIDGES	152
DACs	112	STEREO SYSTEMS	135	Accessories			
TURNTABLES	114	SURROUND SYSTEMS	135	HDMI CABLES	144		



Your essential system set-ups

BEST BUYS

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BEST KIT
FOR YOUR
BUDGET

Home Cinema Systems

BLU-RAY PLAYERS



SONY BDP-S4100
★★★★★
£95

Simply astonishing performance and pictures for less than £100. Smart functionality too: you can't go wrong...



SONY BDP-S790
★★★★★
£200

What a bargain! Not only is this a superb 2D and 3D Blu-ray player, it is also the first to upscale to 4K ultra high definition.



MARANTZ UD7007
★★★★★
£700

This universal player is fantastic with Blu-rays, CDs and even SACD and DVD-A formats.

RECEIVERS



YAMAHA RX-V375
★★★★★
£250

This is the perfect entry-level option for those upgrading to five-channel sound on a budget. It's a brilliant buy.



SONY STR-DN1040
★★★★★
£500

Punch, detail and power combine in this great receiver - and it's good with stereo music, too.



YAMAHA RX-A3030
★★★★★
£2000

As muscular as it is detailed, this amp will make you feel as if you're sitting in a large cinema hall.

SPEAKERS



Q ACOUSTICS 2000i 5.1 PACK
★★★★★
£625

Our 2013 Award winner produces sound with impressive scale for movies and music.



DALI ZENSOR 15.1
★★★★★
£980

This package is as entertaining as it is insightful, delivering all the drama and punch we could hope for. Superb.



KEF R100 5.1
★★★★★
£2850

Best Buy for 2013, the R100 5.1 is simply superb with demanding film soundtracks - and is great in stereo too.

DISPLAYS



PANASONIC TX-L32E6B
★★★★★
£380

If you're after a great all-rounder in both picture quality and smart features, this TV is it. Splendid.



PANASONIC TX-P42GT60
★★★★★
£1000

Truly deep blacks, beautiful colours and winning smart features - this TV is a tough act to beat.



SONY VPL-HW55ES
★★★★★
£2800

Superb in 2D, this projector also excels at 3D. Edges are sharp, pictures have depth and stability.

Hi-Fi Systems

CD PLAYERS



MARANTZ CD6005
★★★★★
£350

This incredibly musical player offers detail in spades, not to mention a great way with dynamics.



NAIM CD5si
★★★★★
£1000

Exceptional player, combining superb sound with great value for money. An Award winner.



ROKSAN CASPIAN M2 CD PLAYER
★★★★★
£1800

Combines bite, refinement and rhythm better than anything else we've heard at this price.

AMPLIFIERS



MARANTZ PM6005
★★★★★
£300

A return to form by Marantz in this market, and a fine match for its CD-player sibling.



NAIM NAIT 5si
★★★★★
£925

The perfect partner for its sibling CD player, this amp just as good value, and great sounding.



ROKSAN CASPIAN M2 AMPLIFIER
★★★★★
£1800

The perfect partner for the M2 CD player. This amp is dynamic, detailed and entertaining.

SPEAKERS



Q ACOUSTICS 2020i
★★★★★
£165

Refined, exciting and detailed - the 2020i deliver an endlessly listenable performance.



TANNOY DC6T SE
★★★★★
£1000

Purposeful looks mate with a solid sound to produce a pair of exciting, agile and nuanced floorstanders.



SPENDOR A6R
★★★★★
£2500

Attacking, detailed and balanced, these floorstanders demonstrate a winning way with dynamics.

Complete your home cinema system

SET-TOP BOXES

Sky+HD 2TB

£250

Humax HDR-1000S (500GB) £220

Humax DTR-T1010 £230

PROJECTORS

Epson EH-TW5910

£900

Epson EH-TW4400 £2000

Sony VPL-HW55ES £2800

COMPACT SPKRS

Tannoy HTS101

£400

Q Acoustics Q7000i

£900

B&W MT60D

£1950

SUBWOOFERS

B&W ASW610

£400

B&W ASW610XP

£700

Velodyne SPL-1000 Ultra £1400

FULL-SIZE SPKRS

Q Acoustics 2000i

5.1 Pack £625

Dali Zensor 15.1

£980

B&W CM9 Theatre

£4200

SOUNDBARS

Philips HTL5120

£250

Philips HTL9100

£600

Monitor Audio ASB-2 £1000

SUPPORTS

Target CL430

£190

Atacama Eris Eco

£460

Custom Design FS

104 Signature £200

REMOTE CONTROLS

One For All Zapper

£10

Logitech Harmony

One £125

Logitech Harmony 1000 £280

Grow your hi-fi system

TURNTABLES

Pro-Ject Essential II

£200

Rega RP3/Elys2

£550

Rega RP6/Exact

£1000

TABLETS

Google Nexus 7

£200 (16GB)

Google Nexus 10

£390 (32GB)

Apple iPad Air

£480 (32GB)

RADIOS

Pure Evoke F4

£170

Geneva WorldRadio

DAB+ £270

Arcam T32

£480

HEADPHONES

AKG K451

£50

Grado

SR80i £135

Beyerdynamic

MMX101i £100

MICRO SYSTEMS

Denon D-M39DAB

£310

Marantz M-CR610

£500

Naim UnitiQute 2

£1150

AUDIO CABLES

Audioquest FLX-

SLIP 14/4 £5.80/m

Atlas Elements

Integra £45

Supra USB 2.0

£30

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A sound experience like no other. Because it's engineered like no other.

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OR LESS



BOWERS & WILKINS • A7 • WIRELESS MUSIC SYSTEM

Easy to set up and simple to use. Stream music wirelessly from your iPod, iPhone or iPad. Adding further Wireless Music Systems is easy too, allowing music to be taken from room-to-room.

£149
OR LESS

SAVE
£120



DLNA

BLACK OR
WHITE

PIONEER • XW-SMA3 • WIRELESS MUSIC SYSTEM

Delivers stunning sound streamed to wherever you are, from your mobile device, PC or Mac. The built-in, rechargeable battery and splash-resistant exterior make it ideal for indoor or outdoor play.

£499
OR LESS



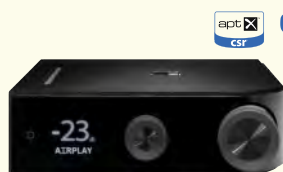
Bluetooth

NAD • VISO 1AP • WIRELESS MUSIC SYSTEM

Streaming system with both AirPlay® and Bluetooth. Ideal for wirelessly playing music from your iPod, iPhone, iPad or any Bluetooth or AirPlay enabled smartphone, tablet or laptop.

NEW

£799
OR LESS



NAD • D 7050 • NETWORK AMPLIFIER / DAC

Combines NAD's most advanced digital platform, Direct Digital technology with Apple AirPlay® Wi-Fi streaming to create the ultimate plug 'n play solution for wireless music.

£2895



NAIM • UNITI2

ALL-IN-ONE NETWORK SYSTEM

Combines an integrated amplifier, CD player, DAB/FM tuner, internet radio, iPod dock, digital-to-analogue converter and high-resolution 24bit/192kHz capable network stream player.

£1195



NAIM • UNITIQUITE 2 ALL-IN-ONE STREAMING SYSTEM

All-in-one system featuring a 30W amplifier, FM/DAB/Internet radio and wired and wireless connections to play network digital audio. UnitiQute 2 can play USB-stored music files of up to 32bit/192kHz resolution.

SSAV
.COM



PIONEER • N-50 • MUSIC STREAMER

Award-winning audiophile Network player supporting AirPlay® and DLNA wireless technologies, allowing you to stream music wirelessly from your iTunes libraries or iOS devices. When connected to your home network, you can also enjoy a wide variety of online music services remotely.

NEW

£399
OR LESS



DLNA



ARCAM • airDAC • AIRPLAY ENABLED DAC

The Arcam airDAC allows you to network any audio system to an Apple AirPlay® enabled music source and is the only audiophile quality AirPlay enabled device available. It also features a secondary digital audio input and a SPDIF digital output.

NEW

£799
OR LESS



SONY • HAP-S1 HI-RES AUDIO PLAYER SYSTEM

Take your music enjoyment to new heights with Sony's new HAP-S1 500GB Hi-Res audio system with 2x40W analogue amplifier, easy music file transfer and smartphone browsing.

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WHAT Hi-Fi?
AWARDS 2013
BEST
ENTRY-LEVEL
PROJECT TURNTABLE

NEW

£209
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PRO-JECT • ESSENTIAL II • TURNTABLE

Entry-level "plug'n'play" two speed turntable with single piece aluminium tonearm and pre-fitted Ortofon OM5e cartridge.



£299
OR LESS

NAD • C 556 • TURNTABLE

Time to enjoy vinyl collections with extraordinary quality! With a minimalist design, the C 556 turntable offers accurate reproduction by using performance-focused parts and components that put music first.



NEW

£575
OR LESS

PRO-JECT • 1 XPRESSION CARBON • TURNTABLE

With its Carbon armtube and supplied Ortofon 2m Silver cartridge, the 1 Xpression Carbon sets new standards in its price range.



£649
OR LESS

WHAT Hi-Fi?
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PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
INTEGRATED AMP

£649
OR LESS

ARCAM • FMJ CD17 / A19 • CD / AMPLIFIER

Arcam's A19 integrated amplifier delivers 50W per channel and includes 7 analogue inputs, a MM phono input and is the perfect partner for the CD17 CD player.



£799
OR LESS

£749
OR LESS

AUDIOLAB • 8200CD / 8200A • CD / AMPLIFIER

The award-winning 8200CD features a wealth of digital inputs that will keep it playing all your music regardless of how it may be stored.



NEW

£975
OR LESS

£1499
OR LESS

CYRUS • CD i / 8 DAC • CD PLAYER / AMPLIFIER / DAC

With its 2 x 70 W power output and extended range of digital inputs, the 8 DAC amplifier is a great partner for the new CD i CD player.



NEW

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.COM

WHAT Hi-Fi?
AWARDS 2013
BEST
CD PLAYER
REPRODUCING
RECORDING

NEW

ESSAV
.COM

MARANTZ • CD6005 / PM6005 • CD / AMPLIFIER

Replacing the 6004 models, the 6005 amp gains digital inputs using the same 24-bit/192kHz DAC as the CD player which now features enhanced USB playback and improved performance.



NEW

£399
OR LESS

aptX
CSF Bluetooth

WHAT Hi-Fi?
AWARDS 2013
BEST
STEREO AMPLIFIER
REPRODUCING
RECORDING

NAD • D 3020 AMPLIFIER / DAC

Features digital and analogue inputs plus the convenience of wireless streaming with its Bluetooth capability.



£499
OR LESS

£699
OR LESS

NAD • C 546BEE / C 356BEE DAC • CD / AMP / DAC

Enjoy music from your computer without musical compromise via the DAC or listen to music from CD with the MP3 / WMA compatible CD player.



£1899
OR LESS

WHAT Hi-Fi?
AWARDS 2013
BEST
STEREO AMPLIFIER
REPRODUCING
RECORDING

£1899
OR LESS

WHAT Hi-Fi?
AWARDS 2013
BEST
STEREO AMPLIFIER
REPRODUCING
RECORDING

ROKSAN • CASPIAN M2 • CD / AMPLIFIER

The M2 amp boasts 85Wpc and five line inputs while the matching CD features a 24-bit DAC plus dedicated power supplies for the outputs.



£599
OR LESS

£499
OR LESS

ROTEL • RA-12 / RCD-12 • AMPLIFIER / DAC / CD

Amplifier with DAC that supports iPod USB and Bluetooth audio streaming. Includes four analogue line-level inputs and a phono input. The RCD-12 CD player is an ideal partner.



£399
OR LESS

WHAT Hi-Fi?
AWARDS 2013
BEST
DIGITAL
REPRODUCING

ARCAM • irDAC • DAC

Designed to be the heart of a digital system. Includes asynchronous USB and a direct iPod input to optimise sound quality. All inputs can be controlled through an IR remote that will also control iPods, iPhones, PC and Mac computers.



£599
OR LESS

WHAT Hi-Fi?
AWARDS 2013
BEST
DIGITAL
REPRODUCING

AUDIOLAB • M-DAC • DAC / PREAMP

Award-winning DAC featuring a USB input with asynchronous data processing along with two coaxial and optical digital inputs. High-res 24-bit/192kHz music files can be played via its coaxial input.

AUDIOQUEST • DRAGONFLY v1.2 DAC / HEADPHONE AMP

An affordable and easy-to-use device that delivers far superior sound by bypassing the poor quality sound card that is built into your computer. DragonFly is a sleek, flash drive sized Digital-Audio Converter that connects to a USB jack on a Mac or Windows PC, turning any computer into a true high-fidelity music source.



NEW

£129
OR LESS



£399
OR LESS

NAD • D 1050 DAC / HEADPHONE AMP

The best way to add Computer Audio and HD Digital to your hi-fi system. In fact, all digital sources will get a boost when the D 1050 takes over for the inferior digital circuitry found in everything from Blu-ray, DVD and CD players, to music streamers and set-top boxes.



£1499
OR LESS

NEW
BLACK
FINISH

NAD • M51 • DAC

This award-winning DAC / pre-amp features optical, coaxial, USB and HDMI inputs, all of which can handle files up to 24-bit/192kHz. The M51 will truly transform any system.



ESSAV
.COM

WHAT Hi-Fi?
AWARDS 2013
BEST
DIGITAL
REPRODUCING

DENON • D-M39DAB • CD / DAB SYSTEM

This micro component system gives you clean dramatic sound, and more life to iPod and iPhone music libraries via its digital USB input. Includes DAB/DAB+/FM tuner.



NEW

£449
OR LESS

WHAT Hi-Fi?
AWARDS 2013
BEST
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
HIGHEST
REPUTATION
REPRODUCING



MARANTZ • M-CR610 • CD / DAB / NETWORK SYSTEM

Enjoy great sounding music from diverse sources, including Internet radio, music-streaming services, mobile devices, TV and other digital audio sources.



NEW

£399
OR LESS



YAMAHA • CRX-N560D • CD / DAB / NETWORK SYSTEM

This Hi-Fi system, with a CD player, DAB/DAB+ tuner for digital broadcasts and Network compatibility with AirPlay, combines elegant design with high quality sound.



BOWERS & WILKINS • CM10
Introducing the CM10, a new flagship for the CM series that combines technologies from the Reference ranges with innovative new construction techniques. The result is simply spectacular.

NEW £2999
OR LESS



TANNOY • REVOLUTION DC6T SE
Award-winning compact, floorstanding speakers featuring Tannoy's unique Dual Concentric™ drive unit along with trapezoidal cabinets. Exclusively finished in luxury Espresso colour real wood veneer.

£999
OR LESS



Q ACOUSTICS • CONCEPT 40
The Q Acoustic Concept 40 floorstanding speakers are the latest addition to the award-winning Concept range and deliver unparalleled sonic performance at its price.

NEW £999.95
OR LESS

BOWERS & WILKINS • 685 S2

At home on a stand, wall or bookshelf, the versatile 685 S2 is ideal for stereo and home theatre uses in most rooms. And performance is enhanced with the addition of a Decoupled Double Dome tweeter.

NEW £499
OR LESS

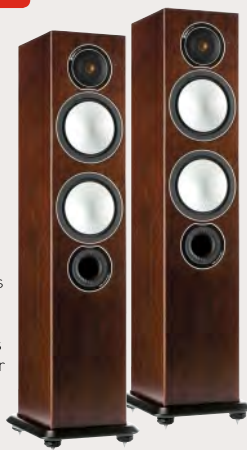
PRICE EXCLUDES STANDS



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.

NEW £999
OR LESS



PMC TWENTY-22

An astonishingly natural balance and high dynamic capability are the hallmarks of this speaker. It creates a precise sound stage and profound bass performance from its compact cabinet.

£1970
OR LESS



PSB IMAGINE MINI

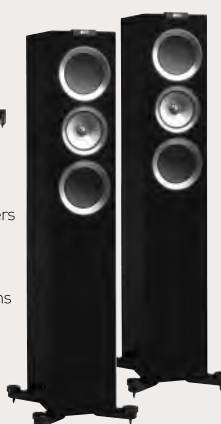
Meet the newest and smallest member of the ultra-stylish Imagine Series. The deceptively small Imagine Mini makes a big impact on an already impressive range of award-winning speakers.

£599
OR LESS

KEF • R500

The smallest of the floorstanders in the R Series. Uses the latest generation Uni-Q driver array and two 5.25-inch aluminium bass drivers. Its slim proportions and sleek contemporary looks make it perfectly suited for any interior.

£1499
OR LESS



KEF • LS50

An innovative concept derived from the legendary LS3/5a. Rarely the case in such a compact design, the LS50 monitor delivers a rich, multi-dimensional 'soundstage experience' that is out of all proportion to its size.

£799
OR LESS

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. Sonos is the only system that combines Hi-Fi sound with high-performance wireless. Plus it's simple to set-up, control and expand so you can easily fill your home with music.

ESSAV
.COM



BOWERS & WILKINS P7 HEADPHONES

With P7, everything is designed to allow you to lose yourself in music. Bass is tight, vocals are precisely defined, and there's a wonderful sense of space, balance and clarity across the whole frequency range. P7's cable comes with a remote/microphone attachment, so it works seamlessly with your iPhone.



NEW

£329
OR LESS

RUARK AUDIO R7 WIRELESS SPEAKER SYSTEM

Retro design combining DAB and FM tuners, CD-quality aptX Bluetooth, DLNA network streaming, internet radio, CD playback, auxiliary analogue and digital inputs and a 2.1 speaker configuration in one beautifully crafted unit. The R7 is manufactured to an uncompromisingly high standard with a furniture-grade walnut cabinet and is supplied with spindle legs for free standing use and puck feet for placing on a cabinet.

aptX CSF Bluetooth DLNA

NEW £1999
OR LESS



Supplied with spindle legs for free standing use or puck feet for mounting R7 on an existing sideboard or cabinet.



NAD VISO HP50 HEADPHONES

Designed for long-wearing comfort and listening with ultra-soft noise-isolating earpads. The convenient three-button Apple remote offers full control of all Apple music and call functionality right at your fingertips, plus voice control with Siri-compatible devices.



NEW

£249
OR LESS

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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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SEVENOAKS
SOUND & VISION



£2199
OR LESS

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 AVR360 & AVR750



NEW

£599
OR LESS

NAD • T 748V2 • AV RECEIVER

The remarkable 7.1 channel NAD T 748V2 is an ideal choice for the most advanced home cinema and multi-room systems.
Also Available: NAD T 758 & T787



SSAV
.COM

WHAT HI FI?
AWARDS 2013
BEST DVD/BLU-RAY RECEIVER
PIONEER SC-LX57

PIONEER • SC-LX57 • AV RECEIVER

Brings studio quality sound to your living room. This receiver allows you to experience films exactly as the creators intended.
Also Available: PIONEER SC-LX87



NEW

£549
OR LESS

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-X3000



SSAV
.COM

YAMAHA • RX-V675 • AV RECEIVER

New highly capable and versatile 7.2-channel Network AV receiver with multi-zone compatibility.
Also Available: YAMAHA RX-V375 & RX-V475



£1999
OR LESS

WHAT HI FI?
AWARDS 2013
BEST DVD/BLU-RAY RECEIVER
YAMAHA RX-A3030

YAMAHA • RX-A3030 • AV RECEIVER

AV Receiver with 11.2 Channel expandability and CINEMA DSP HD3 for the ultimate in surround sound performance.
Also Available: YAMAHA RX-A1030



£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.



£1649
OR LESS

B&W • PANORAMA 2 • SOUNDBAR

Panorama 2 adds a new dimension to home entertainment, bringing truly immersive high quality sound to your TV from a single, discreet speaker. Bowers & Wilkins experience in developing technologies for the world's most advanced home theatre speakers ensures Panorama 2 sounds amazing.



£999
OR LESS

WHAT HI FI?
AWARDS 2013
BEST DVD/BLU-RAY RECEIVER
MONITOR AUDIO ASB-2

MONITOR AUDIO • ASB-2 • SOUNDBAR

If ever there was a complete home entertainment audio system built for today's media delivery, then the ASB-2 is it. The miraculously compact ASB-2 soundbar combines a high performance active audio system with the very latest wireless streaming technologies.

YAMAHA • YSP-1400 DIGITAL SOUND PROJECTOR

The Yamaha YSP-1400 soundbar reproduces presence-rich sound over a wide area. Supporting both Bluetooth and a dedicated app for smartphone control, this new-generation soundbar increases enjoyment and convenience.



NEW

£399
OR LESS

CANTON • DM 50 • SOUNDBASE

The Canton DM 50 sets a new standard for TV sound. Intended to be positioned under a TV's pedestal stand, the DM 50 creates a convincing, room filling sound.



NEW

£399
OR LESS

DENON • DHT-T100 • SOUNDBASE

The Denon DHT-T100 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

£249
OR LESS



WHAT HI FI?
AWARDS 2013
BEST DVD/BLU-RAY RECEIVER
Q ACOUSTICS Q7000i

£900
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 2013
BEST DVD/BLU-RAY RECEIVER
MONITOR AUDIO RADIUS R90HT1

£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.



£899
OR LESS

KEF • E305 • SPEAKER PACKAGE

Inspired by KEF's multiple award-winning 'egg' design, the new E Series packs uniquely advanced technologies in highly distinctive satellite speakers and a powered subwoofer.



WHAT HI FI?
AWARDS 2013
BEST DVD/BLU-RAY RECEIVER
B&W MT-60D

£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.



NEW

£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.



4K
e-shift3

NEW

£4999
OR LESS

JVC • DLA-X500R • 4K D-ILA PROJECTOR

4K Projector with a high contrast ratio achieved by adopting an optical engine with new wire grid and 6th generation D-ILA device.

Samsung UHD TV Curved

Ultra High Definition 4K



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



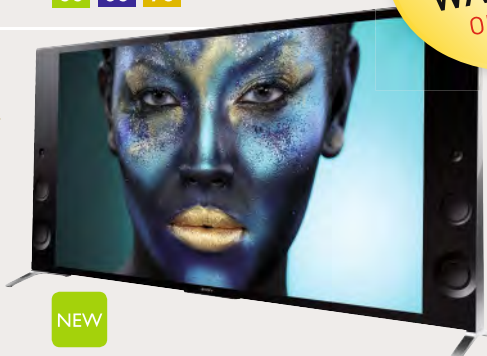
FREE
FIVE YEAR
WARRANTY
ON ALL TVs

SONY 4K

X9 SERIES • 4K UHD TV

Picture quality that must be seen to be believed. With a screen resolution of 3840 x 2160 – that's 8 million pixels – 4K technology offers four times the detail of Full HD. Take a movie you've seen hundreds of times and you'll see things that you couldn't before, from an individual leaf on a distant tree to a tear drop in the heroine's eye.

55 65 79



Panasonic

AX800 SERIES • 4K UHD TV

A high-end model that combines 4K picture quality with high-level innovative functions in a stylish design.

The use of the 3840 x 2180 4K panel produces high-definition picture quality. The newly developed high-brightness, high-color-space panel and 4K Remaster Engine provides a higher dimension of 4K picture quality.

As with the other models in the new VIERA range, you get Freetime built in. This allows you to get the advantages of roll back TV (for the past seven days) and easy access to all major catch up services directly from the Freetime programme guide including BBC iPlayer, ITV Player, 4oD and Demand 5.

<free time>

50 58 65



SONY • W8 SERIES • FULL HD TV

42 50 55



PANASONIC • AS740 SERIES • FULL HD TV

42 47 55



SAMSUNG • H7000 SERIES • FULL HD TV

40 46 55 60



ARCAM • FMJ BDP300 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

Arcam's BDP300 Blu-ray player delivers outstanding sound quality with audio CDs along with excellent movie performance from either 2D or 3D films.

Also Available: YAMAHA BD-A1020



MARANTZ • UD7007 • UNIVERSAL DISC PLAYER

Enjoy exceptional sound and picture quality from many formats including SACD, DVD-Audio, 3D Blu-ray and your home network.

Also Available: DENON DBT-3313UD



SONY • BDP-S6200 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

Bring your favourite movies, photos and more closer to the depth and clarity of 4K with four times the detail of Full HD with the new Sony BDP-S6200 3D Blu-ray Player.

Also Available: SONY BDP-S5200

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Holborn • 020 7837 7540
Kingston • 020 8547 0717
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Loughton • 020 8532 0770
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Norwich • 01603 767605
Oxford • 01865 241773

Reading • 0118 959 7768
Sevenoaks • 01732 459555
Sheffield • 0114 255 5861
Southampton • 023 8033 7770
Tunbridge Wells • 01892 531543
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LCD, LED & plasma TVs

LCD	Once only in smaller screens; now the most common type of panel
LED	This refers to the kind of backlighting used on an LCD panel
Plasma	The rival to LCD, now usually only seen on larger screens

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Hannspree SL22DMBB

"It may be light on features, but it excels in performance. If you want a small, no-frills TV, this Hannspree is an excellent choice."



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Panasonic TX-P42GT60B

"Panasonic may be vague on the future of plasma, but if this TV is anything to go by, the tech has never been better."



AWARD WINNER

Samsung PS51F5500

"A superb all-rounder with a fantastic picture and a strong feature set. At this price you won't find a better 50in set."

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	Active 3D	Passive 3D	Freeview	Freesat	HDMI	Dimensions (WxD, cm)
Up to £500													
Alba AMKDVD22W	130	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A capable set but there are better options for broadcast TV	LED	22	1920x1080					1	38x52x17
Celcus LCD40S913FHD	250	02.13/ST	★★★★★	Big screen on a budget: a real supermarket special	LED	40	1920x1080					3	97x22x66
Finlux 26F7030	240	12.12/GT	★★★★★	A very fine and flexible passive 3D 26in screen	LED	26	1920x1080					2	29x65x45
Finlux 32F8030-T	280	02.13/ST	★★★★★	Great picture and the latest online features: bargain	LED	32	1920x1080					4	49x78x4
Finlux 32F7020-T	280	09.13/ST	★★★★★	Patchy 3D but still worth a look for budget buyers	LED	32	1920x1080					4	48x77x4
Finlux 40F8073-T	330	03.14/GT	★★★★★	ATV with a sharp, exciting picture at a terrific price	LED	40	1920x1080					3	55x93x4
Hannspree SL22DMBB	135	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best 22in TV, Awards 2013	LCD	22	1920x1080					1	53x39x17
Hannspree AD32UMMB	220	02.13/ST	★★★★★	A solid option set for mainly watching TV	LED	32	1366x768					3	44x73x7
Kogan LULED24DVDYA	134	02.13/ST	★★★★★	This versatile little set is fine value for money	LED	24	1920x1080					2	38x58x5
Kogan KULED22XXXYA	110	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Cheap and cheerful and all the better for it	LCD	22	1920x1080					2	39x54x17
Linsar 22LED906T	230	12.12/GT	★★★★★	A great 22in set with a DVD player and Freeview HD	LED	22	1920x1080					2	38x53x4
LG 32LS5600	299	02.13/ST	★★★★★	This budget TV gets the basics right	LED	32	1920x1080					3	46x75x36
LG 50PA650T	499	01.13/GT	★★★★★	Good picture and price, but we'd like more detail	Plasma	50	1920x1080					3	70x117x5
LG 32LN575V	400	09.13/ST	★★★★★	A decent looking TV with credible smart and streaming features	LED	32	1920x1080					3	45x74x8
Panasonic TX-L24X5B	260	12.12/GT	★★★★★	Smooth and accomplished picture with so-so colours	LED	24	1920x1080					2	37x57x5
Panasonic TX-L24X6B	300	11.13/GT	★★★★★	If you can stretch your budget then this TV offers great value for money	LED	24	1366x768					2	42x58x17
Panasonic TX-L32E5B	400	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Great value if you're not fussy about 3D	LED	32	1920x1080					4	47x76x5
Panasonic TX-L32E6B	380	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best 32in TV, Awards 2013	LED	32	1920x1080					3	43x72x5
Panasonic TX-P50X50B	453	01.13/GT	★★★★★	Hard to beat on performance per pound	Plasma	50	1024x768					2	72x118x8
Panasonic TX-P50X60B	430	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Compromised, but this Plasma is an admirable effort nonetheless	Plasma	50	1024x768					2	72x118x8
Philips 22PFL3517T/12	270	12.12/GT	★★★★★	An accomplished set with Freeview HD and YouTube	LED	22	1920x1080					3	32x51x5
Philips 32PFL4258T	480	09.13/ST	★★★★★	A talented TV with excellent picture quality	LED	32	1920x1080					3	45x74x2
Samsung UE32E5500	400	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Exciting, but the same money could buy better	LED	32	1920x1080					3	45x74x5
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
Technika 22-212i	168	02.13/ST	★★★★★	Great value, with plenty of features	LED	22	1366x768					2	37x54x1
Toshiba 23RL933B	230	12.12/GT	★★★★★	Feature-packed but needs slightly better colour	LED	23	1920x1080					3	34x55x5
Toshiba 32L6353	450	09.13/FT	★★★★★	A decent TV for the money but response times can be sluggish	LED	32	1920x1080					4	44x76x7
Toshiba 40L6353	400	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Clunky interface aside, this is a decent TV with a great HD picture	LED	40	1920x1080					4	54x92x27
Toshiba 40TL868	480	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Formidable value meets good performance	LED	40	1920x1080					4	63x92x24

£500-£2000

LG 32LM620T	550	11.12/GT	★★★★★	A good effort with tough competition	LED	32	1920x1080					4	47x75x4
LG 42LM660T	750	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Good screen, good price, tough competition	LED	42	1920x1080					4	57x95x3
Panasonic TX-L32ET5B	530	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Price drop pushes this firmly into five-star territory	LED	32	1920x1080					4	47x76x5
Panasonic TX-L42ET50B	900	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Good effort, great images, beaten by direct rivals	LED	42	1920x1080					4	60x99x4
Panasonic TX-L42FT60B	1100	08.13/ST	★★★★★	Likeable TV with a fine picture and great features	LED	42	1920x1080					3	56x96x4

TELEVISIONS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	Active 3D	Passive 3D	Freeview	Freesat	HDMI	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Philips 42PFL6008	1000	08.13/ST	★★★★★	Impressive picture with comfortable 3D – a strong contender	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	56x95x3	
Samsung PS51E550	850	09.12/GT	★★★★★	A pedigree 50in plasma at a steal of a price	Plasma	51	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	72x120x6	
Samsung UE32ES6800	700	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Great, feature-packed TV but with tough competition	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	45x75x5	
Samsung UE40ES6800	950	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Good spec and looks, but the backlight isn't great	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	67x92x33	
Samsung UE40F6500	900	08.13/ST	★★★★★	Not a class leader but offers a lot for your money	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	91x60x27	
Samsung UE32F6400	500	09.13/ST	★★★★★	Some niggles but a desirable set with excellent catch-up TV features	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	44x74x5	
Sony KDL-32HX753	580	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best 32in TV, Awards 2012	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	47x76x6	
Sony KDL-40HX723	650	03.12/GT	★★★★★	A super smart TV that's full of frills	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	59x94x4	
Toshiba 42VL963	750	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Good set, with lots of features, at a reasonable price	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	58x100x3	
Finlux 47S9100-T	800	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Good picture, decent 3D and a low price. Worth a look	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	67x112x4	
LG 47LM670T	1350	05.12/FT	★★★★★	Great spec, great looks, great performance	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	63x106x3	
LG 47LM860V	1600	08.12/ST	★★★★★	Lots to like: top-notch HD pics and easy-going 3D	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	63x106x3	
LG 55LM760T	1700	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Scores on value and features. A solid all-rounder	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	72x123x34	
Panasonic TX-P42GT50B	1200	10.12/GT	★★★★★	This sensational all-rounder remains a favourite	Plasma	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	60x99x5	
Panasonic TX-P42GT60B	1000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Best 40-46in TV, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	Plasma	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	60x99x5	
Panasonic TX-L47ET50B	1300	08.12/ST	★★★★★	This set gets plenty more right than it gets wrong	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	66x110x4	
Panasonic TX-L47DT65B	1600	06.13/GT	★★★★★	User-friendly set with clean, detailed images. A stunner	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	63x107x4	
Panasonic TX-L50ET60B	1300	05.13/FT	★★★★★	Solid telly but could perform better	LCD	50	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	66x112x4	
Panasonic TX-L50E6B	850	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Fine picture quality but there are TVs that give more for less	LCD	50	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	71x112x27	
Panasonic TX-P50GT60B	1200	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best premium 47-52in TV, Awards 2013	Plasma	50	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	70x117x5	
Panasonic TX-P50VT50B	1900	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Stellar performance in every area from this Plasma	Plasma	50	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	70x117x5	
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	
Samsung PS51F5500	680	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best budget 47-52in TV, Awards 2013	Plasma	51	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	71x112x27	
Samsung PS51E8000	1700	06.12/FT	★★★★★	A big-screen plasma that should be tried out	Plasma	51	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	71x119x5	

Monitor Audio

SILVER 6AV12

5.1 Speaker Package £2875

The gorgeous wideband sound that distinguishes new Silver's two-channel models is multiplied by the Silver 6AV12 system, designed to blend with your home but fill the space with pulsating fidelity every time you watch a movie. We've teamed the slender Silver 6 floor stander with the acoustically matched Silver Centre and dual-dispersion FX surrounds for an enveloping audio experience, featuring brilliant natural detail and dynamics, supported by a rich layer of deep bass potency from the awesome 500 watt Silver W12 subwoofer. Identical 6" C-CAM® RST drivers and C-CAM tweeters across the front and rear channels will bring the latest high definition soundtracks alive with such astonishing three-dimensional accuracy, you'll willingly surrender your disbelief and relish a tangible sense of 'being there'.



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MARCH 2014

Other brands available include: **Panasonic SONY SAMSUNG**

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TELEVISIONS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	Active 3D	Passive 3D	Freeview	FreeSat	HDMI	Dimensions (wxd, cm)
£500-£2000													
Samsung PS51F8500	1900	07.13/FT	★★★★★	A top-class plasma screen	Plasma	51	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	74x119x6
Samsung UE40ES7000	1300	11.12/FT	★★★★★	A great TV with dazzling looks and performance	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	55x91x38
Samsung UE40ES8000	1450	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Impressive features and HD picture, but pricey	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	54x91x3
Samsung UE46ES6800	1150	08.12/ST	★★★★★	A fine performer – but with strong competition	LED	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	64x107x5
Samsung UE40F7000	1200	08.13/ST	★★★★★	A lovely TV with a great picture and a wealth of smart features	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	90x58x24
Samsung UE46F7000	1600	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Great picture coupled with smart features make it one to watch	LED	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	59x104x3
Sony KDL-40HX853	1000	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Best 40-42in TV, Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	57x94x4
Sony KDL-46HX753	1150	08.12/ST	★★★★★	A must-see TV: superb performer for the price	LED	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	65x108x5
Sony KDL-46HX853	1250	08.12/ST	★★★★★	Best 46-47in TV, Awards 2012	LED	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	64x108x3
Sony KDL-55HX853	1440	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Best 55in TV, Awards 2012	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	77x129x3
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-50W829B	900	03.14/FT	★★★★★	Sony returns to form with a highly desirable TV. Excellent	LED	50	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	66x112x6
Sony KDL-55W955B	1600	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A good TV but we expect more from a flagship set	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	79x124x9
£2000 and above													
Bang & Olufsen BeoVision 11	5250	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A truly luxurious TV that delivers a great performance too	LCD	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	6	89x96x6
LG 47LM960V	2000	08.12/ST	★★★★★	An accomplished, covetable TV – but pricey	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	61x105x4
LG 55LA860W	2300	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Close but no cigar. A good TV but the competition is strong	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	72x123x4
LG 55LM960V	3300	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Impressive, but let down by price and sound	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	77x122x4
LG 55LM980W	8000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	A great first OLED effort from LG	OLED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	80x123x19
LG 65LM960W	5500	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Fantastic to look at, but lacks the detail of depth of rivals	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	3	84x143x41
LG 84LM960V	22500	02.13/FT	★★★★★	Stunning with Ultra High Def, but ordinary elsewhere	LED	84	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	102x190x4
Panasonic TX-L47WT50B	2000	08.12/ST	★★★★★	Stylish, with real areas of expertise	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	63x107x3
Panasonic TX-P55VT65B	2000	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best 55in+ TV, Awards 2013	Plasma	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	77x132x5
Panasonic TX-L55WT65B	2470	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A good performer but there are more capable sets	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	72x123x3
Panasonic TX-P60ZT65B	3850	08.13/GT	★★★★★	An accomplished set, but not the best TV pound-for-pound	Plasma	60	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	83x140x5
Panasonic TX-P65ST50B	2500	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Best 60in+ TV, Awards 2012	Plasma	65	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	89x151x5
Panasonic TX-P65WT600	5500	12.13/GT	★★★★★	A capable set that handles 4K footage very well	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	86x147x6
Philips 46PFL9706	2300	05.12/GT	★★★★★	A great flatscreen from Philips	LED	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	66x108x4
Philips 50PFL7956T	2000	09.12/GT	★★★★★	The best 21:9 set we've seen: brilliant for films	LED	50	2560x1080	●	●	●	●	4	58x124x3
Philips 55PFL8008	2500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A great TV from Philips	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	72x124x3
Philips 65PFL9708	4500	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Smart features aren't as good we'd like but this is still a strong 4K set	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	5	84x146x4
Samsung KE55S9C	7000	01.14/GT	★★★★★	An excellent first step for large screen OLED TVs	OLED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	78x142x14
Samsung UE46ES8000	2000	05.12/GT	★★★★★	A benchmark set for 2012	LED	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	61x104x3
Samsung UE55ES8000	2500	09.12/GT	★★★★★	A towering bruiser, with an added control twist	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	78x136x38
Samsung UE55F8000	2500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Can't keep up with the very best. Still a smart, user-friendly set	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	71x122x4
Samsung UE65F9000	5000	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented set with few weaknesses to speak of	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	84x146x4
Samsung PS64E8000	3000	09.12/GT	★★★★★	This is as smart as smart TV gets	Plasma	64	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	3	88x149x5
Sony KDL-55W905A	2400	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A great-looking TV but a few issues knock it down a star	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	72x124x6
Sony KDL-65X9005A	5000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Good looks and great sound but needs 4K material to shine	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	90x168x10
Toshiba 55ZL2	7000	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Struggles at this price level. But it's the future	LED	55	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	4	79x125x4

Setting up your... home cinema system

Looking to get your home cinema system in tip-top shape? Then look no further

1. The majority of home cinema amps include an auto set-up system. Undeniably useful and increasingly very accurate, they are a fine starting point for calibration...

2. ...But don't be afraid to check their work. A sound-pressure level (SPL) meter lets you adjust each speaker's volume 'by hand'.

3. Plan where your speakers will sit. Whether you want 5.1 or 7.1, you will need to think about your room's shape, plus your seating and screen position for the best placement.

4. The front three speakers should be aligned for solid imaging, while the centre channel should be as close to ear level as possible. Rear positioning is a little more flexible.

5. Lastly, don't be afraid to listen to your ears and trust your own judgment. The final set-up tweaks should ultimately be your decision.



Auto calibration helps, but only gets you so far. Trust your eyes and ears to get it just as you want



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



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Sony BDP-S790



AWARD WINNER

Marantz UD7007



AWARD WINNER

Sony BDP-S4100

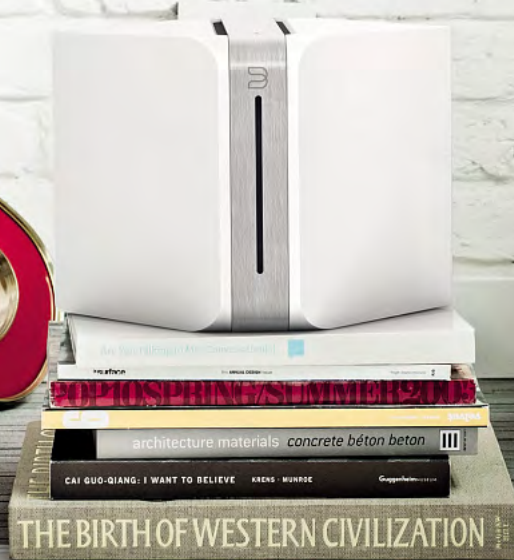
Also consider

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	HDMI out	Optical out	Co-axial out	Multichannel out	Dimensions (hwd,cm)	
Up to £500									
LG BP420	160	06.12/ST	★★★★★	An enjoyable and vibrant performance	1	1	0	No	4x43x19
Panasonic DMP-BBT01	279	08.12/FT	★★★★★	A good quality, stylish Blu-ray player	1	1	0	No	2.7x18x18
Panasonic DMP-BDT220	155	06.12/GT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player £100-175, Awards 2012	1	1	0	No	4x43x18
Panasonic DMP-BDT230	160	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Great picture and fine sound	1	1	0	No	4x43x18
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-BDT320	220	05.12/FT	★★★★★	A superb Blu-ray spinner from Panasonic	1	1	0	No	3x43x18
Panasonic DMP-BDT500	300	07.12/FT	★★★★★	A truly captivating disc spinner	2	1	1	8ch	6x43x24

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BLU-RAY PLAYERS continued

BLU-RAY PLAYERScontinued					HDMI out	Optical out	Co-axial out	Multichannel out	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict						
Up to £500									
Philips BDP3380	80	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Avery good performer that lacks some smart features	1	0	1	No	4x41x21
Pioneer BDP-160	120	01.14/GT	★★★★★	This entry-level unit is pretty spartan, but it delivers an impressive performance	2	0	1	No	6x44x25
Pioneer BDP-450	225	01.12/FT	★★★★★	This budget deck is a real rival for the top performers	1	0	1	No	9x44x25
Pioneer BDP-LX55	350	03.12/ST	★★★★★	Essentially, you can't go wrong with this disc spinner	2	1	0	8ch	9x43x25
Samsung BD-F6500	130	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Competitive but not the best in class	1	0	1	7ch	4x43x18
Sony BDP-S4100	80	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player up to £100, Awards 2013	1	0	1	No	4x36x20
Sony BDP-S5100	140	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player £100-£150, Awards 2013	1	0	1	No	4x36x20
Sony BDP-S390	90	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player up to £100, Awards 2012	1	0	1	No	4x20x23
Sony BDP-S490	110	12.12/FT	★★★★★	An excellent budget Blu-ray player that also does 3D	1	0	1	No	4x43x20
Sony BDP-S790	200	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player £150-£300, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	2	1	1	No	4x43x19
Sony PlayStation 3 (2012)	250	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Super slim PS3 feels less special, but it's still multi-talented	1	1	0	No	6x29x23
Sony PlayStation 4	349	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A great gaming machine that's less spectacular when it comes to home entertainment	1	1	0	No	19x3x3
Xbox One	430	01.14/FT	★★★★★	As ambitious a game console as there has ever been, but yet to fulfil its potential	1	1	0	No	8x33x27
£500 and above									
Cambridge Audio Azur 651BD	500	04.12/GT	★★★★★	A very talented Blu-ray player	2	1	1	8ch	9x43x31
Cambridge Audio Azur 751BD	800	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Ideal for those who want more than a budget player	2	1	1	8ch	9x43x31
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
Denon BDP-2012UD	500	04.12/GT	★★★★★	A price cut makes this disc spinner even more appealing	1	0	1	8ch	11x43x32
Marantz UD7006	550	04.12/GT	★★★★★	Asplendid master of all trades	1	0	1	8ch	11x44x33
Marantz UD7007	700	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player £300+, Awards 2013	1	1	1	No	11x44x31
Marantz UD8004	2449	03.10/FT	★★★★★	A brilliant player – if you want one box to do it all	1	1	1	8ch	12x44x39
Onkyo BD-SP809	500	04.12/GT	★★★★★	A fine choice, but not an all-rounder	2	1	1	No	10x43x31
Oppo BDP-93EU	500	04.12/GT	★★★★★	Perfect for the midrange Blu-ray player market	2	1	1	8ch	8x43x31



Projectors

- Screens** Buy one of these. A painted white wall is simply not good enough
- Noise** Fan noise can be a major issue if you sit close to your projector
- Lamp life** Projector bulbs have limited lifespans and need to be changed regularly

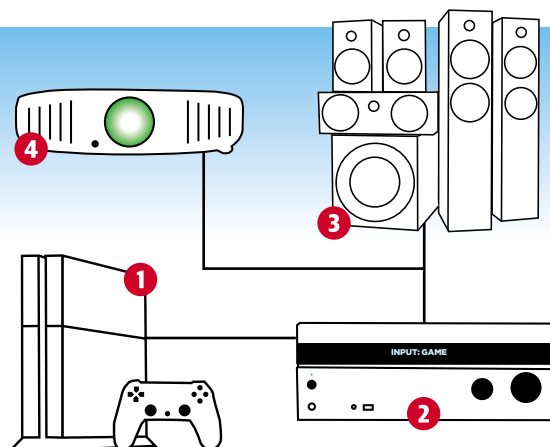
Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Throw Ratio	Resolution	Rated Brightness (Lumens)	HDMI in	DVI in	PC in	Component in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Weight (kg)
Up to £1000													
BenQ W1060	700	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Solid effort for a budget projector	DLP	1.59-1.9	1920x1080	2000	2	1	1	15x33x25	3.6
BenQ W1200	1100	04.12/ST	★★★★★	Best projector up to £1500, Awards 2012	DLP	1.44-2.1:1	1920x1080	1800	2	0	1	14x34x26	3.6
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	10x31x24	2.85
Epson EH-TW5900	950	04.12/GT	★★★★★	Sturdy and impressively spec'd	LCD	1.32-2.15:1	1920x1080	2000	2	0	1	14x42x37	6
Epson EH-TW5910	900	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Best projector up to £1000, Awards 2013. Product of the Year	LCD	1.32-2.15	1920x1080	2100	2	0	1	14x42x37	6
InFocus IN3118HD	990	05.13/GT	★★★★★	A few niggles but a bright and capable projector	DLP	1.6-1.92	1920x1080	3600	2	0	1	10x34x25	3.7
Optoma HD23	800	04.12/GT	★★★★★	Affordable, but not the last word in performance	DLP	1.5-1.8:1	1920x1080	2500	2	0	1	10x32x33	2.9
Optoma HD25	800	05.13/GT	★★★★★	Plenty of features for a budget level projector	DLP	1.5-1.8	1920x1080	2000	2	0	2	12x38x31	4.5

Build the best gaming system

Gaming on your 40in television is small fry. Take your gaming ambitions to the next level with this set-up.

- For us the PS4 just pips the Xbox One. Its line-up will be bolstered once the remastered version of PS3 classic *The Last of US* hits stores.
- For an AV receiver, we opt for the Sony STR DN1040 with its strong, weighty sound and its propensity for soaring dynamics and punchy effects.
- Dali's Zensor 1 5.1 package gets the nod here. A terrific partner for the DN1040, with an articulate and expressive sound to boot.
- Epson's EH-TW5910 is one of the best projectors we've seen at the £900 price point. Stunningly crisp picture with a captivating image.



PROJECTORS continued

PROJECTORScontinued														
Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Type	ThrowRatio	Resolution	Rated Brightness (Lumens)	HDMI in	DVI in	PC in	Component in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Weight (kg)
£1000-£3000														
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
Optoma HD83	2400	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Healthily priced, with a solid performance	DLP	1.45x2.28	1920x1080	1600	2	0	0	1	19x49x37	8.4
Philips Screeneo HDP1590TV	1500	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A great idea that's executed well, but not perfectly	DLP	0.321	1280x800	500	3	0	1	0	15x34x29	5
Sony VPL-HW55ES	2800	04.14/GT	★★★★★	An impressively capable projector	SXRD	n/a	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1	18x41x46	9.6
£3000 and above														
Epson EH-TW9000W	3200	06.12/FT	★★★★★	If you need wireless HDMI, buy this Epson	LCD	1.34-2.87	1920x1080	2400	2	0	1	1	16x47x40	8.5
Epson EH-TW9200W	3000	04.14/GT	★★★★★	A fine projector, but not the showstopper we expected	LCD	1.34-2.87:1	1920x1080	2400	6	0	0	1	14x47x40	9
JVC DLA-X35BE	3000	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Good but not great, this JVC appeals if you like bright pictures	D-ILA	n/a	1920x1080	1300	2	0	1	1	18x46x47	15
Panasonic PT-AT6000E	3000	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Best projector £2000+, Awards 2013	LCD	1.18-2.36	1920x1080	2400	3	0	1	1	15x47x36	8.7
SIM2 C3X Lumis 3D-S	30000	11.11/FT	★★★★★	The best 3D projector we've ever seen	DLP	1.82-2.48:1	1920x1080	3000	2	0	0	1	46x21x46	11
Sony VPL-HW30ES	3000	02.12/GT	★★★★★	Very capable, but there's better for the money	SXRD	1.47-2.18	1920x1080	1300	2	0	1	1	18x41x46	10
Sony VPL-HW50ES	3000	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Shows why home cinema can't be beaten	SXRD	1.64-2.37	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1	18x41x46	9.6
Sony VPL-VW500ES	8500	04.14/FT	★★★★★	Stunningly good with 4K content but pricey nonetheless	SXRD	1.64-2.37	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1	18x41x46	9.6
Sony VPL-VW95ES	5000	01.12/FT	★★★★★	By class standards, it's one of the best projectors around	SXRD	1.38-2.83	4096x2160	1700	2	0	0	0	20x50x46	14



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

Theshortlist



AWARD WINNER
Yamaha RX-V375



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Sony STR-DN1040



AWARD WINNER
Pioneer SC-LX57

Also consider

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Channels /power (w)	HDMI in	HDMI out	Networking	3D passthrough	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £300									
Pioneer VSX-528	285	02.14/GT	★★★★★	A well-equipped budget amp with good surround sound capabilities	5x130	6	1	● ● ●	17x44x33
Sony STR-DH820	230	04.13/GT	★★★★★	A capable, if not faultless, option for those looking for a sub-£250 7.1 channel amp	7x115	4	1	●	16x43x32
Yamaha RX-V373	250	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier up to £350, Awards 2012	5x100	4	1	●	15x44x32
Yamaha RX-V375	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier up to £350, Awards 2013	5x100	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
Onkyo TX-NR515	450	11.12/GT	★★★★★	The amplifier to beat in 2012, now beaten	7x130	8	2	● ●	17x44x33
Sony STR-DH840	350	02.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented, energetic amp that delivers plenty of precision and attack	7x150	6	1	● ●	16x43x33
Sony STR-DN1030	470	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Gives the best (at this price) a run for their money	7x120	5	1	● ●	17x43x33
Sony STR-DN1040	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £350-£700, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	7x100	8	2	● ● ●	16x43x32
Yamaha RX-V675	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	A powerful and thrilling amplifier for the money	7x150	6	1	● ●	17x44x36
£500-£1000									
Denon AVR-2113	550	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Solid, likeable option for both novices and enthusiasts	7x125	6	1	● ● ●	17x44x33
Denon AVR-X2000	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Marks a fine return to form for Denon	7x150	7	1	● ● ●	17x43x33
Denon AVR-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
Pioneer VSX-923	450	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Needs more heft but it's still a confident and compelling amp	7x150	8	2	● ● ●	17x44x36
Yamaha RX-S600	500	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A small, excellent amp that delivers great sound and good features	5x90	5	1	● ● ●	17x43x33
Yamaha RX-V673	500	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £350-£700, Awards 2012.	7x150	6	1	●	17x44x36
Onkyo TX-NR626	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Well-featured but not as compelling or as immersive as rival products	7x160	6	2	● ● ●	17x44x33

AV RECEIVERS & AMPLIFIERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Channels /power (w)	HDMI in	HDMI out	Networking	3D passthrough	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
£1000-£2000									
Denon AVR-4520	1970	03.13/ST	★★★★★	An enjoyable, easygoing sound, piped 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
Pioneer SC-LX56	1300	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £700-£1500, Awards 2012	9x170	8	2	●	19x44x44
Pioneer SC-LX57	1200	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £700-£1500, Awards 2013	9x190	9	3	●	19x44x44
Pioneer SC-LX86	1800	03.13/ST	★★★★★	Best Home Cinema amplifier £1500+, Awards 2012	9x190	8	3	●	19x44x414
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
£2000 and above									
Anthem MRX 700	2100	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Fantastic-sounding and worthy of a serious audition	7x90	4	1	●	17x44x39
Arcam FMJ AVR450	2200	03.14/GT	★★★★★	There's plenty to like with this receiver, but its rivals better it	7x110	7	2	●	17x43x42
Arcam AVR750	4000	12.13/FT	★★★★★	It's not flawless, but this AV receiver is very good	7x100	7	2	●	17x43x43
Pioneer SC-LX87	2000	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Pioneer strikes gold again with this feature-laden powerhouse	9x220	9	3	●	19x44x44
Onkyo TX-NR1010	2000	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Power-packed heavyweight needs a touch more precision	7x200	9	2	●	20x44x59
Onkyo TX-NR3009	2000	04.12/GT	★★★★★	Produces seriously rewarding surround sound	9x200	8	2	●	34x61x60
Onkyo TX-NR3010	2000	03.13/ST	★★★★★	A solid performance but lacks the subtlety to cut it as a complete all-rounder	9x160	9	2	●	20x44x60
Yamaha RX-A3020	2000	03.13/ST	★★★★★	A shot across the bows of the class leaders	9x230	8	2	●	19x44x47
Yamaha RX-A3030	2000	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £1500+, Awards 2013	9x150	8	1	●	19x44x47



Subwoofers

- Sealed cabinet** _____ Tends to produce the tightest bass but limits outright quantity
- Reflex port** _____ A more common design that tends to deliver more bass
- Room equalisation** _____ Evens out the subwoofer's response to produce a more balanced sound

Our recommendations

Our recommendations					Power (w)	Driver (cm)	Passive radiator	Sealed	Ported	Drive unit orientation	Line inputs	Speaker ins	Line outputs	Speaker outs	Phase invert	Remote control	EQ	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict																
Up to £500																			
B&W ASW610	450	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Best subwoofer up to £700, Awards 2011	200	25	●		Forward	1	1			●		●	4	31x31x38	
Klipsch SW-450	330	02.11/GT	★★★★★	Weighty and tight, but loses its way at times	200	25.4		●	Downward	2	2		●	●			1	43x36x50	
Monitor Audio Vector VW-8	225	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Capable little sub for an entry-level system	100	20		●	Forward	2	0			●			2	32x28x28	
REL Acoustics T-Zero	350	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Small and discreet, but limited by size	100	16.5	●		Downward	2	1			●			2	24x22x26	
Tannoy TS2.10	430	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Small, but packs a ferocious punch	300	25	●		Forward	1	0	●		●			3	39x38x33	
Velodyne EQ-Max 8	495	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Small, but punches well above its weight	180	20		●	Forward	2	2	●	●	●	●	●	1	37x33x38	
Velodyne Impact-10	295	07.09/GT	★★★★★	This sizeable subwoofer needs to be more controlled	150	25		●	Forward	2	2	●	●	●	●	●	4	35x32x37	
Velodyne Impact-12	365	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Fine sub, more of a movie than a music classic	165	30		●	Forward	2	1		●	●			1	39x66x45	
Velodyne Impact-Mini	435	10.09/FT	★★★★★	Amazingly small sub with fine movie performance	180	16.5	●		Forward	2	2		●	●			1	25x25x30	
W'fedale Powercube SPC-10	300	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Nearly a terrific subwoofer - but there are issues	215	25	●		Downward	1	1	●		●			8	38x35x31	
£500-£1000																			
B&W ASW610XP	700	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for big bass from a small box	500	25		●	Forward	2	1			●		●	4	32x32x37	
Monitor Audio Apex AW-12	950	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Beautiful to look at, and punchy too	500	30.5		●	Forward	1	0	●		●		●	2	34x34x41	
REL Acoustics T-7	650	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A compact sub with authority	200	20	●		Downward	2	1			●			2	30x35x33	
Sonos Sub	600	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Sounds great. Makes sense with Sonos Play speakers	n/a	n/a		●	Inward	0	0			●	●	●	1	40x38x16	
Tannoy TS2.12	549	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Attractively priced with decent sonics too	500	30.5		●	Forward	1	0	●		●			2	44x43x38	
Velodyne EQ-Max 12	825	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Powerful and agile and supremely enjoyable	225	30.5		●	Forward	1	2	●	●	●	●	●	1	45x42x46	
Yamaha NS-SW700	500	03.10/FT	★★★★★	Not the most accomplished, but very competent	300	25		●	Downward	4	2		●			●	2	45x41x41	
£1000 and above																			
B&W PV1D	1200	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Delivers precision and agility in spades	400	20		●	Forward	1	0			●	●	●	2	34x27x36	
Jamo D600	1300	05.12/GT	★★★★★	A brilliant sub that's worth the price	400	38		●	Forward	n/a	0			●			1	56x59x50	
Paradigm Seismic 110	1250	10.10/FT	★★★★★	A subwoofer that's deeply impressive in every sense	850	25		●	Forward	2	0			●		●	1	34x30x32	
Sunfire Subr. SRA2700EQ	2350	03.12/FT	★★★★★	It's not cheap, but it is impressive	2700	25x2		●	Forward	2	0	●		●		●	1	36x113x9	
Velodyne SPL-1000 Ultra	1400	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Best subwoofer £700+, Awards 2011	1200	25	●		Forward	1	1	●		●	●	●	3	34x33x34	
Wilson Benesch Torus	3000	02.07/GT	★★★★★	The most musical and insightful deep bass ever	200	36		●	Upward	4	1	●		●	●	●	2	45x90x30	

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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 2013: Best Traditional Pack up to £700



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Dali Zensor 15.1

Awards 2013: Best Style Pack £700-£1500



AWARD WINNER
Cambridge Audio Aero 5.1

Awards 2013: Best Traditional Pack £1500-£2500

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
Harman-Kardon HKTS20	450	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Neat, but a conservative listen	22x11x9	11x26x9	22x11x9	36x27x27 1
Jamo A101HCS5	230	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A great way to get started with home cinema	9x15x15	9x15x15	9x15x15	30x57x16 1
Jamo S426 HCS3	350	01.12/FT	★★★★★	A worthy home cinema solution	91x18x24	12x34x12	21x12x12	n/a 3
Teufel Motiv 3	460	06.10/GT	★★★★★	Another solid showing from this manufacturer	12x12x14	12x12x14	12x12x14	26x26x32 1
Teufel Theater 80	449	01.10/FT	★★★★★	Big sounds for not too much money	23x15x19	23x15x19	23x15x19	40x26x40 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
Cambridge Audio Minx S215	500	05.11/FT	★★★★★	Lots to admire here from very little	8x8x9	8x8x9	8x8x9	22x21x22 1
Dali Zensor 1 5.1	980	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £700-£1500, Awards 2013. Product of the Year	27x16x22	16x44x29	27x16x22	31x29x31 3
Jamo A 200 HCS 5	640	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A gutsy and entertaining sound at this price	22x9x5	22x9x5	22x9x5	31x28x31 7
KEF KHT3005 HD2	900	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Great build with an expansive sound	25x13x15	13x25x15	25x13x15	38x37x18 1
KEF E305	900	11.13/ST	★★★★★	A room-filling system but there are more dynamic packages out there	26x14x16	16x22x15	26x14x16	32x43x27 2
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 2013	23x15x20	23x16x12	23x15x20	23x16x12 2
Q Acoustics Q7000	800	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Product of the year - Speaker packages, Awards 2011	24x10x16	12x21x16	24x10x16	37x51x22 2
Q Acoustics Q7000i	900	11.13/ST	★★★★★	Best style package £700-£1000, Awards 2013	24x10x16	12x20x16	24x10x16	32x46x20 2
Tannoy HTS-101	400	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Best style package up to £700, Awards 2013	16x11x14	11x25x17	16x11x14	42x28x37 1
Teufel Theater 200	799	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Big-screen soundtracks don't come bigger than this	44x20x29	25x44x27	23x16x12	60x38x49 1
Wharfedale 100-HCP	950	11.13/FT	★★★★★	A very good package, but could do with a better centre speaker	32x17x26	17x47x27	32x17x26	39x35x31 7
£1000-£2000								
Acoustic Energy Neo V2 5.1	1200	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Plenty to enjoy if you have a large room	91x20x24	18x48x20	36x18x23	41x36x33 2
B&W 685 Theatre	1200	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £1000-£1500, Awards 2010	23x16x12	34x20x33	27x17x33	26x26x33 6
B&W MT-50	1100	11.13/ST	★★★★★	Best style package £1000-£1400, Awards 2013	25x11x16	25x11x16	25x11x16	26x26x33 2
B&W MT-60D	1950	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Best style package £1800+, Awards 2013	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	1950	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £1500-£2500, Awards 2013	98x24x34	15x43x21	18x46x15	34x33x36 2
Dali Fazon 1	1500	07.10/GT	★★★★★	Preferable in many ways to its pricier big brother	26x14x13	26x14x13	26x14x13	28x26x27 2
Dali Fazon 3 5.1	1699	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Best style package £1200-£2000, Awards 2011	26x14x14	14x26x14	26x14x14	23x16x12 2
Dali Zensor 5 5.1	1499	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £700-£1500, Awards 2012	84x16x27	16x44x28	97x16x23	34x37x38 2
Elipson Planet M 5.1	1300	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Enjoyable looks and sound, just lacking a smidge of detail	15x15x15	15x15x15	15x15x15	39x32x32 3
Focal Dome 5.1	1000	11.13/ST	★★★★★	It's not perfect but this Focal charms nonetheless	17x14x14	17x14x14	17x14x14	40x28x28 3
Jamo D500 THX Select 2	1700	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Exceptional and unbeatable value too	26x45x13	26x45x13	26x45x13	42x40x42 2
KEF Q300 5.1	1880	10.11/GT	★★★★★	An admirable package for the purists	36x21x30	21x63x30	36x21x30	33x34x33 3
KEF T105	1200	04.11/GT	★★★★★	A stealthy package that looks the part	33x14x4	33x14x4	33x14x4	38x37x8 1
Klipsch Synergy B20/SW450	1050	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Avibrant and exciting 5.1 package	32x18x20	15x41x13	14x30x12	43x36x50 1

SURROUND SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Front speaker (hwd, cm)	Center speaker (hwd, cm)	Rear speaker (hwd, cm)	Subwoofer (hwd, cm)	Finishes
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 2013	20x13x14	17x46x17	20x13x14	33x32x33	3
Quad L-ite Plus 5.1 package	1200	12.13/FT	★★★★★	A fine package that's up against some formidable rivals at this price	25x14x18	15x38x17	25x14x18	31x24x24	3
Tannoy Rev. Compact 5.1	1300	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Exceptional sound in the average living room	27x15x16	15x30x16	39x31x34	32x29x29	2
£2000 and above									
Acoustic Energy Active Pro 5.1	3035	08.10/FT	★★★★★	A stunning listen that's great value too	22x15x18	22x15x18	22x15x18	35x35x33	1
Acoustic Energy Radiance 5.1	3000	05.09/FT	★★★★★	This 5.1 package has plenty of appeal	92x23x30	19x45x30	32x19x25	41x36x33	2
B&W CM9 Theatre	4200	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £3500+, Awards 2013	102x32x37	22x59x28	34x20x28	32x32x32	2
B&W CT800 system	67950	11.08/GT	★★★★★	Expensive but it's the best we've heard	110x33x55	33x110x55	110x33x10	48x48x48	1
Cabasse MT-30 5.1	2100	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Looks more assertive than it is, but still likeable	x11x21	16x48x37	41x23x20	42x31x43	2
Dali Ikon 6 Mk2 5.1	2900	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for those with big listening areas to fill	103x19x35	15x57x25	38x27x15	48x41x46	3
Dali Lektor 5.1	2320	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Only just fails to get top marks against its rivals	106x25x37	17x60x18	31x17x22	36x31x40	2
Dali Mentor 5.1	5700	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Powerhouse of a system	103x20x39	20x89x29	32x16x24	37x33x33	2
KEFR100 5.1	2850	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £2500-£3500, Awards 2013	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 6AV12	2875	03.14/FT	★★★★★	A hugely capable surround package. Worthy of serious consideration	94x35x20	19x50x24	25x31x12	23x16x14	6
Mon. Audio Silver RX6 AV12	2200	10.11/GT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £1500-£2500, Awards 2011	85x19x25	19x50x20	30x12x25	34x34x41	6
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 5.1	2000	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Guaranteed to keep you on the edge of your seat	95x21x32	18x46x23	95x21x30	42x31x36	3
Mordaunt-Short Mezzo 5.1	2300	11.08/GT	★★★★★	Lots of attack, with little respite	100x22x28	18x49x22	35x22x28	32x34x35	2
Paradigm MilleniaOne	2500	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Smooth and detailed, but slightly lacking in attack	20x12x15	20x12x15	20x12x15	34x30x32	2
PMC DB1i 5.1	4675	12.09/FT	★★★★★	Small and sonically brilliant package	29x16x23	16x29x23	29x16x23	55x20x55	4
Tannoy Revolution Signature	2300	11.08/GT	★★★★★	As thrilling or as calming as you want it to be	85x17x18	17x45x18	27x17x18	37x34x34	2

Five ways to... improve your home cinema part two

Part two of our look at the simple tweaks that can pay dividends when it comes to getting the best picture quality from your kit

1. Control your lighting (1)

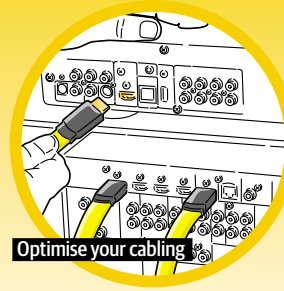
Rule number one: your TV, whether it's a CRT, LCD or plasma, will give a better picture in a darkened room. A properly blacked-out room can be even better, although it can strain the eyes with a smaller screen. Try positioning a light behind the screen (like Philips' Ambilight) to counter this. Even if you'd rather watch in a brighter room, you should try to avoid positioning your screen so it faces a window or direct lighting.

2. Control your lighting (2)

Don't forget there are other small sources of light that can ruin the home cinema experience. If you've got the option, use your remote control to turn off the electronic displays found on DVD players, receivers et al, and, ideally, mask any power indicator status lights on kit like subwoofers and power amps. It might seem fiddly, but it's surprisingly worthwhile. Alternatively, consider a rack with cabinet doors to hide your kit – but ensure it has proper ventilation so your kit doesn't overheat.

3. Optimise your cabling

As with audio cabling, it's a good idea to buy the shortest runs of cable you need. Video signals are vulnerable to quality loss over distances, especially if you use scart cables. You should also avoid tangling your video cables, either with each other, or with other cables in your kit rack (especially mains). Finally, buy the best cables you can afford: as a rough guideline, spend around 10 per cent of your total video outlay.



Optimise your cabling



Fine tune your TV

4. Upgrade your DVD player

Not convinced you need a Blu-ray player? Then consider this: if you have an extensive film collection and a good-quality display, it makes sense to buy a new player to make the most of your investment. Upgrading from a component video signal to HDMI will deliver a big jump in image quality – and a great player like Sony's BDP-S790 costs £200.

5. Calibrate your screen

If you've never tweaked your TV's standard video settings, you're doing your eyes a disservice. The rule of thumb is turn everything down – brightness should be 45 per cent, contrast 65 per cent and colour 50 per cent.

Another way of calibrating your set-up is to try THX's Tune-up app available on Android and iOS



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<p>LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED</p>  <p>DALI ZENSOR 1 SPEAKERS (PAIR) "You really need to hear the Zensor 1s." – What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision magazine. 5 Year Supercare £19.90</p> <p>£199</p>	<p>SAVE £70</p>  <p>YAMAHA A5500 AMPLIFIER "A stunningly capable product." – What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision mag. TSP £269.95 5 Year Supercare £19.95</p> <p>£199.95</p>	<p>LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED</p>  <p>MARANTZ CD6005 CD PLAYER "A fantastic player and immense value for money." – What Hi-Fi? S&V mag. 5 Year Supercare £27.90</p> <p>£279</p>
<p>LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED</p>  <p>MARANTZ PM6005 AMPLIFIER "A hugely talented amp and a real comeback for Marantz." – What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision mag. 5 Year Supercare £29.90</p> <p>£299</p>	<p>LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED</p>  <p>PROJECT DEBUT CARBON BLUE TURNTABLE "...remains a winner. Recommended." – What Hi-Fi? S&V mag. 5 Year Supercare £32.50</p> <p>£325</p>	<p>LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED</p>  <p>Q ACOUSTICS CONCEPT 40 SPEAKERS (PAIR) "Smooth and refined presentation... dynamic punch to keep us entertained." – What Hi-Fi? S&V mag. 5 Year Supercare £99.90</p> <p>£999</p>

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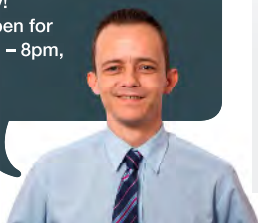
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5 Year Supercare £64.90

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ARCAM FMJ A19 AMPLIFIER

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ROKSAN KANDY K2 CD PLAYER

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5 Year Supercare £87.50

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ROKSAN KANDY K2 AMPLIFIER

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5 Year Supercare £87.50

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TEAC CRH260i SIL MINI SYSTEM

Now with Bluetooth built in, the Teac is everything you could want from a mini system and more.

TSP £249.95
5 Year Supercare £14.95

£149.95

Bluetooth
Digital Radio

SAVE UP TO £50

ONKYO CRN755 STREAMING MINI HI-FI SYSTEM

"A fine, forward-thinking system" – What Hi-Fi? S&V mag. TSP £249.95
5 Year Supercare Only 10% Of Purchase Price

VIP CLUB MEMBER PRICE **REGULAR PRICE**

£199.95 **£229.95**

WiFi
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LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED

PIONEER XCP01 & HARMAN KARDON BTA10 BLUETOOTH MINI HI-FI SYSTEM

A compelling sound, with streaming from your Bluetooth device.
5 Year Supercare £34.95

£349.95

Digital Radio
Bluetooth

SAVE £100

DENON DM39 SILVER MINI SYSTEM & DALI ZENSOR 1 SPEAKERS (PAIR)

These detailed, dynamic speakers are perfectly suited to complement the layers of detail offered by the Denon.

TSP £399.95 | 5 Year Supercare £29.95

£299.95

CALL FOR INDIVIDUAL UNIT PRICES

DEMON DM39 ALSO AVAILABLE IN BLACK

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013
BEST MINI SYSTEM
DENON DM39

SAVE £150

MARANTZ MCR610 MINI SYSTEM & MONITOR AUDIO BX2 SPEAKERS (PAIR)

"The BX2s are quite an achievement and some of the most engaging speakers you can buy at this money." – What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision magazine.

SYSTEM TSP £699.95 | 5 Year Supercare £54.90

£549

CALL FOR INDIVIDUAL UNIT PRICES

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
MCR610

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2012
BEST MONITOR SPEAKER
BX2

WiFi
AirPlay

SAVE £50

MARANTZ PM6005 AMPLIFIER, CD6005 CD PLAYER & Q ACOUSTICS 2020i SPEAKERS (PAIR)

"A fantastic player and immense value for money," said What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision magazine of the CD6005 while they went on to comment "the Q Acoustics 2020is are something of a star."

SYSTEM TSP £749.95 | 5 Year Supercare £69.95

£699.95

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WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013
CD PLAYERS
MARANTZ CD6005

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013
★★★★★
APRIL 2014

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013
STEREO SPEAKERS
Q ACOUSTICS 2020i

We'll **beat** any genuine advertised price, voucher offer or system deal, online & in-store, by up to **£100!**

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A brilliant hi-fi can instantly transform your room into a rock venue, jazz club or concert hall.
Why not visit one of our stores to hear how good your music could sound?

SAVE £430

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 651W POWER AMPLIFIER, STREAM MAGIC 6 NETWORK MUSIC PLAYER & DALI IKON 1 MK2 SPEAKERS (PAIR)

The award-winning Stream Magic 6 makes high-resolution audio more accessible than ever. The separate pre-amp provides a new level of detail and subtlety, which the exceptional Dali Ikon's are able to take full advantage of.

SYSTEM TSP £1929.85 | 5 Year Supercare Only £149.95

£1499.95

CALL FOR INDIVIDUAL UNIT PRICES

SPEAKERS ALSO AVAILABLE IN WALNUT

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013
BEST NETWORK MUSIC PLAYER
CAMBRIDGE AUDIO STREAM MAGIC 6

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013
★★★★★
MAY 2014

SAVE £450

CYRUS LYRIC 05 STREAMING MINI SYSTEM & TANNOY PRECISION 6.1 (PAIR)

What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision magazine praised the "wonderfully focused soundstage" of the Tannoy speakers. They're a perfect match for Cyrus' stunning new all-in-one system, which offers a perfect balance between convenience and amazing sound quality.

SYSTEM TSP £3148.90 | 5 Year Supercare £269.95

£2699.95

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We are the streaming experts!

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Marco - Chiswick store

LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED

LOGITECH UE AIR SPEAKER DOCK
"Logitech's AirPlay-toting speaker dock sounds the business." – What Hi-Fi? S&V magazine.
5 Year Supercare £9.99

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2012
BEST SPEAKER DOCK
JUNE 2012

£99.95

LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO MINX AIR 200 WIRELESS SYSTEM
"A formidable option in this competitive market." – WHF? S&V magazine.
5 Year Supercare £34.95

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013
BEST WIRELESS SYSTEM
AUGUST 2013

£349.95

LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO SONATA NP30 NETWORK MUSIC PLAYER
"For music lovers who don't want to use up a lot of space, the incredibly versatile yet compact NP30 delivers incredible sound quality through a variety of music sources. Connect to your home wi-fi and you'll get access to Internet radio as well as a variety of streaming services. You can even access your own digitally stored music via a simple file sharing system known as UPnP (Universal Plug 'n' Play) and stream even high resolution audio files at better than CD quality! Lastly, you can pop in the optional BT100 Bluetooth receiver and stream music directly from your smartphone!"
5 Year Supercare £16.95

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2011
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
MAY 2011

£169.95

Two Best-sellers Of Our Huge Dock & Headphone Range

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CAMBRIDGE AUDIO MINX GO BLUETOOTH SPEAKER
"A terrific product for this money, with a sound that is a pleasure to listen to." – WHF? S&V magazine.
5 Year Supercare £9.99

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
MAY 2013

£99.95

LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED

AKG K845 BT HEADPHONES
"Oodles of detail, and their build quality is simply fantastic." – What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision magazine.
5 Year Supercare £199.95

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2014
BEST HEADPHONE
FEBRUARY 2014

£199.95

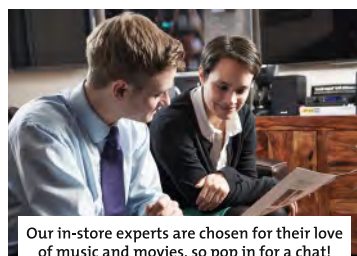
LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO SONATA NP30 NETWORK MUSIC PLAYER
"For music lovers who don't want to use up a lot of space, the incredibly versatile yet compact NP30 delivers incredible sound quality through a variety of music sources. Connect to your home wi-fi and you'll get access to Internet radio as well as a variety of streaming services. You can even access your own digitally stored music via a simple file sharing system known as UPnP (Universal Plug 'n' Play) and stream even high resolution audio files at better than CD quality! Lastly, you can pop in the optional BT100 Bluetooth receiver and stream music directly from your smartphone!"
5 Year Supercare £16.95

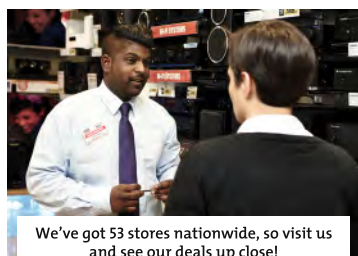
WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2011
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
MAY 2011

£169.95

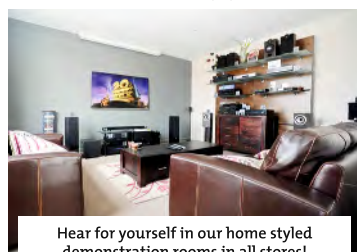
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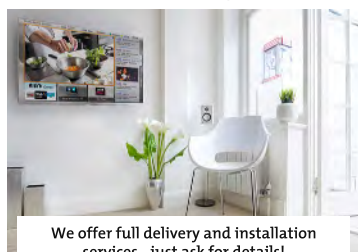
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"A stunning screen that's lovely to use and a great price." – WHF? S&V mag.

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Wi-Fi
Freeview HD
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SONY KDL50W829B
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TSP £899.95

£899

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Freeview HD
ALSO 42"
WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013
★★★★★
MARCH 2014

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Class-leading Smart features and a vivid picture!

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Freeview HD
freesat HD
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DUAL CORE
Freeview HD
freesat HD

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LG 55EA980W
3D SMART CURVED OLED TV

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£1599

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The clarity of Ultra HD combined with the subtly curved screen makes for a totally immersive experience.

TSP £2699.95

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4K ULTRA HD 3D SMART LED TV

Outstanding 4K picture for 2D and 3D, this LED set is at the forefront of home entertainment.

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Anca – Watford store



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"Picture that wouldn't look out of place on a projector costing twice as much." – trustedreviews.com

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FULL 1080p HD
WITH FREE PAIR OF 3D GLASSES WORTH £75

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"Can go so bright if required that its pictures are enjoyable even with a degree of ambient light in your room." – trustedreviews.com

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EPSON EHTW6100W 3D PROJECTOR

"Throws out a clear, bright and vivid image." – What Hi-Fi? S&V mag.

TSP £1599.95

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EPSON EHTW6100W
ALSO 6100 ONLY £1199.95

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"Detailed, dynamic & confident." – What Hi-Fi? S&V magazine.

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PROJECTORS BEST BUY
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"Nothing short of stunning." – What Hi-Fi? S&V magazine.

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★★★★★
APRIL 2014

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£99.95

SAVE £80

YAMAHA RXV375
AV RECEIVER

"We highly recommend starting your system with this capable RXV375 receiver."
— What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision mag.

TSP £249.95 | 5 Year Supercare £16.95

£169.95

SAVE £120

PIONEER VSX923
AV RECEIVER

"A confident and compelling amp thanks to its precision and clarity."
— What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision magazine.

TSP £349.95 | 5 Year Supercare £22.95

£229.95

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DENON AVR2000 AV RECEIVER

"Ticks all our boxes and then some."
— What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision magazine.

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5 Year Supercare £24.95

£249.95

SAVE £150

SONY STRDN1040
AV RECEIVER

"Depth of detail, exciting and ample connectivity – this is a superstar in the making."
— WHF? S&V magazine.

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ONKYO TXNR828
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Powerful sound with a slew of connectivity – it's hard not to be impressed by the Onkyo.

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PIONEER SCLX57 AV RECEIVER

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— WHF? S&V magazine.

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SAVE £580

PIONEER SCLX87 AV RECEIVER & **DALI ZENSOR 15.1** SPEAKER PACKAGE

What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision magazine praised the SCLX87's "precise, punchy sound" and the Zensor 15.1 speaker package, saying "these are enthusiastic and engaging performers that make sure the listener has a good time."

SYSTEM TSP £2579.90 | 5 Year Supercare £199.95

£1999.95

SAVE £600

YAMAHA RXA3030 AV RECEIVER & **CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AERO 5.1** SPEAKER PACKAGE

What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision magazine praised the RXA3030's "warm and muscular presentation" and the Aero 5.1 speakers' "combination of cohesiveness, punch and articulation."

USUALLY £3599.90 | 5 Year Supercare £299.95

£2999.95

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5 Year Supercare Only 10% Of Purchase Price

VIP CLUB MEMBER PRICE* **REGULAR PRICE**

£699.95 **£799.95**

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

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MARCH 2014

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WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013

HOME CINEMA AMPLIFIERS

YAMAHA RXA3030

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WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013
★★★★★
FEBRUARY 2014

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO MINX TV
SOUND BASE
"Exciting sound for a great budget price." – What Hi-Fi? S&V mag.
5 Year Supercare £19.95

£199.95

SAVE £50



WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013
★★★★★
MAY 2014

LG NB4530
SOUNDBAR
"Looks like the part and sounds great." – What Hi-Fi? S&V mag.
TSP £299.95
5 Year Supercare £24.95

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LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED




WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013
★★★★★
MAY 2014

YAMAHA YSP1400
SOUNDBAR
"Offers an experience that isn't trumped until you spend quite a lot more." – What Hi-Fi? S&V mag.
5 Year Supercare £39.95

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WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013
★★★★★
FEBRUARY 2014

TANNOY HTS101
5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE
"Simply in terms of scale, it's deeply impressive." – What Hi-Fi? S&V mag.
TSP £399.95
5 Year Supercare £34.95

£349.95

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WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013
★★★★★
FEBRUARY 2014

Q ACOUSTICS Q7000i
5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE
"The Q7000i is a stunning package at this price." – What Hi-Fi? S&V mag.
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FEBRUARY 2014

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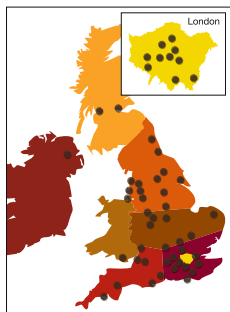
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John – Leeds store



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Edinburgh
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Exeter
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Glasgow
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Manchester
0333 900 0086
Maidstone
0333 900 0062
Middlesbrough
0333 900 0096

Milton Keynes
0333 900 0054
Newcastle
0333 900 0032
Norwich
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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

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Integrated	Transport	Co-axial out	Optical out	XiLRout	RCA out	Headphone out	Co-axial in	Optical in	AES/EBU in	USB in	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
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	★★★★★	Aspacious 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 2013	●		1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x44x34
Sansui CDD-201V	200	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Sensibly priced, but not quite an all-rounder	●		1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	7x43x28
£500-£1000																	
Arcam FMJ CD17	650	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Basic on features, but capable enough	●		1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	9x43x29
Audiolab 8200CD	800	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1000, Awards 2012	●		1	1	1	1	0	2	2	0	1	1	8x44x30
Audiolab 8200CDQ	950	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Improves on the sky-high performance of the 8200CD	●		1	1	1	1	1	2	2	0	1	2	8x44x30
NAD C 546BEE	500	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Talented but struggles against the more enjoyable budget Marantz	●		1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	9x44x31
Cyrus CDI	975	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Arguably the best, most insightful integrated player Cyrus has ever made	●		1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	7x22x36
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	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1500, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	●		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																	
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
dCS Puccini	11300	02.11/FT	★★★★★	With the master clock it's an amazing combo	●		1	0	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	2	11x46x40
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	1650	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Best CD player £1500+ Awards 2013	●		1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x43x33
T+A MP 3000 HV	7900	12.13/FT	★★★★★	A classy multi-source player that delivers high-quality sound	●		1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	11x43x35



DACs

Digital-to-analogue converters take a digital data stream from its 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 XiLRout	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500														
Arcam irDAC	400	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Best DAC £300-£500, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	4x12x19
Arcam irDAC Wireless	380	09.12/GT	★★★★★	No longer the default choice at the money, still very much a contender	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	4x16x11
Arcam miniBlink	90	05.14/GT	★★★★★	A compact DAC that makes a huge impression. Bluetooth sounds brilliant	0	0	0	10	0	0	0	1	0	2.5x3x4
Arcam rPAC	150	04.13/ST	★★★★★	More desirable alternatives, but the rPAC still has plenty of merit	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	3x10x6
Audioengine D1	150	05.12/FT	★★★★★	A DAC and headphone amp with a fine sound	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	3x9x10

DACs continued

DACs continued				USB in	Optical in	Co-axial in	AES EBU in	HDMI in	Wireless	Headphone out	RCA out	Balanced XLR out	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	
Product	£	Tested	Verdict											
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	★★★★★	Outrageously good sound quality at an aggressive price	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	0	1	1	5x22x19	
Camb. Audio DacMagic XS	100	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Drops down a star but still a delightful little device	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	5x3x1	
Crystal Acoustics BluDAC	60	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Doesn't quite have the finesse of others but this is still a real entertainer	0	0	0	0	0	●	0	1	0	6.5x7.5x2
Furutech ADL GT 40	400	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Product of the Year - 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	
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 DAC1	295	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A good, though not exceptional, wireless DAC	1	0	0	0	0	●	0	1	0	4x14x7
NAD D 1050	400	11.13/GT	★★★★★	For those looking for a desktop DAC, the NAD D 1050 is a brilliant box of tricks	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	1	19x6x21
Pro-ject DAC Box DS	299	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A solid performer but doesn't excel in any area	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	7x10x14	

£500-£1000

Audiolab M-DAC	600	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £500-£700, Awards 2013	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	6x25x25	
Chord Chordette QuteHD	990	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £700-£1000, Awards 2013	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 M1SDAC	800	08.13/FT	★★★★★	An impressive spec list but performance is trumped by cheaper rivals	1	1	2	0	0	1	1	0	10x22x31	
Parasound Zdac	500	11.13/GT	★★★★★	The Zdac produces a lively, likable sound	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	5x22x26	
Rotel RDD-1580	600	05.14/FT	★★★★★	Plenty to be impressed with, but the poor quality of its USB input holds it back	1	2	2	0	0	●	0	1	1	5.5x43x32
Sony UDA-1	500	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Not the most musically exciting DAC, but an excellent choice for desktop users	1	2	2	0	0	1	1	0	7x23x26	

£1000 and above

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
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 HDSO	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	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A brilliant but flawed product	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
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	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £1000+, Awards 2013	1	2	3	0	0	1	1	1	9x21x32
T+A DAC 8	1250	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Beautifully engineered with a great sound to boot	1	1	4	1	0	1	1	1	9x27x27



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Turntables

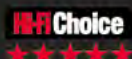
Turntable The main part of the player that actually spins the record
Tonearm The component that carries the cartridge across the record surface
Cartridge Turns the information in the record groove into sound

Our recommendations

Our recommendations					33.33	45	78	Elec. speed change	Manual operation	Phono amp	Tonearm inc.	Cartridges inc.	USB port	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict												
Up to £1000															
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	200	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable up to £400, Awards 2013		●	●		●		●			3	14x46x36
Pro-Ject 2-Xperience Basic +	600	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Fuss-free package with a strikingly clear sound		●	●		●		●	●		1	14x46x36
Pro-Ject 2Xperience Classic	750	12.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine deck that's worth auditioning		●	●		●		●	●		3	16x46x36
Pro-Ject Debut Carbon	300	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable up to £500, Awards 2012		●	●	●	●		●	●		7	12x42x32
Rega RP1	225	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable up to £400, Awards 2011		●	●		●		●	●		3	12x45x36
Rega RP3/Elys2	550	10.11/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable £400-£800, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR		●	●		●		●	●		3	10x45x36
TDK ETVT20102	350	01.12/FT	★★★★★	A neat solution to archive your vinyl		●	●	●		●	●	●	●	1	11x45x38
£1000 and above															
Clearaudio Emotion SE	2110	11.09/FT	★★★★★	For the money, this is an excellent performer		●	●		●		●	●		1	8x40x32
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
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



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TURNTABLES continued

TURNTABLEScontinued					33.33	45	78	Elec. speed change	Manual operation	Phono amp	Tonearm inc.	Cartridges inc.	USB port	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict		—	RPM									
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 RP6/Exact	1000	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable £800+, Awards 2013	●	●		●	●		●	●		8	12x45x36
Roksan Radius 5.2	1375	Aw.09/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable £1200+, Awards 2010. Superb performance	●	●			●		●			8	15x45x37
Roksan Xerxes 20 Plus (Pack)	6275	10.08/FT	★★★★★	A truly exceptional turntable	●	●		●	●		●			3	12x45x37
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
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Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	DAB	FM	MW	Internet	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £100									
Aves Air	50	09.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	10x6x2
iLuv Vibro Classic II	50	11.12/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	7x23x8
Pure Digital Elan II	99	01.10/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	16x28x9
Pure Digital Move 2500	90	11.11/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	10x6x1.5
Pure Digital Move 400D	90	11.12/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	8.5x15x2.7
Pure Digital One Classic II	65	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	15x21x7
Pure Evoke D2	85	09.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	15x21x7
Q2 Internet radio	90	03.11/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	10x10x10
Roberts Duologic	75	01.10/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	15x25x83
Roberts Expression	90	12.11/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	18x26x90
Sony XDR-S16	80	12.11/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	14x27x11
Tangent Trio DAB	90	01.11/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	17x33x20
View Quest WiFi200	80	01.11/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	73x125x23
£100 and above									
Geneva World Radio DAB+	270	09.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	17x30x7
Magibox Nocturne XP-2	170	12.10/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	17x30x15
Philips Original Radio Mini	110	09.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	25x12x12
Pure Digital Avanti Flow i'net	250	12.10/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	13x39x23
Pure Digital Evoke Flow	150	05.10/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	18x21x11
Pure Digital Evoke-1S Marshall	120	01.11/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	17x22x12
Pure Evoke F4	180	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	18x21x11
Pure Digital Oasis Flow	170	09.10/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	23x16x14
Pure Digital One Flow	100	11.12/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	15x21x8
Pure Digital Sensia	250	01.10/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	17x28x18
Revo AXiS	200	12.10/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	13x22x15
Revo AXiS XS	200	11.12/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	12.5x22x15
Revo AXiS X3	200	01.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	12.5x22x15
Revo Domino D3	170	05.10/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	14x22x13
Revo Heritage	230	03.10/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	18x26x10
Revo Pico RadioStation	170	12.10/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	17x11x11
Revo Pixis	100	09.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	13x16x16
Roberts Revival Cath Kidston	200	01.11/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	23x16x12
Roberts Revival iStream	200	12.10/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	15x25x13
Roberts Stream 83i	150	05.10/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	21x25x13
Ruark Audio R1 MkII	160	11.12/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	18x13x14
Tangent Uno	100	01.09/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	13x19x13
Tivoli Albergio+	200	02.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	11x19x11
Tivoli Model 10+	160	09.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	20x12x12
View Quest Retro 1	100	12.11/GT	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	16x28x9



Hi-fi speakers

Standmounters _____ Usually smaller speakers that need to be put on a stand, not bookshelves
Floorstanders _____ Larger speakers that tend to go louder and deeper than standmounters
Powered _____ Have built-in amplifiers and need mains power to work

Our recommendations

Our recommendations					Standmount	Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict						
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 S30	120	07.07/FT	★★★★★	Has an air of quality that extends from its build to its sound	●		2	23x16x22	
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	
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	
Acoust. Energy Neo V2 Three	399	09.10/FT	★★★★★	Much to like, but not quite all-rounders	●		2	91x20x24	
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	
Arcaydis DM1	299	10.10/GT	★★★★★	These brilliant DM1s will give every rival below £450 a fright	●		4	30x16x21	
Bose Companion 20	200	05.13/GT	★★★★★	Solid, reliable speakers for buyers on a tight budget		●	1	22x9x12	
Bose Computer MusicMonitor	250	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Enjoyable sound for a speaker this small	●		2	12x7x12	
Boston Acoustics A-25	200	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Classy and likeable speakers	●		3	27x18x23	
Boston Acoustics A-26	260	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A beautifully accomplished standmounter	●		2	33x21x27	
B&W 685	400	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Great Award-winning speakers from B&W. Just edged out by newer rivals	●		4	34x20x33	
B&W MM-1	399	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Still good, but there's better available		●	1	17x10x10	
Cambridge Audio SLA-25	200	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Not at all bad, but some rivals are better		●	8	22x15x18	
Cambridge Audio SX-60	200	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Impressive speakers but they could do with more refinement	●		2	34x20x27	
Castle Knight 2	400	02.11/GT	★★★★★	Good, but not as adaptable as we'd like	●		8	38x20x34	
Dali Lektor 1	250	10.09/GT	★★★★★	As musically enjoyable as you'll buy at this price	●		2	26x15x21	
Dali Lektor 2	299	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Seriously entertaining speakers and simply stunning at this money	●		2	31x18x22	
Dali Lektor 3	450	08.09/GT	★★★★★	Bigger isn't always better, as the Lektor 3s prove	●		2	39x20x26	
Dali Zensor 1	200	04.14/ST	★★★★★	These brilliant budget standmounters demand a listen	●		2	27x16x22	
Dali Zensor 3	300	01.14/FT	★★★★★	If it's entertainment you crave, then these standmounters deliver in spades	●		3	35x21x29	
EB Acoustics EB1	470	08.09/GT	★★★★★	You'll have trouble faulting these nifty standmounters	●		2	31x17x27	
Epos Epic 1	325	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Punchy and exciting but they can't deliver all-round ability	●		2	31x19x25	
Focal Chorus 706V	390	03.11/FT	★★★★★	Thoroughly enjoyable but they may not cut it with dance music	●		3	39x22x29	
Focal XS Book	300	07.12/GT	★★★★★	A potent-sounding speaker that brings hi-fi listening to your desktop		●	1	28x11x20	
Focal XS Book Wireless	300	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Stacks of detail but not quite the measure of their rivals		●	1	28x11x20	
KEF Q300	450	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Not quite at the top anymore, but still fine, engaging standmounters	●		3	36x21x30	



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SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Leema Xero	495	07.08/GT	★★★★★	Not a true all-rounder, but loaded with talent	●		5	25x25x16
Monitor Audio Bronze BX 1	200	05.11/FT	★★★★★	Stylish as you like, but not the complete article	●		4	26x17x18
Monitor Audio Bronze BX2	250	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers £200-£350, Awards 2012	●		4	35x19x26
Monitor Audio Silver RX1	425	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Well-made and refined speakers, just lacking the flexibility of its rivals	●		6	31x19x24
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 1XR	250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Still great, but the rivals have caught up	●		1	28x18x27
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 2	300	03.10/FT	★★★★★	Plenty of bang for your buck, and more besides	●		3	32x21x30
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 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	●		2	26x17x28
Q Acoustics Q-BT3	350	03.14/FT	★★★★★	There are few products as versatile and as easy to like as the Q-BT3s at this price	●		4	31x19x24
Q Acoustics 2050i	440	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £400-£800, Awards 2013	●		4	100x32x27
Quad 11L Classic	330	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Impressive standmounters but lack a touch of sparkle	●		4	31x19x24
Ruark Audio MR1	300	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Best desktop speakers, Awards 2013	●		3	17x13x14
Tangent Evo 5	200	05.09/FT	★★★★★	Considered, grown-up and a supremely easy listen	●		2	23x15x20
Tannoy Mercury V1i	150	04.14/ST	★★★★★	A stylish, self-assured pair of speakers that are well worth auditioning	●		2	30x17x26
Tannoy Mercury V4	380	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £350-£700, Awards 2011	●		2	97x20x28
Tannoy Mercury V4i	400	01.14/FT	★★★★★	An exciting and punchy listen, but it comes with compromises	●		1	100x20x28
Tannoy Revolution DC4	380	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Well worth considering if your listening room isn't too big	●		2	27x15x16
Tannoy Revolution DC6	400	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Best standmounter £350-£700, Awards 2012	●		1	36.5x20x25
Teufel Ultima 60	368	12.09/FT	★★★★★	Bargain speakers with a big, bold sound that's engaging and exciting	●		1	103x21x32
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
£500-£1500								
Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic	1000	07.11/GT	★★★★★	A classic yes, but not the best around	●		2	30x18x26
Acoustic Energy AE22 Active	899	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Talented active speakers not easily matched	●		1	25x35x30
Audio Pro LV2e	700	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Wireless desktop speakers with a hi-fi flourish			3	98x14x24
Audiovector Ki1 Super	800	04.12/GT	★★★★★	These pint-sized speakers lack far-reaching dynamics, but are easy to live with	●		5	98x14x24
Audiovector Ki3 Standard	1200	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Packed with resolution and speed	●		5	98x14x24
Arcaidys SM35C	850	08.09/FT	★★★★★	If you want a quality small standmounter, audition these	●		3	30x16x14
ATC SCM11	1200	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best standmounter £800-£1500, Awards 2013	●		2	38x21x25
AVI ADM9.1	1125	07.12/GT	★★★★★	A simple way to make the most of your music	●		5	30x20x26
B&W 684	700	12.09/GT	★★★★★	Still a fine product after all these years	●		4	91x20x30
B&W 685 S2	500	05.14/GT	★★★★★	A superb, hugely entertaining pair of speakers. Worth the wait? Absolutely	●		2	35x19x32
B&W CM8	1250	08.11/FT	★★★★★	Stunning in some ways but not the last word in integration	●		4	96x25x30
B&W XT2	700	07.08/GT	★★★★★	Classy, sophisticated but the sound lacks bite	●		2	31x15x20
Cabasse Minorca MC40	720	02.11/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for those who like finger-snapping ability	●		2	40x23x28
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 6	750	12.08/FT	★★★★★	Only the bass stops these good speakers becoming great	●		3	26x16x14
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 DM3/7	1300	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Plenty of positives in this mid-range floorstander	●		2	96x20x27
Dynaudio Excite X14	945	12.13/ST	★★★★★	A crisp and clean sound is shortchanged by a lack of versatility	●			29x17x26
Dynaudio MC-15	780	09.08/GT	★★★★★	Well-executed active speakers	●		1	26x17x24
Dynaudio Xeo 3	1365	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Versatile wireless speakers	●		2	28x17x26
EB Acoustics EB2	669	09.10/GT	★★★★★	Remarkable performers that should worry the competition	●		2	45x23x30
Eclipse TD508 Mk3	960	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Not an all-rounder, but still a rather special speaker	●		3	29x18x27
Edwards Audio SP1	550	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Enjoyable performers but up against top-quality competition at this price level	●		4	31x17x25
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
Elipson Planet L	600	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Charming in many ways, with good transparency	●		3	40x42x43
Epos Epic 5	750	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Hugely likeable floorstanders with broad sonic appeal	●		2	92x21x32
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

SPEAKERS continued

SPEAKERScontinued					Standmount	Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict						
£500-£1500									
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
KEFX300A	600	09.13/FT	★★★★★	A smooth, relaxed sound that lacks punch and dynamics	●		1		28x18x24
Kudos X2	1450	03.11/GT	★★★★★	These floorstanders have much to recommend them		●	6		78x17x21
Klipsch RB-81	540	08.09/GT	★★★★★	If you like to party hard, audition these Klipschs		●	2		48x24x31
Leema Xone	995	10.09/FT	★★★★★	In certain areas nothing else comes close at this pricepoint			●	6	85x14x21
MAD 1920	1350	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Impressive and powerful. although not as precise as its peers			●	5	28x19x23
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 RX2	630	10.12/GT	★★★★★	A lot of speaker and a lot of sound			●	6	37.5x23x30
Monitor Audio Silver RX6	800	12.09/GT	★★★★★	A sensational product from Monitor Audio – detailed, dynamic and very attractive, too			●	6	91x28x31
Monitor Audio Silver RX8	1050	06.10/FT	★★★★★	If you're addicted to bass, these floostanders will suit you			●	6	96x28x39
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
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 8	750	12.09/GT	★★★★★	Great speakers for sure, but too controlled			●	3	95x21x32
Mordaunt-Short Mezzo 6	800	11.08/GT	★★★★★	Possibly the best in their class			●	2	100x22x28
Mordaunt-Short Mezzo 8	1000	03.09/FT	★★★★★	Not the best all-rounders in the Mezzo range, but still very likeable			●	2	107x22x31
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 1	1350	02.09/GT	★★★★★	Charming unique speakers - they lean backwards			●	4	93x16x20

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SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount	Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Neat Motive 2	945	07.12/GT	★★★★★			●	4	77x16x20
Neat Petite SX	1250	01.12/ST	★★★★★		●		6	31x20x18
PMCD B1i	1050	12.11/ST	★★★★★		●		4	29x16x23
PMCTwenty 21	1485	10.13/GT	★★★★★		●		4	33x15x28
PSB Imagine Mini	600	05.14/GT	★★★★★		●		5	23x14x21
Opera Mezza	850	04.13/GT	★★★★★		●		3	32x20x33
Q Acoustics Concept 40	1000	05.14/FT	★★★★★		●		2	97x17x29
Quad 12L Classic	500	11.11/FT	★★★★★		●		4	34x21x28
Rega RS3	780	07.12/GT	★★★★★		●		3	80x22x25
Revolver Music 3	650	06.10/FT	★★★★★		●		4	39x21x28
Revolver Music 5	1300	02.10/FT	★★★★★		●		4	93x25x32
Ruark Acoustics Sabre III	899	06.09/GT	★★★★★		●		2	34x20x27
Roksan Kandy K2 TR-5	750	06.09/GT	★★★★★		●		1	37x19x28
Spendor S3/5R2	850	07.11/GT	★★★★★		●		4	31x17x18
Tangent Evo E45	650	12.09/GT	★★★★★		●		2	100x15x26
Tannoy Precision 6.1	900	04.13/GT	★★★★★		●		2	33x22x26
Tannoy Revolution DC6 SE	700	12.13/FT	★★★★★		●		1	37x20x24
Tannoy Revolution DC6T	799	07.12/GT	★★★★★		●		1	95x26x29
Tannoy Revolution DC6T SE	1000	09.12/FT	★★★★★		●		1	100x31x28
Tannoy Rev. Sig. DC4	600	07.12/GT	★★★★★		●		2	27x17x18
Totem Rainmaker	1095	06.10/FT	★★★★★		●		4	36x17x23
Triangle Color 123	600	08.12/FT	★★★★★				3	14x14x14
Triangle Comete Anniv.	950	12.10/FT	★★★★★		●		1	42x20x34
Vienna Ac. Haydn Grand	1000	10.10/FT	★★★★★		●		5	36x17x27
Wharfedale Denton	500	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★		●		1	32x20x31
Wharfedale Diamond 155	500	07.13/GT	★★★★★		●		7	94x20x31

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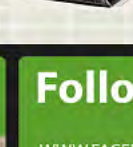


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SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
£1500 and above							
Acoustic Energy Reference 1	1500	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Terrific all-rounders for the money	●	1	31x19x28
ADAM Aud. Classic Compact 3	2800	06.10/GT	★★★★★	For those who like their music ear-poppingly loud	●	1	44x23x29
ADAM Audio Tensor Gamma	12500	05.09/FT	★★★★★	Quite possibly the best speakers we've seen in a decade	●	2	108x32x34
Audiovector S1 Avantgarde	2950	03.10/FT	★★★★★	At their best these are stunning, but not for all tastes	●	5	37x19x28
Aurousal VS	1650	04.11/FT	★★★★★	When they're good, these Aurousal's are great	●	3	108x22x27
Analysis Audio Omega	14500	08.11/FT	★★★★★	These planar floorstanders are a sonic treat	●	1	168x61x6
ATC SCM 100A	11615	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Massively talented and proportioned	●	4	107x40x56
Beauhorn Rhapsody B2	2750	10.07/FT	★★★★★	Outlandish shape but treat them right and you'll be deeply rewarded	●	98	120x34x75
B&O BeoLab 9	5060	05.07/FT	★★★★★	Work not just as style but in hi-fi terms too	●	4	78x40x430
B&O BeoLab5	11000	10.08/FT	★★★★★	Active speakers with outlandish looks that sound fabulous	●	1	97x49x49
B&W 800 Diamond	18000	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Some of the best speakers money can buy	●	3	118x45x65
B&W 805 Diamond	3750	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Good, but easier to admire than really love	●	3	42x24x35
B&W PM1	1995	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Best standmounter £1500+, Awards 2011	●	1	33x19x30
Burmester B10	3220	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Well built, well refined and an engaging listen. We're in love	●	3	39x22x28
Dali Epicon 2	3750	01.13/FT	★★★★★	Reinforces Dali's reputation for making top-class speakers	●	3	39x21x37
Dali Epicon 8	11500	08.13/FT	★★★★★	Give them space and they'll deliver a muscular, enthusiastic sound	●	3	126x35x50
Dali Fazon F5	2700	12.11/FT	★★★★★	Stylish deliverers of audiophile sound	●	3	92x28x32
Dali Helicon 300 Mk2	2100	02.08/FT	★★★★★	Excellent midrange; woolly bass	●	2	44x21x40
Dali Mentor 6	2200	02.07/FT	★★★★★	Dynamic floorstanders that are really fast and agile	●	1	40x8x15
Dynaudio Confidence C1	5325	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Set up with care, the C1s are quite exceptional	●	4	45x20x43
Dynaudio Excite X32	1765	02.09/GT	★★★★★	These pack an eloquent, expansive sound	●	4	92x17x27
Dynaudio Focus 110A	1700	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Fun, flexible and hugely capable active speakers	●	6	31x17x32
Dynaudio Focus 160	1800	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Just do the job and don't intrude on the entertainment	●	6	35x20x29
Dynaudio Focus 220 Mk II	2630	10.09/FT	★★★★★	These Dynaudios are fine speakers; all they lack is a little star quality	●	4	98x21x30
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
Jamo R907	5500	04.09/FT	★★★★★	The innovative R907s are stunningly capable speakers	●	1	119x44x19
JBL Studio 580	1500	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Hugely capable floorstanders for the money	●	2	107x25x35
KEF Reference 207/2	12000	10.08/FT	★★★★★	Big, bold and stunningly built, they major on bass	●	4	123x40x69
Kudos Cardea C30	5650	07.10/FT	★★★★★	Ideal if musical enjoyment is your top priority	●	7	112x20x27
Linn Akubarik	15600	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Deeply impressive engineering but its presentation veers towards the clinical	●	200+	105x35x45
Monopulse 42A	2000	07.09/GT	★★★★★	Odd appearance apart, there's an awful lot to like about these Monopulses	●	10	108x23x25
Monitor Audio Gold GX200	2300	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Pretty looks and excellent refinement	●	2	90x17x30
Mon. Audio Platinum PL300	6000	03.08/FT	★★★★★	Its been a long time coming, and it is well worth the wait	●	3	111x41x47
Naim Ovator S-400	3650	10.13/GT	★★★★★	The most rounded Naim speaker we've heard	●	5	106x33x35
Neat Ultimatum XLS	4500	09.12/FT	★★★★★	An entertainer of the highest order if partnered with care	●	9	38x22x37
Opera Callas	2375	01.09/FT	★★★★★	Arguably the best standmounter at this price level	●	3	37x23x34



Spendor D7 Technology or Music?

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 indeed, 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 from the D7's. Spendord7's set the standard for speakers at this price.

What Hi-Fi Oct 2013

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SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Standmount	Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
PMC Fact 3	4100	08.11/FT	★★★★★	Hugely caxpable but a touch overcontrolled	●			4	54x16x30
PMC Fact 8	4700	04.10/FT	★★★★★	These PMC floorstanders are quite simply magical - even at this price		●		4	103x15x38
PMCPB1i	5850	09.09/GT	★★★★★	Simply excellent speakers: big, bold and accomplished		●		1	108x20x40
PMCTwenty 22	1970	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Best standmounter £1500+, Awards 2013	●			4	41x18x37
PMCTwenty 23	2300	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £1500+, Awards 2013		●		4	92x15x33
PMCWafer 2	2295	02.12/GT	★★★★★	A real achievement for those after proper hi-fi				2	57x35x10
ProAc Response D18	2145	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £1500+, Awards 2011		●		6	93x19x27
ProAc Response D28	3250	07.07/FT	★★★★★	Another excellent pair of floorstanders from ProAc		●		6	108x20x29
ProAc Response 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
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
Tannoy Precision 6.2	1700	10.13/GT	★★★★★	A beautifully balanced and hugely listenable pair of standmounters	●			3	100x31x28
Sonus F. Cremona Auditor M	2690	06.08/FT	★★★★★	One of the best standmounts money can buy	●			2	35x20x37
Sonus F. Liuto Monitor Wood	1649	01.10/FT	★★★★★	These are classy and natural standmounters	●			2	35x19x34
SP Acoustics SP1 Signature	14950	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Able to challenge the very best at this exalted level	●		Any		106x35x46
Spendor A5	1695	03.11/GT	★★★★★	The most accomplished speakers for this money		●		4	79x17x25
Spendor A6R	2500	02.14/GT	★★★★★	An outstanding pair of speakers that do very little wrong		●		5	87.5x19x28
Spendor D7	3500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	The finest Spendors in years		●		6	95x20x32
Tannoy Definition DC8	2500	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Capable of seriously controlled sound	●			3	47x27x26
Tannoy Precision 6.4	2200	02.14/GT	★★★★★	If bass is important to you, then these speakers are worth an audition	●			3	105x31x35
Totem Element Ember	3995	05.14/FT	★★★★★	If you're looking for entertainment, we can't think of a better alternative	●			2	36x11x25
Totem Mani-2 Signature	4600	12.10/FT	★★★★★	When it comes to outright enjoyment we can't think of any rival speakers we prefer for this money	●			4	42x21x31
Triangle Magellan Cello SW2	6699	05.10/FT	★★★★★	A speaker dedicated to actually enjoying music	●			2	114x42x37
Vivid Audio V1.5	5250	11.09/FT	★★★★★	They might look odd, but these are a must hear	●			5	113x26x24
Wharfedale Jade-5	1650	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Floorstanders that pack immense power and poise	●			3	106x25x40
Wilson Audio Duette	11000	10.08/FT	★★★★★	One of the best pairs of speakers we've ever heard	●		Any		47x23x35
Wilson Audio Sophia 3	16500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Expensive, but they deliver a stunning sound full of detail, dynamics and drive	●			7	105x35x48
Wilson Benesch A.C.T	8800	08.07/FT	★★★★★	Good looking, solid and superb sounding floorstanders	●			1	108x23x37
Wilson Benesch Trinity	4700	03.08/FT	★★★★★	An awful lot of technology and ability for the money	●			4	108x24x30

Jargon buster: loudspeakers

If you're new to hi-fi you may be unaware of the jargon and lingo involved. 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 buying your first pair of speakers

Coloration

Any tonal alterations or distortion added to the original signal can be classified as coloration.

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.

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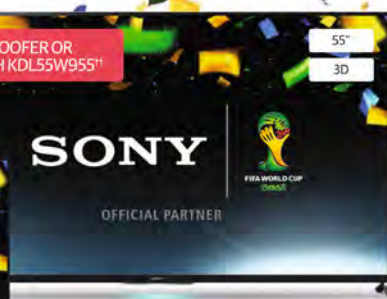
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Stereo amplifiers

Integrated These amplifiers combine a preamp and power section in one box
Power output A higher number usually means louder, depending on speakers
Digital inputs Some amplifiers now have a DAC built in, which could be useful

Our recommendations

Our recommendations					Power (w)	DAC	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	USB in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Speakers out	Tone controls	Headphone out	Remote control	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict															
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 A18	500	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Comfortable, with impressive detail and agility	50		6	1	0		2	●	1	●	●	●	1	8.5x43x33
Arcam FMJ A19	650	05.13/ST	★★★★★	Best Stereo amp £500-£800, Awards 2013. 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
Cyrus 6a	700	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £600-£1000, Awards 2012	40		6	0	0		0	●	2		●	●	2	7x22x36
Cyrus 6XP	925	09.09/FT	★★★★★	Stereo amplifier Product of the Year, Awards 2010	40		6	0	0		1	●	2		●	●	2	7x22x36
Denon PMA-710	350	07.10/GT	★★★★★	The most enjoyable Denon amp we've heard in ages	50		5	1	0		2	●	2	●	●	●	2	12x43x21
Denon PMA-720AE	350	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Entertaining and capable, but sonically stubborn	50		4	1	0		1	●	1	●	●	●	2	12x43x31
Icon Audio Stereo 25	500	01.09/FT	★★★★★	The Stereo 25 is superbly made for the money	30		3	0	0		0	1					1	22x32x31
Marantz PM-KI Pearl Lite	900	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Decent performance at an affordable price	70		3	1	0		2	●	2	●	●	●	2	13x44x38
Marantz PM6004	310	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Product of the Year - Stereo amplifiers, Awards 2011	45		5	1	0		1	2	●	●	●	●	2	11x44x37
Marantz PM6005	300	05.14/GT	★★★★★	A shot across the bow to Marantz's rivals. An excellent system	45		5	1	0		1	2	●	●	●	●	2	11x44x37
NAD C316BEE	260	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A decent listen that's overshadowed by rivals	40		5	0	0		1	1	●	●	●	●	2	8x44x29
NAD C326BEE	300	07.10/GT	★★★★★	A really musical amplifier to grace any budget system	50		7	0	0		2	●	1	●	●	●	1	10x44x29
NAD C356BEE	600	10.10/FT	★★★★★	A party animal of an amplifier	80		7	0	0		2	●	2	●	●	●	1	13x44x34
NAD C356BEE DAC	695	01.12/FT	★★★★★	A good amplifier with a great DAC	80	●	8	0	0	●	2	●	2	●	●	●	1	13x44x34
NAD D 3020	400	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp up to £500, Awards 2013	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	11.13/FT	★★★★★	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-A6	350	03.08/FT	★★★★★	Among the most fluent amps under £500	45		3	1	0	●	1	1	●	●	●	●	2	10x42x36
Pioneer A-70	800	05.13/ST	★★★★★	Excels in many areas, falls short of class-leading	90		3	1	1	●	1	●	2	●	●	●	2	14x44x36
Rega Brio-R	480	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £400-£600, Awards 2012	50		4	1	0		1	1				●	2	8x22x31
Roksan Kandy K2	795	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £700-£1000, Awards 2011	125		5	1	0		1	●	1		●	●	3	10x43x38
Roksan Kandy K2 BT	895	05.14/FT	★★★★★	Full of power and punch but some heart and soul is missing	140		5	1	0		1	●	1		●	●	2	11x43x38
Rotel RA-10	350	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Sounds good, but rivals offer more insight and better digital features	40		4	1	0		1	●	2	●	●	●	2	7x43x34
Rotel RA-12	600	05.13/ST	★★★★★	Well priced, appealing amp, just lacks a little expression	60	●	4	1	0	●	1	●	1	●	●	●	2	14x44x36
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-S500	330	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier up to £500, Awards 2010.	85		3	1	0		2	2	●	●	●	●	2	15x44x39

£1000 and above

Audio Analogue Class A Int. SE	9190	06.11/FT	★★★★★	A fantastic, and sonically rounded performer	50	5	0	0	1	1	●	1	33x45x41			
ATC SIA 2-150	2379	02.10/GT	★★★★★	One of the best amplifiers at this price level	150	4	0	0	1	●	1	●	●	1	14x44x35	
Bryston B60R	2600	07.09/FT	★★★★★	The Bryston B60R may be unassuming, but has quality	60	4	0	0	1	1	●	●	2	5x43x28		
Cambridge Audio Azur 851A	1200	12.12/GT	★★★★★	For scale, power, build and style, this is hard to beat	120	8	0	0	1	●	2	●	●	2	12x43x39	
Chord Elec. Cyan Click HP	4215	07.10/FT	★★★★★	Stylish, and astonishingly well built too	100	2	0	0	●	0	1	●	2	6x34x15		
Creek Evolution 5350	1025	06.10/FT	★★★★★	There's lots to like here, but better available elsewhere	120	5	1	0	0	●	2	●	●	1	9x43x34	
Cyrus 6XPD	1250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A sturdy DAC-toting amp that's a cracker	40	●	6	0	0	●	1	●	2	●	2	7x22x36
Cyrus 8a	1200	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 8XPd	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	2750	11.13/FT	★★★★★	With the Signature upgrade, the DACXP remains a fine product	70	2	0	0	1	●	1	●	●	2	7x22x36	
Dartzeel CTH-8550	16858	05.10/FT	★★★★★	Well engineered - but with a colossal price tag	200	7	0	0	1	●	1	●	2	17x44x34		

AMPLIFIERS continued

AMPLIFIERS continued					Power(w)	DAC	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	USB in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Speakerouts	Tone controls	Headphone out	Remote control	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict															
Denon PMA-2010AE	1700	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Listen to this amp in full flow and it's a monster	80		4	1	1		2	●	2	●	●	●	1	18x43x44
Devialet 110	4490	02.14/FT	★★★★★	An exceptional all-rounder	110	●	1	1	0	●	0	1				●	1	4x38x38
Devialet D-Premier	11450	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A fresh look at amp design	240		2	1	1		1	●	1	●		●	3	4x40x40
EAR Yoshino V12	7000	07.13/FT	★★★★★	This terrific integrated amp needn't fear any rival at this price	50		5	0	0		1	1					1	14x42x14
Heed Audio Obelisk si	1300	06.12/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £1000-£1500, Awards 2012	35		5	1	0		0	●	1			●	2	9x22x36
Karan Acoustics KA1180Mk2	5995	09.13/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest amps we've heard	180		4	0	0		1	1				●	2	9x50x34
Lavardin IS Reference	2950	01.10/FT	★★★★★	Amazing: its rivals sound mechanical in comparison	30		4	0	0		1	1					1	8.5x43x35
Leema Tucana Mk II	3595	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier £2000+, Awards 2010.	148		7	0	0		1	●	1		●	●	2	10x43x36
Leema Elements	1395	12.12/GT	★★★★★	Solid choice, wide connection range and optional DAC	56	●	3	0	0	●	0	●	1		●	●	2	9x22x28
Myryad MXI2080	1000	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Assiduous, precise presentation	80		6	1	1		1	●	1		●	●	1	9x44x38
NAD C 390DD	2250	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Novel thinking delivers an alternative to the favourites	150		1	0	0	●	0	●	2	●	●	●	1	13x43x39
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	3650	09.08/FT	★★★★★	An inspirational amp: wonderful with all music	110		6	0	0		1	2			●	1	15x48x22	
Plinius Hautonga	4455	07.11/FT	★★★★★	A powerhouse of an integrated amplifier	200		5	1	1		2	●	1		●	2	12x45x50	
Plinius Hiato	6759	08.09/FT	★★★★★	If you're after a top class amplifier the Hiato is for you	300		5	0	0		1	●	1		●	2	17x45x45	
Quad II Classic Integrated	4500	04.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine integrated amplifier with a hefty price tag	25		3	1	1		1	1					1	20x31x38
Rega Osiris	5998	06.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine amp that makes sense partnering its Isis sibling	162		6	0	0		1	1			●	1	12x44x35	
Rega Elicit-R	1600	10.13/GT	★★★★★	This is truly a fantastic amplifier	105		5	1	0		1	●	1		●	1	8x43x34	
Roksan Caspian M2	1695	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier £1500+, Awards 2013	85		5	0	0		1	●	1		●	2	8x43x33	
Sony TA-A1ES	2000	04.14/FT	★★★★★	Not quite a flawless effort but talented enough in key areas	80		5	1	1		0	1			●	●	1	13x43x42
Synthesis Shine	2449	07.10/FT	★★★★★	This valve design needs sensitive speakers to fly	40		5	0	0		1	1			●	4	16x32x22	
T+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 S6	2995	05.11/FT	★★★★★	In the right system, the S6 is truly magical	33		5	0	0		1	1			●	2	21x35x49	
Unison Research S9	6995	02.10/FT	★★★★★	We can't help but love this quirky valve amplifier	35		4	0	0		0	1			●	1	25x41x57	
Unison Research Simply Italy	1495	09.12/FT	★★★★★	A well-engineered valve amplifier at a sensible price	12		5	0	0		1	1			●	2	26x19x35	



Preamps

Preamps are also known as control units. On a most basic level, they perform two functions: source selection and volume control. Most powered preamps also amplify the signal slightly in order to make matching to a power amplifier easier. Some include phono stages.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Balanced out	Headphone out	Tone controls	Remote control	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £5000														
Audio Research LS17	3399	01.09/FT	★★★★★	This top quality product should serve you for decades	7	0	0	1	●	●			●	14x48x31
Audionet Pre 1 G3	3525	01.10/FT	★★★★★	As revealing as amplifiers get for the money	5	0	0	1	●	●	●		●	7x43x31
ATC CA-2	1058	12.09/FT	★★★★★	A matchless preamp when paired with the P1 power amp	5	0	0	1	●	●	●		●	9x44x32
Cyrus DACXP+	2550	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Massive ability in a small box	2	0	0	1	●	●			●	7x22x36
Cyrus Pre XP d	1300	02.10/GT	★★★★★	Works wonders when coupled with the matching 8 power amp	6	0	0	0	●		●		●	7x22x36
Heed Audio Obelisk pre/px	2230	04.13/FT	★★★★★	A superb-sounding preamp, but Heed needs to make it feel more luxurious	5	0	0	1	●				●	9x22x33
Lavardin C62	3471	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Belongs near the top of any shortlist	6	0	0	1	●					9x43x31
Leema Pyxis	3995	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A versatile, enjoyable preamp	5	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	●	11x44x31
Linn Akurate Kontrol	4200	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Part of the Linn Akurate system - and truly awesome	4	1	1	1	●	●	●		●	9x38x38
NAD C165BEE	650	08.10/FT	★★★★★	A brute of a preamp	4	1	1	0		●	●		●	8x44x29
Naim NAC 152 XS	975	02.10/GT	★★★★★	It's good, but could do better with dynamics	5	0	0	0	●				●	7x43x30
Quad Elite Pre	850	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Doesn't blow us away, but it's still worth consideration	6	1	1	1	●			●	●	7x32x31
Quad QC-twenty four	1000	06.13/FT	★★★★★	Pleasant listen but works best with Quad's valve power amps	5	0	0	2	●					9x30x22
Rotel RC-1580	995	03.10/FT	★★★★★	A likeable, fully featured performer that delivers much for the money	5	1	1	2	●		●	●	●	10x43x34
Townshend Allegri	1895	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Basic features, but terrific sound	6	0	0	0	●					5x13x31

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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)
£5000 and above													
Audio Research LS27	6500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	A fine preamp but struggles to shine in comparison to the Reference 75	6	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	13x48x34
Aesthetix Calypso Signature	6400	03.11/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest preamps on the market today	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	11x46x45
Bryston BP26DA	5050	08.06/FT	★★★★★	A must-hear preamp. Lacks style but built to last	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	6x49x28
Burmester 808 MK5	22242	02.13/FT	★★★★★	A beautifully constructed, highly versatile preamp for serious devotees	Opt	Opt	Opt	Opt	●	●	●	●	95x48x33
Chord Electronics CPA 8000	25500	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A magnificent preamp, but not quite the masterpiece its price demands	8	0	0	2	●	●	●	●	31x42x36
Chord Electronics Indigo	8670	11.09/FT	★★★★★	A far sighted design mixing useful features with great sound	6	0	0	0	●	●	●	●	36x42x9
Krell Phantom II	12000	11.12/FT	★★★★★	A hugely capable preamp that is able to dig deeply into any recording	8	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	10x44x46
McIntosh C2500	7495	01.14/FT	★★★★★	A refined and entertaining preamp that needs a little care in partnering	8	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	19x44x46
Naim NAC252/Supercap	9070	11.08/FT	★★★★★	Makes a magical combination with the NAP250 power amp	6	0	0	0	●	●	●	●	9x43x31
Plinius Tauto	6325	09.08/FT	★★★★★	A mighty amplifier in every sense of the word	4	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	16x45x48



Power amps

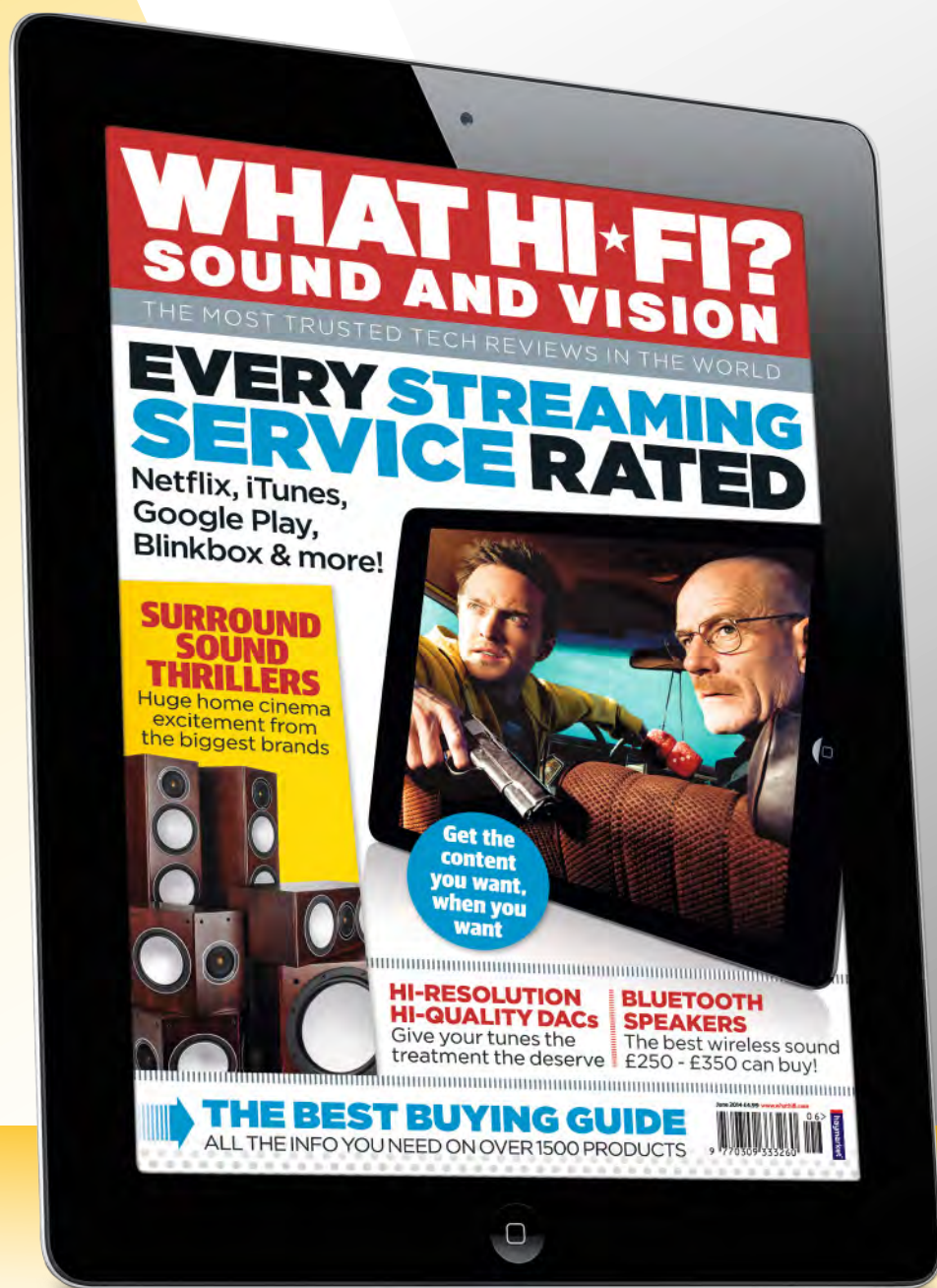
These are effectively the powerhouse of the system. They deliver the high currents necessary to make a loudspeaker work. They can be configured as a stereo unit, or monoblocs, where the circuitry for each channel is housed separately. Don't judge a power amp by its output level.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Power (w)	Phono in	XLR in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Weight (kg)	
Up to £5000										
Audiolab 8200MB	1900	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Hefty, but a bit of a blunt instrument	Mono	250	1	1	15x22x38	9
Audionet Amp 1 V2	4850	01.10/FT	★★★★★	As revealing as amplifiers get for this kind of money	Stereo	200	1	1	18x43x32	28
ATC P1	1566	12.09/FT	★★★★★	A matchless power amp when paired with the CA-2 preamp	Stereo	150	1	1	14x44x35	26
Bryston 2B SST	2925	08.06/FT	★★★★★	Big, strong and very powerful	Stereo	100	1	0	49x13x41	14
Chord Electronics Maxx	990	05.11/FT	★★★★★	This could be a sign of hi-fi to come	Stereo	20	1	0	7x16x4	0.4
Chord Electronics SPM 1050	3990	10.07/FT	★★★★★	Very fast and punchy, exciting and stable sound	Stereo	200	2	2	13x42x36	15
Croft Polestar 1	800	06.07/FT	★★★★★	Great buy if you want sound quality not quantity	Stereo	25	1	0	11x22x33	6
Cyrus 8 Power	850	02.10/GT	★★★★★	Performs with panache, we'd spend our cash here	Stereo	60	3	0	7x22x36	5
Cyrus Mono X300	2500	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Exceptionally fluid and agile. Recommended	Stereo	235	1	1	7x22x36	7
Cyrus Mono X300 Signature	2750	10.13/FT	★★★★★	A deceptively compact monobloc that surpasses the Mono X300	Mono	225	1	1	8x22x37	6.5
Heed Audio Obelisk ps	1350	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Engaging and a pleasure to listen to, even if it's not the classiest in terms of finish	Stereo	50	1	0	9x22x33	6
Leema Hydra II	3595	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A top class power amplifier for the money	Stereo	160	1	1	11x44x31	33
NAD C275BEE	820	08.10/FT	★★★★★	A great power amp, best matched with the C165BEE preamp	Stereo	150	1	0	13x44x35	15
Naim NAP 155 XS	1115	02.10/GT	★★★★★	It's a good performer, but not the last word in dynamics	Stereo	60	0	0	7x43x30	7.5
Naim NAP 250	3050	11.08/FT	★★★★★	Paired with the NAC252 preamp it's magical	Stereo	80	0	0	9x43x32	16
Plinius P10	3390	09.07/FT	★★★★★	Makes a terrific amp when partnered with the Plinius M8 preamp	Stereo	200	2	1	12x45x40	14
Quad Elite Stereo	700	11.10/FT	★★★★★	The Elite power amp paired with the Elite Pre is well worth consideration	Stereo	80	1	0	7x32x31	6.25
Quad QSP	1200	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Needs to be auditioned - a confident listen	Stereo	140	2	0	15x33x27	14
Rotel RB-1582	1095	03.10/FT	★★★★★	Great when paired with the RC-1580 preamp	Stereo	200	1	0	14x43x41	33
£5000 and above										
Aesthetix Atlas	7600	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Sophisticated brute - pair with the Aesthetix Calypso	Stereo	200	2	2	19x45x46	33
Audio Research Reference 75	8495	03.13/FT	★★★★★	A fabulous power amp, match it with care and you'll have sonic magic	Stereo	75	0	1	22x48x50	21
Audio Research VS115	5395	02.09/FT	★★★★★	Ignore the looks and enjoy the sound	Stereo	120	1	1	20x45x21	29
Burmester 911 Mk3	32800	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Awesome price, awesome bit of kit	Stereo	535	0	1	22x48x48	31
Chord SPM 14000 MkII	24480	01.13/FT	★★★★★	An awe-inspiring monobloc, yet not quite as sonically rounded as we'd like	Mono	700	1	1	31x48x69	75
Krell Evolution 402e	18500	11.12/FT	★★★★★	The Evolution 402e is world-class. It isn't cheap, but quality such as this never is	Stereo	400	1	1	25x44x56	61
Lavardin AP150	7686	12.10/FT	★★★★★	For sound quality and musical enjoyment, the C62 with the AP150 is hard to beat	Stereo	50	1	0	14x43x31	12
Marantz MA-9S2	5000	02.08/FT	★★★★★	Right up there with the very best power amplifiers	Mono	300	2	1	45x46x20	37
Plinius SA-REF	12650	09.08/FT	★★★★★	As enticing an amplifier as you can get	Stereo	300	1	1	28x51x54	57
Quad II eighty	6000	06.13/FT	★★★★★	A capable monobloc amp that should be considered	Mono	80	1	0	21x43x18	57

"The Audio Research Reference 75 really does deserve to be considered a landmark product of its type. Consider us wowed, and very tempted"

March 2013



WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION

iPAD EDITION

June issue available on iTunes now

The end for MP3?

If you own a half decent hi-fi system, using 'FLAC' instead of 'MP3' files could be music to everyone's ears

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.

Listening to music has many benefits

Hi-Fi is, of course, a means to an end – the reproduction of music. Many studies over the years have shown remarkable benefits for mankind through listening to music. Making music is intrinsic to all cultures and music is often used for various therapeutic purposes because it involves using the whole brain. It is believed to improve memory and intelligence, improve physical development and coordination, reduce stress and blood pressure, and even reduce levels of pain.

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

along with 78 rpm records and the 8-track cartridge. Unfortunately, such is the current market penetration of MP3 and AAC formats that many people today are listening to a considerably lower quality of music reproduction than their peers back in the 1970's.

Bach - my favourite!



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.soundcrafthi-fi.com

Chelmsford

RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
216 Moulsham Street.
t: 01245 265245
www.rayleighhi-fi.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.martinshi-fi.co.uk

Rayleigh

RAYLEIGH HI-FI
44a High Street.
t: 01268 779762
www.rayleighhi-fi.com

Southend-on-Sea

RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
132/4 London Road.
t: 01702 435255
www.rayleighhi-fi.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 2043
www.oandhi-fi.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.gullifordhi-fi.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
6 Hotel Street.
t: 0116 262 3754
www.cymbiosis.com

Nottingham

CASTLE SOUND & VISION
48/50 Maid Marian Way.
t: 0115 9584404
www.castlesoundvision.com

NORTH

Cheadle

THE AUDIO WORKS
14 Stockport Road.
t: 0161 428 7887
www.theaudioworks.co.uk

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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FACILITIES ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
VERDICT ★ ★ ★ ★ ★





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

The shortlist



Bowers & Wilkins Zeppelin Air

"The Zeppelin Air sounds great, it has better features and sound quality is a step ahead of the original."



AWARD WINNER

Epoz Aktimate Micro

"If you want a pair of speakers to sit either side of your laptop, these are a brilliant performance-per-pound option."



JBL OnBeat Venue LT

"The JBL Venue LT dock delivers an exciting all-round performance and sets the bar at its position in the market."

Also consider

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
Arcam rCube	350	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	90	20x20x20
Bose SoundDock II	250	09.10/GT	★★★★★			iOS	●	n/a	17x30x17
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
Marantz Consolette	700	05.13/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS		150	26x54x21
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	200	04.11/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	23x37x18
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
TEAC SR-80iDAB	150	10.11/FT	★★★★★			iOS		20	18x39x21
£500 and above									
B&O BeoSound 8	895	03.11/FT	★★★★★			iOS		n/a	24x66x16
Bose SoundDock 10	699	08.11/GT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	n/a	22x43x24
B&W Zeppelin Air	500	12.11/ST	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	150	17x54x21
Geneva Lab Model L	1000	08.09/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	100	29x45x37
Geneva Lab Model M	550	04.12/ST	★★★★★			iOS	●	50	20x37x25
Geneva Lab Model XL	1500	10.09/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	600	79x55x37
JBL OnBeat Xtreme	500	04.12/ST	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	120	23x44x24
Loewe AirSpeaker	500	01.13/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	4x20	13x24x24
Philips Fidelio SS DS9800	700	05.12/FT	★★★★★			iOS	●	100	22x27x9
Pro-Ject DBS1	500	06.11/FT	★★★★★			iOS		n/a	4x10x11
Samsung DA-E750	600	10.12/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS/Android	●	100	15x45x24

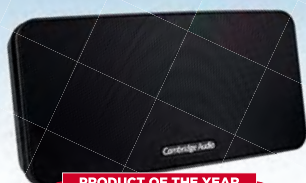
To subscribe call 0844 848 8813 or email: whathifi@servicehelpline.co.uk



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



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Cambridge Audio Minx Go

"The Minx Go is a terrific product for the money. As a way of filling a small or medium-sized room with your music at a quality that belies its size and price. It's a winner."



AWARD WINNER

Denon Cocoon Stream DSD-501

"The DSD-501 is a superb wireless speaker whose impressive feature count is matched by its equally polished sound quality. A worthy Award winner."



AWARD WINNER

Audio Pro Allroom Air One

"If you're looking for the convenience of a wireless speaker in a premium package, then the Audio Pro has to be considered the very best in this price range."

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		AirPlay	Bluetooth	Aux	Charging	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £800										
Audio Pro Allroom Air One	500	08.13/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £400+, Awards 2013	●	●	●	●	●	20x31x19
Bayan Audio SoundBook	150	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A nice-looking portable speaker with some clever design touches		●	●	●	●	9x16x4
Bose SoundLink Mini	170	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A no-frills approach reaps dividends in the SoundLink's sonic performance		●	●	●	●	5x18x6
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
Bose SoundLink Air	300	12.12/GT	★★★★★	Not the last word in power or dynamics, but a tidy little package	●		●			17x31x10
Braven 625s	150	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Practical, outdoors-friendly Bluetooth speaker		●	●	●	●	6.5x5x16
Cambridge Audio Minx Air 100	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★	A worthy option but it can't match the best when it comes to sound	●	●	●			18x35x12
Cambridge Audio Minx Air 200	430	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Majors in excitement, detail and power – a real entertainer	●	●	●			45x22x17
Cambridge Audio Minx Go	100	08.13/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker up to £150, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	●	●	●	●	●	23x24x6
Dali Kubik Free	625	03.14/FT	★★★★★	Dali strikes gold with these enthusiastic-sounding, well-featured speakers		●	●	●		31x15x15
Denon Cocoon Stream DSD-501	250	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £150-£300, Awards 2013	●		●	●	●	24x45x17
Geneva Model S Wireless DAB+	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★	Best wireless speaker £300-£400, Awards 2013	●	●	●	●	●	15x14x18
Harman/Kardon Go+Play	280	05.13/FT	★★★★★	These wireless active speakers deliver good sound		●	●	●	●	24x50x23
Jawbone Big Jambox	260	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Great for bass and sound, lacks a little finesse though		●	●	●	●	9x26x8
iLuv MobIOut	70	05.13/GT	★★★★★	A small unit that boasts a likable sound		●		●		0x0x0
JBL Charge	120	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A punchy and energetic sound is let down by some coarse and harsh treble		●	●	●	●	18x7x7
JBL Flip	100	05.13/GT	★★★★★	A great value bluetooth speaker		●		●	●	0x0x0
JBL OnBeat Rumble	260	10.13/ST	★★★★★	A chunky, versatile unit that has a real sense of fun		●	●	●		17x45x22
Libratone Zipp	370	10.13/ST	★★★★★	Stylish, portable and fully-featured. Libratone hits the jackpot with the Zipp	●		●		●	26x12x12
Libratone Loop	400	12.13/FT	★★★★★	An enjoyable-sounding speaker with some unique looks	●		●	●		33x33x8
Loewe AirSpeaker	500	03.13/GT	★★★★★	Fussy set up issues aside, this is one incredibly capable speaker	●		●			24x13x24
Logitech UE Boombox	200	12.12/GT	★★★★★	It's not faultless, but for the money it's difficult to argue with this		●	●	●	●	16x39x8
Logitech UE Mobile Boombox	75	05.13/GT	★★★★★	Limited functionality but a good choice for portable users		●	●	●	●	6x7x11
Monitor Audio Airstream WS100	250	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Cracking speakers. A desktop force to be reckoned with				●		13x12x12
Panasonic SC-NA10	130	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A speaker that oozes class and subtlety. Watch out for the cabinet vibrations, though		●	●	●	●	10x20x3
Philips Fidelio E2	300	05.14/FT	★★★★★	Classy speakers but you'll need some room to accommodate them		●	●			30.5x16x16
Philips Fidelio P9	240	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Hard to find fault with this Bluetooth speaker		●	●	●	●	12x29x5
Pioneer XW-SMA4	350	12.12/GT	★★★★★	Bags of features, solid build and smart design – just watch that bass	●		●	●	●	21x36x17
Pure Jongo S3	170	06.13/FT	★★★★★	Great sound and easy portability make this a real gem		●	●	●	●	13x13x14
Roth Oli POWA-5	250	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Some great features, but it's not the class-leader in outright sound quality		●	●	●	●	27x18x21
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
Ultimate Ears Boom	170	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Loads of fun to listen to, the Boom is exciting, attractive and packed with features to boot		●	●	●	●	16x6.5x6.5
Sony SRS-BTM8	85	05.13/GT	★★★★★	Classy, cleverly designed speaker that can handle large volumes.		●	●	●		19x25x9

"The Fidelio P9 has to be one of the nicest looking Bluetooth speakers we've seen"

March 2013



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 E10



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
AKG K451



AWARD WINNER
Sennheiser Momentum

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight (g)
Up to £70									
AKG K451	50	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears up to £100, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR			●	Closed	120
Audio Technica ATH-CK550	49	09.11/ST	★★★★★			●	Closed		8
Audio Technica ATH-CKS55i	45	08.12/GT	★★★★★			●	Closed		6
Audio Technica ATH-T400	50	11.10/FT	★★★★★			●	Closed		260
Apple EarPods	25	01.13/FT	★★★★★			●	Open		10
Beyerdynamic DTX101iE	65	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £40-£80, Awards 2013			●	Closed	11
Beyerdynamic DTX71iE	54	09.11/ST	★★★★★			●	Closed		11
dBLogic EP-100	25	08.12/GT	★★★★★			●	Closed		117
Digital Silence DS-321D	60	09.11/ST	★★★★★			●	Closed	●	11
Etymotic Research MC5	57	01.12/GT	★★★★★			●	Closed	●	17
Grado iGrado	49	09.11/ST	★★★★★			●	Open		85
Jays a-Jays Four	50	12.11/FT	★★★★★			●	Closed		14
Jays t-Jays Two	67	09.11/ST	★★★★★			●	Closed		8
Ministry of Sound MOS003	30	12.11/GT	★★★★★			●	Closed		15
Mix-Style inner headphones	30	08.12/GT	★★★★★			●	Closed		13.5
Panasonic RP-HTX7	35	09.11/ST	★★★★★			●	Closed		153
Philips CitiScape Downtown	55	10.12/ST	★★★★★			●	Closed	●	174
RHA MA-350	30	12.11/GT	★★★★★			●	Closed	●	48
Sennheiser CX 300-II	30	09.10/GT	★★★★★			●	Closed		4
Sennheiser CX281	35	12.11/GT	★★★★★			●	Closed		16
Sennheiser CX495	35	08.12/GT	★★★★★			●	Closed		4
Sennheiser HD 202	26	02.11/FT	★★★★★			●	Closed		130
Sennheiser HD 218	40	11.09/FT	★★★★★			●	Closed		224
Sennheiser MM 70i	50	09.11/ST	★★★★★			●	Closed	●	12
Sennheiser PX100-II	40	11.10/FT	★★★★★			●	Open		80

"a discernible improvement in overall clarity... The PowerBar™ is an excellent quality product"

Hi-Fi Choice, May 2014

The start of the Russ Andrews range of mains extensions, PowerBar™ features 4, 6 or 8 high-quality, positive-grip and individually wired sockets along with the option of SuperClamp™ surge protection - a "no-brainer" according to Hi-Fi Choice.

And all from just £89!



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Russ Andrews®

HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		In-ear On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling Wireless	Weight (g)
Skullcandy Full Metal Jacket	65	07.10/FT	★★★★★	An extremely likeable pair of in-ear 'phones	●	Closed		13
Slick Distributions SD50	30	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Features and price make it easy to forgive minor sonic flaws	●	Closed	●	71
SoundMagic E10	35	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Best in-ears up to £40, Awards 2013	●	Closed		11
SoundMagic PL30	30	01.10/GT	★★★★★	Great headphones that are held back by better value rivals	●	Closed		10
SoundMagic PL50	50	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Comfy and smooth-sounding; great all-rounders	●	Closed		8
Sony MDR-570LP	30	08.10/GT	★★★★★	Comfortable, all-round, on-ear headphones	●	Closed		110
Sony MDR-AS40EX	24	03.09/GT	★★★★★	Sporty headphones that sound weighty and clear	●	Closed		6
Sony MDR-EX500LP	45	09.10/GT	★★★★★	Display good solidity and weight – well worth an audition	●	Closed		7
Vivanco Airc. Studio Monitors	50	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Capable - but should be approached with caution	●	Closed		n/a
£70 and above								
AKG K3003i	1000	04.12/FT	★★★★★	The best, and priciest, in-ears we've seen	●	Closed		10
AKG K370	73	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Impressive for the money	●	Closed		4
AKG K450/HA450	180	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Product of the Year Headphones, Awards 2011	●	Closed		120
AKG K545	210	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Built to last but lacks refinement and likeability	●	Closed		280
AKG K550	200	02.12/ST	★★★★★	Best home on-ear headphones £150+, Awards 2013	●	Closed		305
AKG K551	230	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Smashing all-rounders that really sing	●	Closed		305
AKG K845BT	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★	If you like your music clear and uncoloured, then these AKGs are definitely worth a listen	●	Closed	●	292
AKG Q701	340	09.11/ST	★★★★★	A great, solid sounding set of cans	●	Open		236
AKG Q460	140	02.11/GT	★★★★★	More pros than cons, but still not complete	●	Closed		120
Audeze LCD-3	1725	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Very expensive, but there's little to complain about here. Even with that price	●	Open		548
Audio Technica ATH-A500	140	02.10/GT	★★★★★	If you're after closed-back cans, give these a try	●	Closed		290
Audio Technica ATH-AD700X	190	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Huge headphones that offer an airy, open sound	●	Open		265
Audio Technica ATH-ANC1	80	06.10/FT	★★★★★	Their portability and noise-cancelling makes them a viable buy	●	Closed	●	100
Audio Technica ATH-CKX9IS	75	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Easy on the ears and very comfortable, but they need a bit more refinement to be great	●	Closed		10
Audio Technica ATH-ES55	90	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ear headphone up to £100, Awards 2010	●	Closed		120
Audio Technica ATH-ES7	140	02.11/GT	★★★★★	Appearance apart, there's an awful lot to like here	●	Closed		160
Audio Technica ATH-ES88	230	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Appealingly eccentric cans	●	Closed		130
Audio Technica ATH-EW9	159	10.07/FT	★★★★★	Featherlight phones are awesomely detailed	●	Closed		33
Audio Technica ATH-M50	130	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Immersive and refined: a great effort	●	Closed		284
Audio Technica ATH-W1000	650	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Expensive, but offer magnificent hi-fi sound	●	Closed		350
Audio Technica ATH-W1000X	650	07.10/FT	★★★★★	Best home on-ear headphones £500-£800, Awards 2010	●	Closed		350
Audio Technica ATH-WS55i	89	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	An excellent pair of on-ears for the bass-loving iPhone-owner	●	Closed		165
Beyerdynamic Custom One Pro	170	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Accomplished and easy to listen to. We like them	●	Closed		290
Beyerdynamic DT880	200	06.09/GT	★★★★★	Comfortable and the sound is impressive	●	Open	●	340
Beyerdynamic DTX80	80	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ear headphones £50-£100, Awards 2010	●	Closed		12
Beyerdynamic MMX 101iE	95	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £80-£150, Awards 2013	●	Closed	●	11
Beyerdynamic T1	880	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Best home on-ear headphones £800+, Awards 2010	●	Closed		350
Beyerdynamic T50P	230	02.12/ST	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears £200+, Awards 2012	●	Closed		174
Beyerdynamic T51P	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A fine replacement for the T50ps, superbly entertaining	●	Closed		174
Beyerdynamic T70	456	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Undeniably capable, but don't quite feel worth the money	●	Closed		330
Blackbox M10	90	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Good noise-cancellers, but sonically slack	●	Open	●	180
Blackbox M10-RB	99	04.12/GT	★★★★★	Impressive, capable and clear-sounding	●	Closed	●	180
Blackbox i10	80	12.10/GT	★★★★★	A great set of noise-cancellers, with a good sound to boot	●	Closed	●	25
Bose AE2w	200	02.14/GT	★★★★★	No aptX Bluetooth onboard, but still a very listenable pair of cans	●	Closed	●	150
Bose MIE2i	120	09.11/ST	★★★★★	A perfect headphone meets microphone solution	●	Closed		19
Bose QuietComfort 15	280	04.12/GT	★★★★★	Best noise-cancelling headphones, Awards 2013	●	Closed	●	227
B&W P3	170	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Stylish and sonically talented on-ear headphones	●	Closed		130
B&W P5	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	They look fantastic and sound just as good	●	Closed		195
B&W P7	330	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears, Awards 2013	●	Closed		290
Denon AH-D600	200	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Open and spacious. A crisper presentation would make this a five-star product	●	Closed		365
Etymotic Research HF2	180	08.09/FT	★★★★★	The same money buys punchier cans, but not ones that fit as well	●	Closed	●	26
Etymotic Research HF3	134	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Serious hi-fi quality in a stylish little package	●	Closed	●	11
Focal Spirit One	200	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Refined enough, but not the most exciting	●	Closed		225
German Maestro GMP 8.35 D	150	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Virtually indestructible sonic goodness	●	Closed		220
Goldring NS-1000	100	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Sweet, powerful sounding noise-cancellers	●	Closed	●	183
Grado GR10	399	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Stunningly insightful and expressive	●	Closed		9
Grado GR8	300	04.10/GT	★★★★★	Precisely detailed and balanced, but they lack a certain richness	●	Open	●	9
Grado GS1000i	1000	10.09/GT	★★★★★	For sheer, sonic pleasure these cans are stunning	●	Open		312
Grado PS1000	1700	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Undoubtedly one of the finest headphones money can buy	●	Open		500
Grado SR325is	300	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Best home on-ear headphones £150+ Awards 2011	●	Open		330

HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Weight (g)
£70 and above								
Grado SR60i	80	02.10/GT	★★★★★			● Closed		125
Grado SR80i	100	04.14/GT	★★★★★			● Open		200
Grado iGi	90	01.12/GT	★★★★★			● Closed		12
Harman/Kardon CL	170	09.12/FT	★★★★★			● Closed		195
Jamo IN40i	90	09.11/ST	★★★★★			● Closed		11
Jamo wEAR IN20m	70	06.11/FT	★★★★★			● Closed		13
KEF M200	150	10.13/FT	★★★★★			● Closed		12
KEF M500	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★			● Closed		208
Klipsch Image One	140	05.11/GT	★★★★★			● Closed		138
Klipsch Image X7i	170	04.13/GT	★★★★★			● Closed		16
Klipsch Image X10i	219	09.11/ST	★★★★★			● Closed		320
Klipsch Mode M40	290	02.13/FT	★★★★★			● Closed	●	356
Klipsch S4i	90	12.09/GT	★★★★★			● Closed		12
Klipsch S5i	120	05.11/FT	★★★★★			● Closed		12
Logitech UE 9000	300	03.13/GT	★★★★★			Closed	● ●	378
Lindy Premium Headphones	75	09.11/ST	★★★★★			● Closed		225
Martin Logan Mikros 70	150	04.13/GT	★★★★★			● Closed		13
Monster Beats by Dr Dre	280	03.10/GT	★★★★★			● Closed	●	260
Monster Beats by Dre iBeats	80	03.11/GT	★★★★★			● Closed		n/a
Monster Beats Pro by Dre	350	09.11/ST	★★★★★			● Closed		299
Monster Gratitude	199	08.12/FT	★★★★★			● Open		453
NAD Viso HP50	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★			● Open		453
Nocs NS400 Titanium	80	01.12/GT	★★★★★			● Closed		12
Onkyo ES-HF300	180	10.13/GT	★★★★★			● Closed		240
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 M1BT	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★			● Closed	●	500
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 HD 800	1000	10.09/GT	★★★★★			● Open		350
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 200	99	10.09/GT	★★★★★			● Closed	●	28
Sennheiser MM 400-X	150	10.12/ST	★★★★★			● Closed	●	105
Sennheiser MM 70s	70	01.14/GT	★★★★★			● Closed		13
Sennheiser Momentum	260	11.13/GT	★★★★★			● Closed		190
Sennheiser Momentum On-ears	170	10.13/GT	★★★★★			● Closed		160
Sennheiser PXC 310 BT	190	09.11/ST	★★★★★			● Closed	● ●	105
Sennheiser PXC310	200	02.11/GT	★★★★★			● Closed	●	115
Sennheiser RS 160	115	05.10/GT	★★★★★			● Closed	●	226
Sennheiser RS 180	185	05.10/GT	★★★★★			● Open	●	204
Sennheiser RS 220	350	10.12/ST	★★★★★			● Open	●	329
Sennheiser X 320	70	10.12/ST	★★★★★			● Closed		280
Shure SE215	100	09.11/ST	★★★★★			● Closed	●	30
Shure SE310	120	05.09/GT	★★★★★			● Closed		7
Shure SE425	200	04.13/GT	★★★★★			● Closed		32
Shure SE535	450	09.11/ST	★★★★★			● Closed	●	272
Shure SRH1840	500	06.12/FT	★★★★★			● Open		268

HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		In-ear On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling Wireless	Weight (g)
Sony MDR-1R	210	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Detailed and airy, but need more kick	●	Closed		240
Sony MDR-Z1000P5	385	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Impressive sounding cans - with good flexibility	●	Closed		270
Sony XBA-2iP	130	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £120-£200, Awards 2012	●	Closed		6
Sony XBA-3iP	225	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £200+, Awards 2012	●	Closed	●	7
Sony XBA-4iP	275	10.12/ST	★★★★★	The best Sony headphones we've heard in years	●	Closed	●	8
SoundMagic HP100	150	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Sparkling detail, spacious character	●	Closed		228
TDK ST700	150	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Tonally balanced and solidly musical	●	Closed		205
thinksound ts02+mic	90	02.13/FT	★★★★★	Eco-friendly buds provide a clear sound and a clearer conscience	●	Closed		10
Ultrasone HFI-580	125	11.10/GT	★★★★★	Not class-leading, but still worthy of consideration	●	Closed		285
Ultrasone HFI-780	160	02.12/ST	★★★★★	Big and bold, and offer excitement in spades	●	Open		285
Ultimate Ears Super Fi 5vi	110	12.09/GT	★★★★★	These in-ears are, in a word, brilliant	●	Closed		14
V-moda Crossfade M-80	160	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Good-looking and great fun, with lots of bass	●	Closed		200
V-moda Remix Remote	70	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Smooth and enjoyable sounding buds	●	Closed		17



Stereo systems

This category includes a wide range of products including all-in-one packages where the speakers are part of the system, through to micro systems where the electronics are housed separately from the speakers. A streaming option is available on many newer systems.

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Denon D-M39DAB

"The D-M39DAB is a doddle to use, and offers an impressive overall sound – once again, Denon's micro system is the one to beat."



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Marantz M-CR610

"The latest Melody is an affordable, good-looking box that does pretty much everything, bar Bluetooth streaming. And it does it well."



AWARD WINNER

Sonos

"It's not cheap, but you get what you pay for. Easy to set up, it sounds great and works brilliantly."

Also consider

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		CD	Streaming	Internet Radio	DAB	FM	Analogue inputs	Digital inputs	Headphone out
Up to £500												
Denon CEOL Piccolo	260	03.13/FT	★★★★★	No matter what the source, the CEOL Piccolo will play all your music in superb style		●	●			●	●	●
Denon CEOL RCD-N8	350	02.14/FT	★★★★★	An attractive option if you're looking for a compact system that does a bit of everything	●	●	●			●	●	●
Denon D-M39DAB	310	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Best music system up to £400, Awards 2013	●	●		●	●	●	●	●
Onkyo CR-N755	300	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best networked micro system, Awards 2012	●	●	●	●		●	●	●
Panasonic SC-HC55DB	240	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Great specs and a great sound too	●	●		●	●			●
Panasonic SC-PMX9DB	450	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Well-featured but its laid-back sound makes it a solid buy	●	●		●	●	●		●
Pioneer X-HM70	350	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Not flawless, but gets much right	●		●	●	●	●		●
Pioneer X-SMC5-K	300	02.12/FT	★★★★★	An excellent jack of all trades	●	●				●	●	●
Sony CMT-G1BiP	400	12.11/FT	★★★★★	Capable and fun to listen to	●			●	●	●		●
TEAC CR-H258i	230	08.10/GT	★★★★★	Big in heart and low in price	●			●	●	●		●
Teufel Impaq 40	299	08.10/GT	★★★★★	No frills but near-faultless sound for the money	●					●	●	●
Yamaha MCR-140	275	09.10/FT	★★★★★	Large portfolio of functions and it sounds good		●	●		●	●		●
Yamaha MCR-232	300	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Harsh treble docks it a star but it's an impressively compact micro system	●			●	●	●		●
Yamaha MCR-550	280	03.11/FT	★★★★★	Ditch the speakers, the CD/receiver is top-notch	●				●	●	●	●
Yamaha MCR-555	380	10.11/GT	★★★★★	Vastly improved over the original	●				●	●	●	

"The real key to this system's five-star rating is its raft of functionality."

A 21st century micro hi-fi system, the Onkyo CR-N755 is brilliant little box"

Awards 2012

STEREO SYSTEMS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	CD	Streaming	Internet Radio	DAB	FM	Analogue inputs	Digital inputs	Headphone out
£500 and above											
Aura Note Premier	1500	05.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine sounding all in one system	●	●		●	●	●	●
Arcam Solo Neo	1350	09.10/FT	★★★★★	Extra functionality over the original Solo - great buy	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Camb. A. Sonata DR30/CD30	550	10.09/FT	★★★★★	Decent, but the performance doesn't hit the heights	●	●	●	●			●
Cabasse Stream3	850	07.13/FT	★★★★★	Hardware is great but the app needs developing	●	●	●		●	●	
Consonance F. City - Ping	1495	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Delightful CD receiver in one box	●	●		●			
Lyngdorf Digital 2.2 System	12350	05.10/FT	★★★★★	Not without its flaws, but a system worth a look	●	●			●	●	
Linn Majik DSM	2965	02.13/FT	★★★★★	A thoughtfully designed system and a pleasure to use	●	●	●		●	●	●
Marantz M-CR610	500	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £400-£800, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Naim Uniti	2670	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best Network Music Player £1500+, Awards 2010	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Naim UnitiQute	1600	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Systems Product of the Year, Awards 2010	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Pioneer P1DAB	550	07.13/FT	★★★★★	Great sound for a sensible price	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Ruark Audio R4i	599	07.11/FT	★★★★★	Best all-in-one music system, Awards 2012	●	●	●	●			●
Sony CMT-G2BNiP	500	04.12/FT	★★★★★	A solid performer in every respect	●	●	●	●			●
TEAC CR-H700DAB	550	10.11/GT	★★★★★	Great - but not a total all-rounder	●	●	●	●			●



Surround systems

This category includes a wide variety of systems. Most include a disc drive and now tend to feature video and music streaming capabilities. The speakers supplied tend to either be small satellite designs, or towers that usually provide greater scale and sonic authority.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Blu-ray	3D Blu-ray	DVD	Streaming	Optical in	HDMI in	Channels	
Up to £500											
LG HX906PA	425	07.11/GT	★★★★★	Talented enough to warrant an audition	●	●	●	1	2	5.1	
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	330	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	
Sony BDV-E380	400	07.11/GT	★★★★★	A fine system for the money	●	●	●	1	2	5.1	
Sony BDV-N590	400	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Best cinema system, Awards 2012	●	●	●	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-BFT800	600	10.11/GT	★★★★★	A neat and well-priced all-in-one option	●	●	●	1	0	2.1	
Panasonic SC-BT735	600	08.10/GT	★★★★★	Good Blu-ray system but lacks polish	●		●	2	0	5.1	
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

Before you buy... surround systems



Space matters

There is little point in cramming a big speaker system into a small room. Instead, try to place your kit in the right areas. Doing so will make a big difference to the overall sound quality.



Socket to me

Most all-in-one systems have fairly limited socket counts. If you have lots of sources that you need to hook up, make sure you check your prospective buy will do everything you want it to.



Streaming

Streaming functionality is becoming an increasingly important component. Systems are now supporting Spotify, BBC iPlayer and Netflix, so there's a little something for everyone.



Try some music

Many buyers won't have room for both a hi-fi and home cinema system, but all-in-one kit tends not to sound great in stereo. Be sure to play some music on it before you pay.



Speaker stands

Small speakers rely on proper mounting and support just as much as large ones. Using the wall-mount option offered with some speakers is a good idea - better yet, buy some stands.

SURROUND SYSTEMS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Blu-ray	3D Blu-ray	DVD	Streaming	Optical in	HDMI in	Channels
£1000 and above										
Harman-Kardon BDS 477	1100	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A jack of all trades that's pretty good	●	●	●	0	3	2.1
Harman-Kardon BDS-800	1300	05.11/FT	★★★★★	A simple, compact and effective system	●	●	●	1	0	5.1
Meridian G95	3995	12.07/GT	★★★★★	Top performer with sound and vision		●	●	2	0	5.1



Soundbars

One-box speaker systems that include amplification, and are a great alternative to a full-on home cinema package if you don't have much space. Few soundbars include a Blu-ray player as standard.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Disc drive	Smart	Ext. subwoofer	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	RCA in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £1500											
Bowers & Wilkins Panorama 2	1650	09.13/GT	★★★★★	An improvement on the original	●	3	1	0			13x110x18
Cambridge Audio Minix TV	200	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A soundbase that delivers an exciting sound at a great price		0	1	0			8x4x38
Canton DM 50	400	02.14/FT	★★★★★	With gorgeous sound and looks, the DM 50 justifies its price		0	1	1			6.5x54.5x30
Canton DM 90.2	1100	09.13/GT	★★★★★	Thunderous sound but needs a bit more refinement	●	0	2	2			15x90x30
Harman/Kardon SB30	800	07.12/FT	★★★★★	A good alternative to a full-on home cinema system	●	0	1	1	●		10x116x8
JBL Cinema SB200	200	03.14/ST	★★★★★	A very good single-bar solution to boost your TV sound		0	1	0			12x90x10
JBL Cinema 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			71x950x50
LG NB4530A	300	06.13/ST	★★★★★	Best soundbar up to £400, Awards 2013	●	1	1	0			8x104x4
Maxell MXSP-SB3000	220	02.14/FT	★★★★★	An enjoyable performer with some impressive features		3	1	1			8x94x39
Monitor Audio ASB-2	1000	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbar £800+, Awards 2013	●	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			15x410x10x81
Philips HTL9100	600	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbar £400-£800, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	●	2	1	1			7x103x16
Pioneer SBXN700	350	05.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented subwoofer with an exhaustive feature set	●	●	0	2	0		9x90x12
Sandström S42SWLH13	150	03.14/ST	★★★★★	A great-looking soundbar with plenty of connections	●	2	1	0			113x900x48
Samsung HW-E551	400	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Decent sound in a versatile package	●	2	1	0			104x5x5
Samsung HT-E8200	500	11.12/FT	★★★★★	If it's convenience you crave, this is pretty alluring	●	●	2	1	0		10x104x13
Sonos Playbar	600	05.13/FT	★★★★★	An impressive soundbar that produces fantastic surround sound	●	0	1	0			9x90x14
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-5100	1300	10.10/FT	★★★★★	So impressive it may even persuade some owners of full 5.1 systems to trade-in		4	2	1	●		21x120x9

Before you buy: soundbars

Monitor Audio's ASB-2 can be wall-mounted, although it'll cost an extra £20 for the bracket



Will you table- or wall-mount?

If you're placing the soundbar on the same level as your TV, it will need enough room to stay clear of the screen. Also, try to visualize how the soundbar will look with your TV – you wouldn't want a huge soundbar with a comparatively tiny 32in screen.



What will you connect?

Make sure the system you go for has all the connections you need for your kit. Not all soundbars feature HDMI inputs and some have only one optical digital input. If you're looking for a solution with streaming options, make sure it's wi-fi capable before you buy.

Philips's HTL 9100 features detachable wireless speakers, good for 10 hours of use



Is there enough room?

Don't forget, you really need to have the sub as close as possible to the soundbar; otherwise you could struggle to integrate the two and they could sound like separate entities. Philips's HTL9100 has detachable speakers, ideal for those with limited space.



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 £2000														
Lacie Lacinema Classic HD	190	04.10/GT	★★★★★	As good as Apple TV, this needs to be auditioned	1TB	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	24/92	●
Microsoft Xbox 360 (250GB)	200	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Now an appealing media hub as well	250GB	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	16/48	●
Netgear EVA9000	190	04.10/GT	★★★★★	Needs better sound and Apple TV-like usability	500GB	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	24/92	●
Olive 4HD	2150	02.10/FT	★★★★★	This is 21st-century hi-fi at its best	2TB	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	24/192	●
Olive O3HD	900	12.10/FT	★★★★★	A great music server that's nearly excellent	500GB	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	24/192	●
Raumfeld 3Raumfeld	1680	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	A fabulous product to make Sonos sweat	160GB	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	24/96	●



Media streamers

These access the music or video files you have stored on your network. Check for file compatibility and decent control apps that improve usability.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	HDMI out	Optical out	Co-axial out	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/kHz)	Video
Up to £500													
Apple TV	100	06.12/GT	★★★★★	A limited but likeable streamer from Apple	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
Asus O!Play HD2	110	01.11/FT	★★★★★	A flexible streamer improved by a hard disk	1	1	1	0	0	0	3	20/48	●
Cambridge Audio NP30	430	05.12/ST	★★★★★	Still worthy, but there's better around	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	24/96	●
Denon DNP-720AE	250	02.12/GT	★★★★★	A bargain for its features	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	24/192	●
LG ST600	130	07.11/GT	★★★★★	With more apps it could be a class king	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	20/48	●
Marantz NA7004	430	05.12/ST	★★★★★	Unique, flexible and packed with dynamics	0	1	1	0	1	1	2	24/96	●
Netgear NeoTV 550	150	07.11/GT	★★★★★	Decent enough if you know what you're doing	1	1	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	●
Popcorn PopBox 3D	140	10.11/FT	★★★★★	A Swiss Army Knife of streaming	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	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 2XS	100	06.12/GT	★★★★★	A family friendly streamer	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	16/48	●
Sonos Play 3	259	12.11/ST	★★★★★	A cracking little performer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/44.1	●
Sonos Play 5	349	12.11/ST	★★★★★	An ideal one-box network player	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/44.1	●
Sony NSZ-GS7	180	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Good first Google TV device but needs more apps	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	24/48	●
Sony SMP-N100	120	07.11/GT	★★★★★	A fine mixture of paid-for and catch-up content	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	24/96	●
Sony SMP-N200	100	06.12/GT	★★★★★	A competent and easy to use device	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	24/192	●
ViewSonic VMP72	117	04.10/GT	★★★★★	A decent streamer at a good price	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	24/96	●

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STREAMERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	HDMI out	Optical out	Coaxial out	HDMI in	Optical in	Coaxial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/kHz)	Video
£500-£1000													
Cambridge Audio Minxi	600	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Easy to use, well built and sounds great. A terrific streamer	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	24/96	
Camb. Audio Stream Magic 6	700	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £600-£1000, Awards 2013	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	24/96	
Olive O2M	700	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Affordable, but a bit too refined for our tastes	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	24/96	
Pioneer N-50	400	05.12/ST	★★★★★	Best streamer up to £600, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	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 Lyric 09	3000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Controversial looks aside, the Lyric is a really strong sonic performer	0	0	0	0	2	2	3	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	2300	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best streaming system £2000+, Awards 2013	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	1600	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Systems Product of the Year, Awards 2010	0	0	1	0	2	2	1	24/192	
Naim UnitiQute 2	1150	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £800-£1500, Awards 2013	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	
T+A MP 1260R	2700	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Amazing – this is proper high-end hi-fi	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	24/192	
Yamaha NP-S2000	1400	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Network streamer – a solid piece of hi-fi hardware	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	24/96	

How it works: Chromecast

Chromecast is Google's latest attempt to infiltrate your living room via a wireless streaming dongle that mirrors content from your portable device



Slightly bigger than a USB, the Chromecast slots neatly into the HDMI port

All you need is a wi-fi Internet connection, a TV with a HDMI port and some portable devices from which to "cast" from.

Insert it into a HDMI slot on your TV, download the Chromecast app to your smartphone or tablet (Android and iOS only, there's no support for Windows, BlackBerry or Kindle) and you'll be asked to log in to your wi-fi via the app and... you're finished. Simple and easy.

Packed with it is a USB cable for powering the device, as well as a power adapter for the mains if your TV lacks a nearby USB port.

Chromecast (slightly bigger than a USB stick and weighing a measly 34g) streams directly from the Internet and not from your device, freeing your device for other tasks.

Streaming is referred to as 'casting'. Bring up a video on your device; 'cast' it to the TV and within a few seconds it will start playing.

At the moment support for the dongle is not widespread but it is growing, with over a 100 apps and games reported to be compatible across Android, Chrome and iOS.

Netflix, BBC iPlayer and Google Play Movies & TV/Music are available off the bat, although it lacks live-TV and a decent curation of music apps.

Chromecast can support resolutions up to 1080p. If 1080p is not available then Chromecast will stream at the highest quality it can.

5.1 surround sound is supported, but as there is no audio connection on the Chromecast you'll need to connect your TV to an external speaker

set-up to get it working.

You can also 'cast' Chrome webpages to your TV screen by downloading the add-on for Chrome. It works well but performance may be a bit spotty due to this aspect of the app still being in beta.

It also has trouble with content that uses plug-ins such as Microsoft's Silverlight and Apple's Quicktime, with sound or images (or both) missing when a tab is 'cast'. That means you won't be able to watch Amazon's Instant Prime service as it relies on Silverlight.

Chromecast supports iOS (6 and above), Android (2.3 and above), Windows (7 and above), Mac OS (10.7 and above) and Chrome.

Best apps for Chromecast



Allcast, £3

Streams content that's available on local devices. Handy.



BBC iPlayer, free

Free and with the content you love. A great app.



Netflix, £5.99/month

If movies are your thing, then Netflix is still the king.

You'll need the USB cable to power it





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

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Humax DTR-T1010 (500GB)

"The Humax DTR-T1010 doesn't go in for the bells and whistles. But you know what? We don't mind. This box does what it does extremely well."



AWARD WINNER

Humax HDR-1000S (500GB)

"If great sound, superb picture quality and one of the most user-friendly TV experiences out there sounds like everything you want from a PVR, the HDR-1000s is the one to get."



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Sky+ HD 2TB

"The Sky+ HD delivers excellent picture and sound quality as ever: the 1080i HD pictures are crisp and vibrant, while standard-definition content is generally clean and stable."

Also consider

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-T1000	230	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Best Digital HD recorder, Awards 2012				●	2	500	1	
Humax DTR-T1010 (500GB)	230	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best Freeview HD recorder, Awards 2013				●	2	500	1	

Picking the right box



Sky+HD 2TB
£250

Humax DTR-T1000
£280

Confused by the various options in the set-top market? Not sure on how to decide which one is better? Here are a few tips on the things to consider when looking for the set-top box that's perfect for you.

Tuners

If you plan on watching one channel while recording another, make sure your receiver has more than one tuner. Three tuners mean you can record two channels, so you don't have to miss out on your favourite programmes.

Content

If you're not sure which set-top box/service you want, then content is a good yardstick to measure by. BBC iPlayer and a fair few of its ilk are available on most service providers but other programmes and channels could be exclusive to just one.

HDD

Looking to record? You'll need a big enough hard drive to store your TV shows. The bigger the better. 500GB will give you 125 hours of HD viewing or two weeks of standard-def content. Some receivers now ship with a huge 1TB of onboard storage.

On the go

With service providers rolling out mobile apps, watching TV with a remote control is a thing of the past. Browsing what's on, managing your recorded content and deleting remotely when you're out and about is a handy trick. TV is now mobile.

Multi-room

Tired of someone else hogging the TV? Add an extra box and turn your set-up into a multi-room affair. Monthly fees apply but marry that with all the content on offer and you'll have a firm idea of which set-top box you should get.

SET-TOP BOXES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Freeview	Freesat	Sky	Virgin	YouView	Tuners	Hard drive capacity (GB)	HDMI out	Smart
Humax Foxsat HDR	300	04.10/GT	★★★★★	If you're looking to try Freesat, this is the way we'd do it		●				2	320	1	
Humax HD-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	
Panasonic DMR-PWT500	350	01.12/FT	★★★★★	PVR box meets Blu-ray player	●					2	320	1	●
Philips DTR-5520	150	07.10/GT	★★★★★	Fine in its own right, but there's better out there	●					2	n/a	1	
Philips HDT8520	270	09.10/GT	★★★★★	Excellent Freeview HD+ box	●					2	500	1	
Sagem DTR94250S	250	04.10/GT	★★★★★	A capable if unspectacular buy		●				2	250	1	●
Samsung BD-D8500	450	05.11/FT	★★★★★	Freeview meets Blu-ray in this handily sized box	●					2	500	1	●
Samsung STB-E7500	270	09.12/FT	★★★★★	One of the best, most flexible, Freeview HD TV recorders	●					2	500	1	●
Sky + HD 1TB	249	Aw.12/GT	★★★★★	Product of the year, Set-top boxes, Awards 2012			●			2	1TB	1	
Sky + HD 2TB	250	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best subscription service, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR			●			2	1TB	1	
Sony SVR-HDT1000	300	12.11/GT	★★★★★	One to appeal to the 'bigger is better' crowd	●					2	1TB	1	
TechniSat HDFS	180	04.10/FT	★★★★★	A superb solution for its price		●				1	n/a	1	
TVonics DTR-HD500	280	12.10/FT	★★★★★	A clever and well-presented PVR	●					2	500	1	
Virgin Media Samsung V+	99	07.09/FT	★★★★★	An alternative to Sky HD, but still less high-def content				●		3	320	1	●
Virgin Media TiVo	200	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Best cable recorder, Awards 2011				●		3	1TB	1	●



Music/video 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 use in the gym. Higher-end machines will add video, internet browsing and apps as well.

The shortlist



Apple iPod Touch



Astell & Kern AK100 MkII



Sony NWZ-NX1

Also consider

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 Classic 160GB	229	09.09/FT	★★★★★	Carry your entire music collection, uncompressed	2.5	320x240	160	60x100x14
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
Archos 5 Internet Tablet	280	03.10/GT	★★★★★	A desirable media player with the occasional flaw	4.8	800x480	32	80x130x13
Cowon X7	200	02.11/FT	★★★★★	A genuine rival to the monopoly of Apple	4.3	480x272	120	127x79x15
Cowon Z2	200	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	A great music player with good sound and flexible storage	3.7	800x480	16	116x63x12
Creative Zen Style M100 4GB	35	12.11/GT	★★★★★	An ultra-portable player with punch	1.45	128x128	4	55x44x13
SanDisk Sansa Clip+ 8GB	40	12.11/GT	★★★★★	A worthy Apple alternative	1	96x96	8	60x40x20
Sony NWZ-F805 16GB	200	01.13/FT	★★★★★	This multimedia Walkman is a fine choice	3.5	800x400	16	115x57x9
Sony NWZ-ZX1	550	04.14/GT	★★★★★	A seriously impressive first attempt at a premium high-res audio player	4	854x480	128	123x61x16

"If you're looking for a small, portable device for music, movies and browsing, or something to share the load with your smartphone, then the Sony NWZ-F805 is a fine choice"

January 2013

Subscriptions 0844 848 8813 email: whathifi@servicehelpline.co.uk



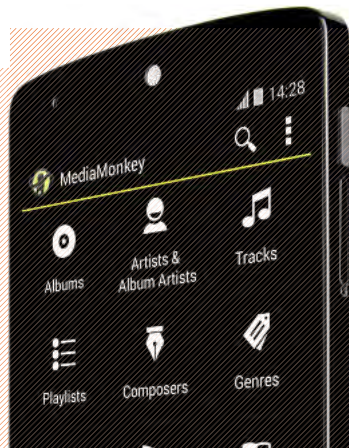
Tablets

Android	Offers great flexibility and innovation
Apple iOS	Fantastic ease of use; massive choice of quality apps
Windows	New kid on the block. Watch this space

Our recommendations

Our recommendations											
Product	£	Tested	Verdict		OS	NFC	3G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Up to £600											
Amazon Kindle Fire HD 16GB	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	A great option for those looking for a user-friendly tablet	Android	●		7	1280x800	16/32	193x137x10
Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 7	200	01.14/FT	★★★★★	An excellent tablet but Android fans might find it a little restrictive	Android	●		7	1920x1200	16/32/64	186x128x9
Asus VivoTab ME400	400	04.13/GT	★★★★★	A convincing rival to the Microsoft Surface in the Windows 8 space	Windows 8	●		10.1	1366x768	32/64	263x171x10
Apple iPad Mini 64GB Wi-Fi	430	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Apple hits the bullseye. Again	iOS		●	7.9	1024x768	16/32/64	200x135x7
Apple iPad Mini/Retina display	320	01.14/ST	★★★★★	An absolutely superb tablet that shows its rivals how it's done	iOS 7		●	7.9	2048x1536	16/32/64	200x135x7
Apple iPad 4 16GB Wi-Fi	400	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Best tablet over 8in, Awards 2013	iOS		●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x190x9
Apple iPad Air	400	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Refined and improved, the iPad Air is a stunning piece of technology	iOS 7		●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x170x8
Asus Eee Pad Transformer	380	09.11/GT	★★★★★	A competitive tablet with a keyboard dock	Android		●	10.1	1280x800	16/32	271x177x13
Asus Eee Pad Transformer Prime	500	07.12/FT	★★★★★	A slim and smart tablet that we love	Android		●	10.1	1280x800	16/32	181x263x8
Asus Transformer Pad Infinity	600	04.13/GT	★★★★★	A very capable iPad alternative and one of the best android tablets	Android			10.1	1900x1200	32/64	263x181x9
Blackberry PlayBook 16GB	400	09.11/GT	★★★★★	There's plenty on offer here, but lacks apps	QNX		●	7	1024x600	16/32/64	130x194x10
Dell XPS 10 32GB	340	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Not perfect but an appealing alternative to the usual suspects	Windows RT		●	10.1	1366x768	32/64	270x180x10
Google Nexus 7	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Best tablet up to £300, Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	Android		●	7	1280x800	16/32	199x120x11
Google Nexus 7 (2013)	200	01.14/ST	★★★★★	Best tablet up to 8in, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	Android		●	7	1920x1200	16/32	200x114x9
Google Nexus 10	319	01.13/FT	★★★★★	Great performance and price: a real iPad-botherer	Android		●	10	2560x1060	16/32	264x178x9
LG G Pad	260	01.14/ST	★★★★★	Looks the part but struggles against its price rivals	Android		●	8.3	1920x1200	16	216x127x8
Kobo Arc 16GB	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Not for music buffs but a great budget option nonetheless	Android			7	1280x800	16/32	190x120x10
Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1	450	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A great screen that's let down by a cluttered all-rounder	Android		●	10.1	2500x1600	16/32/64	171x243x8
Samsung Galaxy Tab 2 7.0	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Find it for the right price and it's a capable all-rounder	Android		●	7	1024x600	8/16	190x120x10
Sony Xperia Tablet S	330	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Plenty of potential, but there are niggles	Android			9.4	1280x800	16/32	240x170x10
Sony Xperia Tablet Z	399	06.13/FT	★★★★★	Sony fans will love it, but there are tablets out there for less money	Android		●	10.1	1920x1200	16/32	172x266x69
Tesco Hudl	120	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Not flawless, but this is a superb budget tablet from Tesco	Android			7	1440x900	16	192x129x10

Killer apps



VLC player, free

The version we found on the Play Store (one of many, opt for the official version) is still in beta so you can expect a few teething issues. Still, this free and open-sourced multimedia app plays a wide range of formats in great clarity. Perfect for viewing those holiday videos.



MX Player, free

Another option for those who find VLC a little too buggy, MX Player ranks as one of our favourite Android video players. A new update enables deletion of files on your SD, joining features such as looping videos, subtitles and a user-friendly search function.



Sonos, free

Or to call it by its full name, the Sonos Controller for Android (or iPhone or iPad). This app turns your smartphone/tablet into a fully-fledged remote for your Sonos hi-fi system. A recent update has added Google Play Music, bringing its music library along for the ride.



MediaMonkey, free

Available on both Android and Windows 8 (the premium version on Android lifts the restrictions found in the free app), you may find more use for it on Windows devices. It handily features support for FLAC and 24-bit/192kHz files that the Xbox Music app does not.



Smartphones

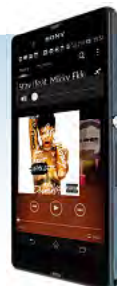
Android	Offers great flexibility and innovation
Apple iOS	Fantastic ease of use; massive choice of quality apps
Windows	New kid on the block. Watch this space

The shortlist



Apple iPhone 5S

"Finding a smartphone that innovates while still getting all the basics right isn't always as easy as you'd expect, but the iPhone 5s has nailed it."



Sony Xperia Z

"With a stunning 5in screen, elegant build and sonic strengths, the Sony Xperia Z is set for super-smartphone glory. It remains one of the best smartphones we've seen this year."



HTC One

"Beating all other Android phones and inciting sly glances from Apple fans, its sleek design, fine performance and stunning screen make this a superb smartphone."

Also consider

Also consider

Product	Tested	Verdict	OS	NFC	4G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Apple iPhone 4S	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Former reigning smartphone, now replaced but still good	iOS		3.5	960x640	16/32/64	115x59x9
Apple iPhone 5S	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best smartphone, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	iOS	●	4.0	1136x640	16/32/64	124x59x8
Google Nexus 4	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A top performer and a brilliant realisation of Android power	Android		4.7	1280x768	8/16	134x69x9
Google Nexus 5	01.14/FT	★★★★★	A powerhouse of a phone in every respect	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 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	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Unbridled power and thoughtful design: a fantastic phone	Android	● ●	5.2	1920x1080	16/32	139x71x9
LG G Flex	05.14/FT	★★★★★	All the pros of the G2, but with a low-res screen	Android	● ●	6	1280x720	32	161x82x8
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 1520	05.14/ST	★★★★★	Apps still disappoint but this is the best Windows Phone yet	Windows	● ●	6	1920x1080	32	163x85x9
Oppo N1	05.14/ST	★★★★★	Quirky and flexible, this is a great effort from a promising brand	Android	● ●	5.9	1920x1080	16/32	171x83x9
Samsung Galaxy Nexus	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Great in many ways but pipped by rivals for audio	Android		4.65	1280x720	16/32	136x68x9
Samsung Galaxy Note	07.12/ST	★★★★★	A hybrid between a smart phone and a tablet	Android		5.29	1280x800	16/32	147x83x10
Samsung Galaxy Note II	01.13/ST	★★★★★	Massive screen, massive battery, very tempting	Android		5.55	1280x720	16/32/64	151x81x9
Samsung Galaxy Note III	05.14/ST	★★★★★	The original phablet, updated and still the best	Android	● ●	5.7	1920x1080	32	151x80x8
Samsung Galaxy 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
Sony Ericsson Xperia Arc S	01.12/GT	★★★★★	An excellent addition to the market	Android		4.2	854x480	1	125x63x9
Sony Xperia S	07.12/ST	★★★★★	A real rival to the iPhone	Android		4.3	1280x720	32	128x64x11
Sony Xperia T	01.13/ST	★★★★★	A strong all-rounder for music and movie lovers	Android		4.55	1280x720	16	129x67x9
Sony Xperia Z	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A triumph for Sony – one capable of taking the fight to Google	Android	●	5	1920x1080	16	139x71x8
Sony Xperia Z1	03.14/FT	★★★★★	Sony fans will love it, a speedy, sleek and impressive smartphone	Android	●	5	1920x1080	16	144x74x9

"Much like the Xperia Z, the Xperia Z1 is a brilliant smartphone not just for sophisticated picture and sound quality that's a cut above most rivals"

March 2014

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HDMI cables

Digital cables that carry both picture and sound. These carry control signals as well, so they can integrate the operation of components in your system.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Length as tested (m)	HDMI type
Up to £80					
Audioquest Pearl	23	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Best HDMI cable, Awards 2012	1 1.4
Cambridge Audio 500 (5m)	69	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A perfectly acceptable cable for the money	5 1.3a
Chord Company Supershield	50	10.10/GT	★★★★★	Still a class-leading cable, but now it's 1.4 too	1 1.3
Clearer Aud C-line HDMI (2m)	60	08.07/FT	★★★★★	Will improve even 1080p pictures, helping stability. Well worth the money	1 2
Kimber Kable HD-09	73	03.09/GT	★★★★★	Picture quality is up with the best and it creates a wide sound field	2 1.3
Philex Thor Flat HDMI	40	10.09/GT	★★★★★	A gutsy, well built HDMI cable.	1 1.3
Philex Thor HDMI/DVI kit	60	09.06/FT	★★★★★	A very decent cable for not much cash - you can't really go wrong	5 1.3
QED HDMI-P	50	11.08/FT	★★★★★	This award winning cable just got better	1 1.3
QED Performance HDMI	70	03.09/GT	★★★★★	Capable performer - finely balanced sound and a wonderfully rendered picture	3 1.3
QED Performance HDMI-e	35	03.11/FT	★★★★★	Perfectly good cable that just falls down in its pricing	1 1.4
QED Perf. HDMI-e S/speed	60	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Communicates a superb and natural colour balance and virtually noise-free images	2 1.4
QED Profile HDMI	25	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Now with 1.4 status, this is still a worthy cable	1 1.4
QED Qunex HDMI-P (5M)	75	09.08/GT	★★★★★	Fantastic picture quality mated with a dynamic and powerful sound	5 1.3
ThatCable HDMI	5	10.09/FT	★★★★★	Brilliant way to spend a fiver - will give rivals up to £20 something to think about	1.5 1.3
ThatCable HDMI (5m)	10	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A no-brainer for those on a tight budget	5 1.3a
Vivanco Powire	45	10.10/GT	★★★★★	A fine cable that's worth seeking out	1.5 1.3
Vivanco Sound and Image	30	11.09/GT	★★★★★	A respectable upgrade, it provides greater fidelity in sound and vision over budget cables	2 1.3

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AudioQuest Pearl HDMI Cable



Atlas Element Integra Audio Cable



QED Performance Optical Cable



AudioQuest DragonFly V1.2



AudioQuest FLX-SLiP 14/4 Cable



QED Performance Digital Cable



Supra USB 2.0 Cable



Merlin Tarantula MK6 Mains Cable

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HDMI CABLES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Length as tested (m)	HDMI type
Wireworld Chroma (Miami)	60	10.09/GT	★★★★★	1	1.3
Wireworld Chroma 6	60	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	1	1.4
Wireworld Island 6	46	10.10/GT	★★★★★	1.4	2.0
£80 and above					
Audioquest Cinnamon	80	01.11/FT	★★★★★	2	1.4
Audioquest Forest	80	06.10/GT	★★★★★	5	1.4
Audioquest HDMI-1	180	09.08/GT	★★★★★	3	1.3
Audioquest HDMI-X	95	03.09/GT	★★★★★	3	1.3
Atlas HDMI	160	07.07/GT	★★★★★	7	1.3
Black Rhodium Coral HDMI	100	10.06/FT	★★★★★	4	1.3
Chord Company Active	115	10.09/GT	★★★★★	1.5	1.3
Chord Co. Active Silver + HDMI	95	01.11/FT	★★★★★	1	1.4
Chord Co. Supershield (5m)	90	06.10/GT	★★★★★	5	1.3a
Ecosse Picture Perfect Ultra	110	09.08/GT	★★★★★	5	1.3
Ecosse Picture Perfect Ultra +	169	09.08/GT	★★★★★	5	1.3
QED Qunex HDMI-P (7m)	85	07.07/GT	★★★★★	7	1.0
QED Reference	125	06.10/GT	★★★★★	5	1.3a
QED Signature HDMI	150	10.09/GT	★★★★★	1	1.3
Supra HF100 HDMI (8m)	112	08.06/GT	★★★★★	8	1.0
van den Hul Flat 180	90	10.09/GT	★★★★★	2	1.3b
van den Hul Flat HDMI (3m)	105	03.09/GT	★★★★★	3	1.3
van den Hul Ultimate	300	10.08/FT	★★★★★	1	1.3
Vivanco SHQ Ultra	80	06.10/FT	★★★★★	1.2	1.4
Wireworld Chroma 5 HDMI (7m)	109	07.07/GT	★★★★★	7	1.0

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Wireworld Chroma 7 HDMI Cable



QED Reference Optical Quartz



Oehlbach XXL i-Connect IP-5/U



QED Signature Audio 40 Cable



AudioQuest Irish Red Sub Cable



Wireworld Oasis 7 Audio Cable



AudioQuest Cinnamon RJ/E Cable



Wireworld Ultraviolet 7 USB Cable

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Digital interconnects

USB	An increasingly common way to connect your computer to your hi-fi
Optical	Digital cable that uses light to transmit sound between components
Coaxial	Sends audio via an electrical signal between your hi-fi and AV kit

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

QED Performance Graphite

Awards 2012: Best Optical Digital Cable
 “The sound through this cable is incredibly detailed and startlingly clear. There’s a good grasp of dynamics, too.”



AWARD WINNER

QED Performance

Awards 2012: Best Coaxial Digital Cable
 “QED is good at conveying subtleties. There’s a good sense of energy too, with plenty of attack.”



AWARD WINNER

Supra USB 2.0

Awards 2012: Best USB Cable
 “It helps deliver impeccable timing and plenty of energy, both of which translate into a tangible sense of fun.”

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Length tested (m)
Up to £50					
Audioquest Forest USB 1.5	25	11.10/FT	★★★★★	USB	1.5
Audioquest VDM-1	43	09.08/GT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
Atlas Fibre Optic	32	06.09/GT	★★★★★	Optical	1
Ecosse The Producer	15	09.08/GT	★★★★★	Co-axial	0.8
Profigold PRO12102	30	03.11/FT	★★★★★	USB	2
QED Performance Coaxial	30	10.08/GT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
QED Performance Graphite	40	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Optical	1
Supra USB 2.0	29	11.12/GT	★★★★★	USB	1
True Colours Industries Coral	35	06.09/GT	★★★★★	Optical	1
Wireworld Nova 6	40	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Optical	1
Wireworld Ultraviolet 5	40	04.07/GT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
£50 and above					
Audioquest Cinnamon	60	11.12/FT	★★★★★	USB	1.5
Atlas Equator Optical	50	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Optical	1
Chord Company Optichord	51	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Optical	1
Chord Company Prodac	80	09.09/GT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
Chord Co. Prodac Pro Digital	70	05.11/FT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
Clearer Audio Copper-line 75	97	Aw.08/FT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
Clearer Aud. Silverline Optimus	185	09.09/GT	★★★★★	Co-axial	0.5
Ecosse The Director SE	89	09.09/GT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
Furutech Formula 2	55	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	USB	1.2
Kimber USB	52	11.12/GT	★★★★★	USB	1
QED Qunex 75 Signature	80	09.09/FT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
QED U Play (Bluetooth)	65	05.10/FT	★★★★★	Bluetooth	10
Vertere Pulse D-Fi	70	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	USB	1
Wireworld Ultraviolet 5 USB	50	08.09/FT	★★★★★	USB	2

Jargon Buster



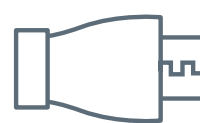
Coaxial

One of two types of digital audio connector. Offers slightly better performance than optical.



Component

Superior to scart, S-video or composite, carries video from a source to a display on three leads.



HDMI

A high-quality digital connection that carries images from DVD/Blu-ray players to displays.



Analogue interconnects

These carry audio signal from source to amplifier, or between pre-amplifier and power amplifier. Some use a shielding construction to reduce external electrical interference.

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Atlas Element Integra

Awards 2013: Best Analogue Interconnect
"Improves on many of the things that the former champ did right. The Element Integra is highly recommended as a first upgrade."



Furutech Alpha-Line 1

03.11 First Test ★★★★★

"If your current soundstage sounds a little loose and disorganised, this can help to snap everything back into place."



Chord Company Chameleon Plus

Awards 2012: Best Analogue Interconnect
"Give your kit a serious shot in the arm – an overly dull system would certainly benefit from its ability."

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 2013	● 1
Belkin Mini-Stereo Cable	13	12.08/GT	★★★★★	Cheap MP3 cable with reasonably exciting sound	1.8
Chord Company CrimsonPlus	45	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Fantastic control, expression and detail resolution	● 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
Griffin Aux Audio Cable 3011	15	12.08/GT	★★★★★	Last-generation iPhone compatible 3.5 plugs	1.8
Ixos XHA516-100 (1m)	40	09.07/FT	★★★★★	Refined - if you're after a gentle, mature sound they are fine	● 1
Merlin Mozart	40	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Open and exuberant, if lacking in warmth	● 1
QED Audio 1	25	09.07/GT	★★★★★	Good value, but struggles with challenging tracks	● 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 6	36	12.09/GT	★★★★★	Looks strange, but delivers a great refined sound	● 1
£50 and above					
Atlas Equator Integra	75	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A recommended second-upgrade cable	● ● 1
Black Rhodium Prelude	80	09.07/FT	★★★★★	Very good cable - sound is crisp and detailed, but still with lovely, chunky bass	● ● 1
Chord Company iChord	50	12.08/GT	★★★★★	Expensive, but definitely worth it	1
Chord Crimson Vee3	50	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A nice, easy-going cable that's a little too restrained	1
Clear. Aud.C-line Alpha	85	09.08/FT	★★★★★	Entry-level – solid construction and a smooth sound. Not for sonic thrill seekers	● ● 1.8
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 J2P	50	12.09/FT	★★★★★	Clean sounding and packed with detail	● 1.5
Russ Andrews GQ-24 UltPlate	73	12.08/GT	★★★★★	Best iPod cable, Awards 2010. Punchy cable for iPod or iPhone owners	1
van den Hul The Name	60	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Energy and fun trump ultimate precision	● 0.8
Chord Co. Chameleon Plus	125	11.11/FT	★★★★★	New plugs make these even more essential	● 1
Chord Company Indigo Plus	995	05.09/FT	★★★★★	It's genius in an interconnect - but you need the right system	● 1
Ecosse Maestro MA2	177	05.08/FT	★★★★★	The Maestro MA2 may be getting on years, but it remains appealing	● 0.8
Ecosse Nu Diva	140	09.05/FT	★★★★★	Not cheap, but they will take your listening experience to a new level	● 0.8
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
Ecosse The Symphony	225	03.05/FT	★★★★★	Authoritative and detailed, a real all-rounder, but it is 10 percent too pricey	● ● 0.8
QED Signature Audio S	190	09.09/FT	★★★★★	QED's new flagship interconnect offers great dynamics and punch	● 1
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

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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
Russ Andrews Powerlink	112	02.09/FT	★★★★★	A roaring success in many ways		●			4
R Andrews Ref P/Kord W350i	232	05.09/GT	★★★★★	If you have components costing £2000 upwards, consider this cable	●			●	n/a
R Andrews Sig P/Kord W350i	275	11.06/GT	★★★★★	Top mains cable that will really get a system purring	●			●	n/a
Russ Andrews X2	200	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Effective but suffers from a lack of sockets		●	●	●	2
Supra MD-06	150	07.08/FT	★★★★★	It adds clarity, but some might not like the leaner sound		●		●	6
van den Hul M/Server Hybrid	150	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Not boring or dull, but it's just too relaxed and safe sounding	●			●	n/a
Wireworld Stratus 52	100	08.10/FT	★★★★★	One of the best mains cables for this money	●			●	n/a



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



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Audioquest FLX/SLIP 14/4

Awards 2012: Best Speaker Cable

It all knits together perfectly. Nothing is stifled: it's open, clear and effortless, with tremendous dynamic ability for the money."



Talk Electronics Talk 3

£4/m

"This cable performs admirably with detail, dynamics and subtlety, while there's a lovely expressive midrange and firm bass too."



QED Revelation

£15/m

"If your system is good enough to make proper use of a cable like this, you won't be disappointed."

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	BiWire
Up to £10/m				
Audioquest FLX/SLIP 14/4	5.80	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Best Speaker Cable, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
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 Element	3	11.09/FT	★★★★★	A fine budget upgrade, but you don't have to spend too much more to do quite a bit better
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

SPEAKER CABLES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	
Chord Co. Carnival Silv. Screen	6	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Slightly overtaken by newer rivals, but still a mighty fine choice
CL Audio C-line Alpha Shield	5	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Restrained dynamics hold this otherwise good cable back from the full five stars
Ecosse CS 2.3	5	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Balanced, nuanced and an easy listen, but a little subdued
Ecosse CS 4.2	3	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A decent cable that needs a touch more punch
QED Ruby Anniversary	6	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Rich and detailed but lacking in rhythm and dynamics
QED Ruby Anniversary Evolution	6	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Rich, detailed, energetic and clean. A great cable
QED Silver Anniversary XT	5	07.08/GT	★★★★★	Our budget cable Best Buy for three years on the trot
QED X-TC	4	09.10/FT	★★★★★	A great budget cable that's able to hold its own
QED XT Evolution	6	10.09/FT	★★★★★	QED is now a twin threat in the sub-£10/m speaker cable market
Talk Electronics Talk 3	4	07.11/GT	★★★★★	An essential first cable upgrade
Wireworld Luna 7	6.50	03.14/GT	★★★★★	The all-round ability of this cable means it should sit well with a wide range of systems
Wireworld The Stream 16/2	5	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Still a cracking cable, but losing out to better competition
Wireworld Stream 7	6	11.13/GT	★★★★★	If you're a fan of detail then you should definitely consider the Stream 7

£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 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 CS122	17	04.10/GT	★★★★★	Still great with subtleties, but rivals have caught up
van den Hul The Clearwater	10	03.14/GT	★★★★★	A cable with an impressive level of detail and clarity

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QED Silver Anniversary XT

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March 2014



Wireworld Luna 7 Speaker Cable

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Van Den Hul The Clearwater

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Atlas Hyper 2.0 Speaker Cable

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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



Quadrapire QV60
£250



AWARD WINNER

Custom Design FS104 Signature
Awards 2013: Best Speaker Stands



Partington Super Dreadnaught
£180

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Fillable	Finishes
Up to £5000						
Apollo A3/6	80	07.10/GT	★★★★★	Spacious and well-focused fillable stands	60x23x26	● 2
Atacama HMS2	200	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Retain detail and cohesion with these solid stands	60x31x31	● 1
Custom rc60 Deluxe	125	10.07/FT	★★★★★	This bespoke service has made a fine pair stands	60x20x25	5
Custom Design FS104 Sig.	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
Mission Stance	100	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Will do a fine job with £200-£400 speakers	58x21x28	● 3
Partington ANSA 60	150	09.11/GT	★★★★★	They remain fine stands - but no longer outstanding value	60x23x28	● 1
Part. D'nought Broadside	300	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Deliver wide ranging improvements to sound	60x23x28	1
Partington Heavi	399	03.07/FT	★★★★★	If you demand the best, buy these	60x30x21	1
Part. Super Dreadnought	180	03.07/GT	★★★★★	Best £100+ speaker stands in Awards 2007	60x16x17	● 1
Soundstyle Z2	70	11.08/FT	★★★★★	Best sub-£100 speaker stand in Awards 2007	57x17x23	● 2



AV & hi-fi racks

Many racks are built to be expanded. Several manufacturers offer you a number of shelving options for ready-made products, but what if you want to get more kit in a few years? We like having the option to build upwards at a later date.

The shortlist



Hi-Fi Racks Podium
£460



AWARD WINNER

Atacama Eris Eco 5.0
Awards 2013: Best Equipment Support



Custom Design Tokyo Hi-Fi 4
£430

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Modular Shelves	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Finishes
Up to £500						
Alphason Finewood 1100	300	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Looks great and provides sturdy support for your kit	3 51x110x45	1
Alphason ST560/3	260	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A well isolated modular design that does much right	● 4 65x56x59	2
Atacama Equinox	339	11.09/GT	★★★★★	Still a good rack, but newer rivals offer more	● 2-5 Variable 60x55	3

RACKS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Modular Shelves	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Finishes
Atacama Equinox AVI	380	05.07/FT	★★★★★	Neat solution to mount a TV above AV electronics		2 110x106x60	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
Custom Design Tokyo Hi-Fi 4	430	08.11/GT	★★★★★	A lightweight rack with immense potential	●	4 64x58x40	3
Hi Fi Racks Podium	460	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Best equipment support, Awards 2011	●	3 62x60x40	1
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
Sonorous PL2200	280	09.08/FT	★★★★★	Classy looks and features		2 82x95x44	6
Target CL470	299	06.10/GT	★★★★★	For pure performance, this is a winner at this price		4 82x50x55	2
Techlink Ovid	200	04.07/GT	★★★★★	Perfect for a minimalist system in a trendy flat		3 32x95x40	4

£500-£1000

Atacama Elite Eco 12.0	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Offers solid performance and flexibility	●	5 Variablex115x32	1
BDI Valera 9724	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Complicated to assemble but the results make it worthwhile		3 54x112x52	3
Hi Fi Racks Akorner XL	930	09.12/FT	★★★★★	A corner-friendly alternative to the Podium	●	3 45x110x40	6
Optimum Avion 8925	999	06.10/GT	★★★★★	Heavyweight, but likeable and good with sonics		3 57x127x56	3
Quadraspire Q4 Bamboo	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	An all round performer. Easy to set up and excellent results	●	4 Variablex59x40	1
Quadraspire QAVM (Oak)	540	04.07/GT	★★★★★	Solid and rigid, delivers a fine performance	●	3 50x109x50	8
Quadraspire QAVX	560	12.07/FT	★★★★★	Supports a great big telly and expansive system	●	2 Variablex163x52	8
Quadraspire Sunoko Vent T	800	11.09/GT	★★★★★	A first-rate rack, that highlights subtleties	●	4 Variablex59x47	6

£1000 and more

Audiophile Base StarBase	1180	12.06/GT	★★★★★	Exceptional, spectacular results with high end hi-fi	●	3 65x59x52	3
Hi Fi Racks Podium XL	1050	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A great performer: plenty of weight and dynamics	●	3 53x140x40	1
Spectral Closed CL1050	1100	07.07/FT	★★★★★	Fantastic build and style, plus numerous options		2 31x101x53	17
Spectral Closed CL1552	1800	07.07/GT	★★★★★	Awesome style and decent abilities - a great rack		6 VariablexVariablex53	16



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

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
Graham Slee Voyager	180	02.09/FT	★★★★★	It might not be the most practical headphone amp ever, but it's packed with potential	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

"However, it's as a headphone amplifier that the unit impresses most. As far as sonic performance is concerned, the Lehman Black Cube Linear is the best we've come across"

July 2009



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.

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Rega Fono MM MK2

Awards 2013: Best Phono stage

"Others may deliver a little more detail, but the weight and scale here justifies the extra outlay. A splendid amp."



AWARD WINNER

Leema Elements

Awards 2011: Best Phono stage

"We rate the Elements very highly and can't think of a better alternative at this price. Buy with confidence."



Graham Slee Gram Amp 2 Communicator £150

"Fast, organised and dynamic. It's low on frills but high on quality. The aptly named Communicator comes highly recommended."

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	MM	MC	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £2000							
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
Plinius Koru	2325	04.09/FT	★★★★★	●	●	2	9x45x40
Pro-Ject Phono Box S	120	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	2	7x10x14
Musical Fidelity V-LPS II	160	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	1	5x11x11
Rega Fono Mini A2D	85	03.12/FT	★★★★★	●	●	1	6x18x25
Rega Fono MM MK2	200	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	2	7x43x33



Cartridges

Moving magnet (MM) These produce a higher output, giving your phono stage an easier time

Moving coil (MC) Can produce more detail, but is more demanding of your phono stage

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	MM/MC	Tracking weight (g)
Up to £500					
Clearaudio Aurum Beta Mk II	360	04.11/GT	★★★★★	MM	2.2
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

"The Goldring 2500 held our attention pretty much from the start and, by doing right just about everything required of it, gets top marks"

March 2009



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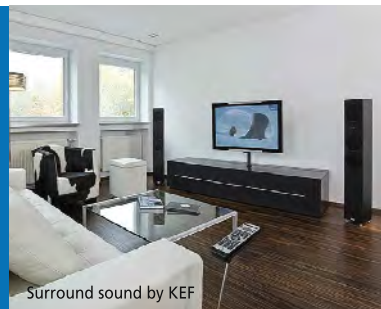
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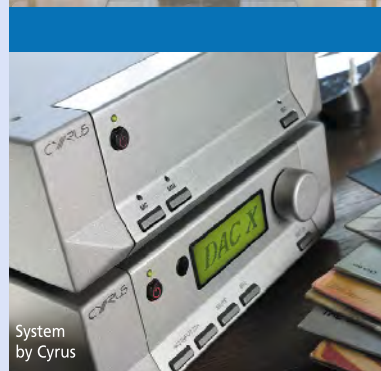
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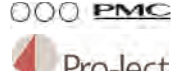
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THAT WAS THEN

Monitor Audio Silver surround package

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Monitor Audio has scored some notable successes of late, most recently in our April issue, where we were blown away by the bass power and dynamics of the Silver 8i floorstanders. So powerful is their sound that these same speakers make fine front effects designs in a multichannel set-up. Indeed, for many homes, their outright extension will be ample even for use with all-out action movies, with little need of an add-on subwoofer.

Each 85cm-tall floorstander employs three drivers, including a 10cm



Before each listen, it's worth it, for the great bass and integration

to a little better. There's element of hardness at times, most notably with the dynamics of *Tubular Bells*. bright or excessive, just a more vivid than is ideal. That, however, is the only significant demerit. Attractive and well made, for extension and dynamics this package has few peers at its price. Monitor Audio is back.

Conclusion

This is an extraordinary quartet. Each has a fine array of virtues, each shows commendable attention to detail, and each is superbly made. Of the more affordable pairing, we lean, just, to the Mission; it can't rival the overall weight and power of the Monitor Audio, but it achieves greater insight. Of the pricier packages, B&W just edges it, by virtue of its breathtaking transparency: no other set-up here can eclipse it for sheer resolution. For that reason – provided, of course, you can afford it – B&W's CDM package gets our overall vote.

Monitor Audio's latest Silver package could be the template for a modern, full-size surround set-up. It's beautifully presented and made with an obsessive attention to detail.

Yet look back at our 2001 review of the first Silver speaker package and you'll see not much has changed down the years. We were taken with the company's construction standards back then too. Dig deeper and you find the similarities between old and new go far deeper than just build standards.

It's the use of metal drive units that draws our attention. Those used in the latest package may be superior in terms of dynamics, detail and resonance control, but their DNA is easily traceable to the earlier designs. The newer package pulls ahead by using dedicated surround speakers rather than the conventional standmounters of its ancestor. These specialist surrounds are designed with great thought, and can

change from bipole to dipole operation by flicking a switch; the correct choice of dispersion depends on their positioning.

True, the earlier package's conventional rear speakers are better for music replay, but in this case convincing cinema sound has priority.

We can't help but be impressed.



Monitor Audio has maintained their high construction standards

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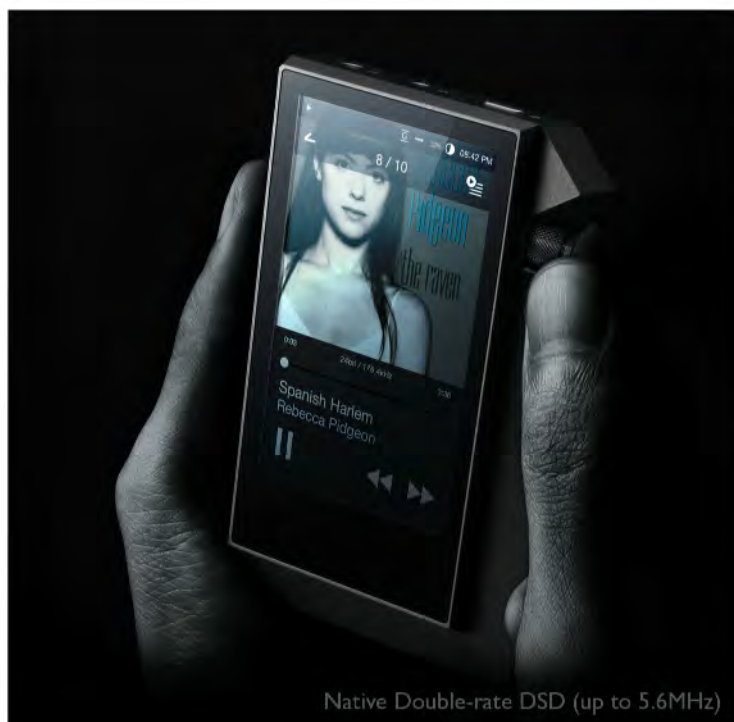
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