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I know everybody here, well, thinks he needs you

Omnipotence can come at quite a pace. Until 3rd April 2010 people didn't even know they wanted a tablet computer, but dial forward fewer than four years and the market for tablets is enormous.

When internet search engines and supermarkets have their own brand of tablet to sell you, you know the tablet has achieved ubiquity. So we've lined up the second-generation iPad Mini (because smaller tablets are all the rage now, apparently on a collision-course with ever-more sizeable smartphones) in **a definitive small-tablets Supertest (p38)**.

So I guess the question for the New Year is: what desirable, brilliantly marketed bit of as-yet unimagined tech will we all be desperate to own in four years' time? I hope it's a jetpack.



Simon

Simon Lucas, Editor

My products of the month

LG 55EA9800

Test p12

I've entered the competition on p33 under an assumed name.*

(*Not really. Sadly it's not allowed.)



Apple iPad Air

Test p22

Because I like a tablet as much as anyone, and this one looks, sounds and feels delightful.

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"Attractive design, great features and an exciting sound - this is one cool product"

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"About as tech-packed as speakers get"

Ketan Bharadia Technical editor



Dali Zensor 3 First test p14

"So enjoyable that you'll sit through album after album"

Ced Yuen Staff writer



Apple iPad Mini with Retina Display Supertest p39

"It's the iPad Mini we've been waiting for - the screen is so good you won't want to put it down"

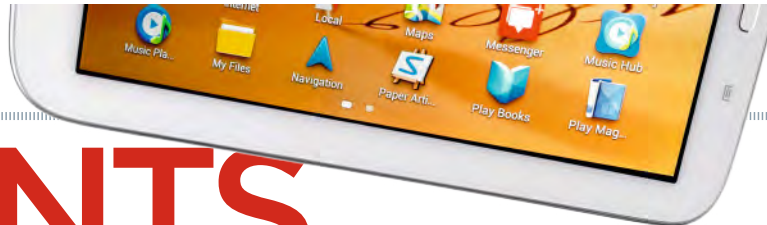
Verity Burns Multimedia editor



Cyrus Lyric 09 First test p6

"The new design is a bold move, but the bottom line is that the Lyric sounds stunning"

Andy Madden Reviews editor



Supertest Tablets

"Don't be fooled into thinking that the most expensive equates to being the best... or vice versa"

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36 Supertest: Tablets Four years ago we rarely used tablets; now they're the biggest game in town. We've cast our eyes at eight miniature marvels from Amazon, Apple, Archos, Asus, LG, Samsung, Google and Tesco to see which offers the best value per inch.

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First tests
"Even an enraged symphony orchestra in full attack mode doesn't faze them"



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We preview the products looking to steal the limelight at the world's biggest technology show

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UltimateGuide

Best TVs of the year



Ultimate Guide Televisions
"At this size and price, the picture quality is second to none"



Group Test Wireless speakers
"It has the looks, the build and the extra features to be extremely attractive"

65 Wireless speakers Merging style with the latest technology in a compact body is no easy feat. We test seven units in the £120-£170 range to see which delivers that portable slice of manna.

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92 Temptations Featuring McIntosh's C2500 preamp, Esoteric's E-05 high-end CD player and Linn's beautifully engineered Akubarik speakers.

100 Playlist Zack Snyder's *Man of Steel* destroys a city, *Pacific Rim* destroys the world and the visual feast of *Forza Motorsport 5* destroys our evenings.



Temptation
"There's plenty of bite in the treble, but plenty of refinement too"



WIN
A 55in CURVED LG OLED
WORTH £8000!
Turn to page 33

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

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

Revamped hi-fi guide!
1500 products rated **p111**
With new categories and key tech specs, we've made it even easier for you to pick the best kit for your cash

Find out...
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FIRST TESTS

**MORE
FIRST TESTS**



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EXCLUSIVE

New streaming wonder is a Cyrus, but not as we know it

Cyrus Lyric 09 | Streaming system | £3000

Controversy isn't a word you'd normally associate with Cyrus. The British company with a penchant for half-width hi-fi separates has stuck with its tried and tested design formula since 1984...

Which is why the first press images of the Lyric 09 came as quite a shock. And, going by some of the reactions on *whatifi.com*, the change in form factor for this new all-in-one system was as controversial as the idea of horsemeat lasagne.

A modern slant for Cyrus

In the flesh, Cyrus's latest addition does take a little getting used to, especially if you're familiar with the brand. Give it a few days, though, and the Lyric should blend into your surroundings well enough. The minimalist and button-less black front



panel helps out here, and an assortment of brightly lit touch-sensitive controls gives the unit a modern slant.

Gathered on the left-hand side you've got the controls for navigating through the menus on the central display, and over on the right are the controls for playback and volume. The Cyrus logo on the left doubles as the power button.

reminiscent of a combine harvester chewing up wheat. We'd prefer a smoother, quieter action.

If the backlight is a tad bright for you, you can turn off the display for the controls - Cyrus has added a proximity sensor so the

The Lyric supports a whole host of file formats and bitrates, including WAV, FLAC and AIFF, as well as 24-bit/192kHz high-res files. There's wi-fi, ethernet and high-quality aptX Bluetooth



The Cadence app for iOS devices (Android is on the way) offers a good breadth of control over the system, from switching inputs to accessing tracks stored on a network. It's not the most modern-looking app out there but you shouldn't find it a struggle to use. It isn't without the odd flourish such as a virtual volume knob and the ability to post what you're listening to on Twitter and Facebook.

The system responds really quickly and smoothly to manual inputs, but thankfully doesn't act as a major magnet for your fingerprints.

A slot-loading CD mechanism sits below the front panel, highlighted by a welcoming white glow around the opening. The noise as the mechanism draws a CD into its mouth is a little agricultural though - rather

front bursts into life as you approach. It's a useful and clever feature.

There's also a light sensor which checks on the ambient light and supposedly adjusts the brightness of the screen to compensate, although our review sample didn't seem to want to react.

Despite the new aesthetic, it's good to see this hasn't distracted Cyrus from

The screen is one of
the best we've seen
on a smartphone

Google Nexus 5, p16

The Lyric will play
just about anything
you care to chuck at
it, from CD to high-res



delivering the kind of functionality and features an all-in-one system needs to cover, especially at this price.

Loads of file formats supported

Two USB Type A sockets (one front and one back) allow you to connect external hard drives, MP3 players and Apple iPhones, iPods and iPads, while the solitary USB Type B input on the rear is your go-to connection for hooking up a computer, so you can stream music files and use the Cryus's built-in DAC.

The Lyric supports a whole host of file formats and bitrates, including WAV, FLAC and AIFF as well as 24-bit/192kHz high-res files should you own any. They are becoming more available by the month.

Streaming over a home network can happen wirelessly (a wi-fi aerial is included in the box) but for stability's sake we'd recommend using a wired connection straight into the Lyric's ethernet socket.

Bluetooth streaming is catered for, including the higher quality aptX codec, available through some of the latest smartphones and tablets.

Finally there's DAB, FM and internet radio to choose from. The internet service is provided through TuneIn which gives you more than 70,000 channels - some good, some terrible - to choose from.

WHAT IT HAS TO BEAT...



Naim Uniti 2 | £2795 | ★★★★★

If you're in the market for a premium sounding hi-fi system but don't have the space for separates, this is the main rival.

Cyrus Lyric 09: round the back

1 Power supply

If you think 170W per channel is underpowered you can always add an additional power amplifier using the Lyric 09's configurable analogue output.

2 Wireless aerials

Don't forget to screw in the DAB and wi-fi aerials. They're included in the box.

3 Digital inputs

There's no shortage of digital inputs on the Cyrus, with two coaxial, two optical and three USB sockets to choose from.



To control the system you've got two options: the supplied remote or Cyrus's own Cadence app for iOS devices (see panel).

The remote's on the long side, but the smooth, chunky buttons are smartly laid out. Some of the key controls are different shapes, which makes it easier to get your thumb in the right place. There's a motion sensor inside too, which should mean it lights up every time it's moved; ours needed more of a deliberate jolt to bring it to life.

The Lyric 09 unearths a fabulous amount of detail and laps up information from every tune you play, whether it's an uncompressed WAV file from a NAS or a compressed Spotify stream over Bluetooth. Even with the latter, the Cyrus manages to pick out more edges of notes and subtleties than you'd think possible.

Listening to *Time* from the *Inception* soundtrack and the Cyrus hits some serious dynamic highs. The sense of scale as the

USE IT WITH

PMC Twenty 23

These floorstanders sound exciting and beautifully balanced - a good match for the Cyrus system



sound, it certainly seems to help the Cyrus. This system leaves a lasting impression.

We play Haim's *Falling* over Bluetooth, and the Cyrus hits hard in the low frequencies. The drum kicks and bass notes arrive with a serious amount of weight behind them. The Cyrus does trade a touch of agility for this added muscle, but it's a trade many will be willing to make.

On paper, all the ingredients seem to be there. And you soon realise that Cyrus has mixed them to perfection. There's all the musicality, enthusiasm and agility we've come to expect

Cyrus has a strong line-up of hi-fi separates and the company has hand-picked technologies and components across its whole range to use in the Lyric 09. The streaming engine, for example, comes out of the Award-winning, £2300 Stream XP2 QX, while the CD section uses the same mechanism found in the company's £700 CDt transport.

An intoxicating mix of ingredients

On paper, all the ingredients seem to be there. Play a couple of CDs and you soon realise Cyrus has mixed them to perfection. There's all the musicality, enthusiasm, and agility we've come to expect from Cyrus products, and more.

string and wind instruments rise in volume is captivating, as is the sudden shift from a loud crescendo to delicate piano play.

An impressive sense of power

Switch to Eminem's *Bad Guy* streamed as a WAV file from our networked storage, and there's a fine sense of precision and timing to the track. All the individual elements of the song hang neatly in a clear, open soundstage.

There's an impressive sense of power and drive on tap too. The Lyric 09's specifications include a new hybrid amplifier design capable of a claimed 170W per channel. And although more power doesn't always equate to a more powerful

A bold move that pays off

All-in-one systems can sometimes be a recipe for compromise, but the Lyric 09 has no such trouble. It's a bold move for Cyrus, but one that's paid off handsomely, so to speak...

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Detailed sound; open presentation; powerful delivery; control app; functionality

AGAINST Noisy CD loading mechanism; bass can sound musclebound at times; odd looks

VERDICT A really strong sonic performance makes the Lyric 09 a must-audition. It's superb

TECH SPECS

Power 2 x 170W • **Inputs** Optical digital x2, coaxial digital x2, USB Type A x2, USB type B, analogue • **Outputs** Analogue, headphone • **Format support** WAV, FLAC, ALAC, AAC, MP3, WMA, AIFF • **Sample rate support** up to 24bit/192kHz • **Bluetooth** Yes, aptX • **Radio** DAB/FM/Internet • **Dimensions** (hwd) 11 x 42 x 32cm • **Weight** 9kg

REVIEWER'S NOTES... 5 THINGS ABOUT THE CYRUS LYRIC 09

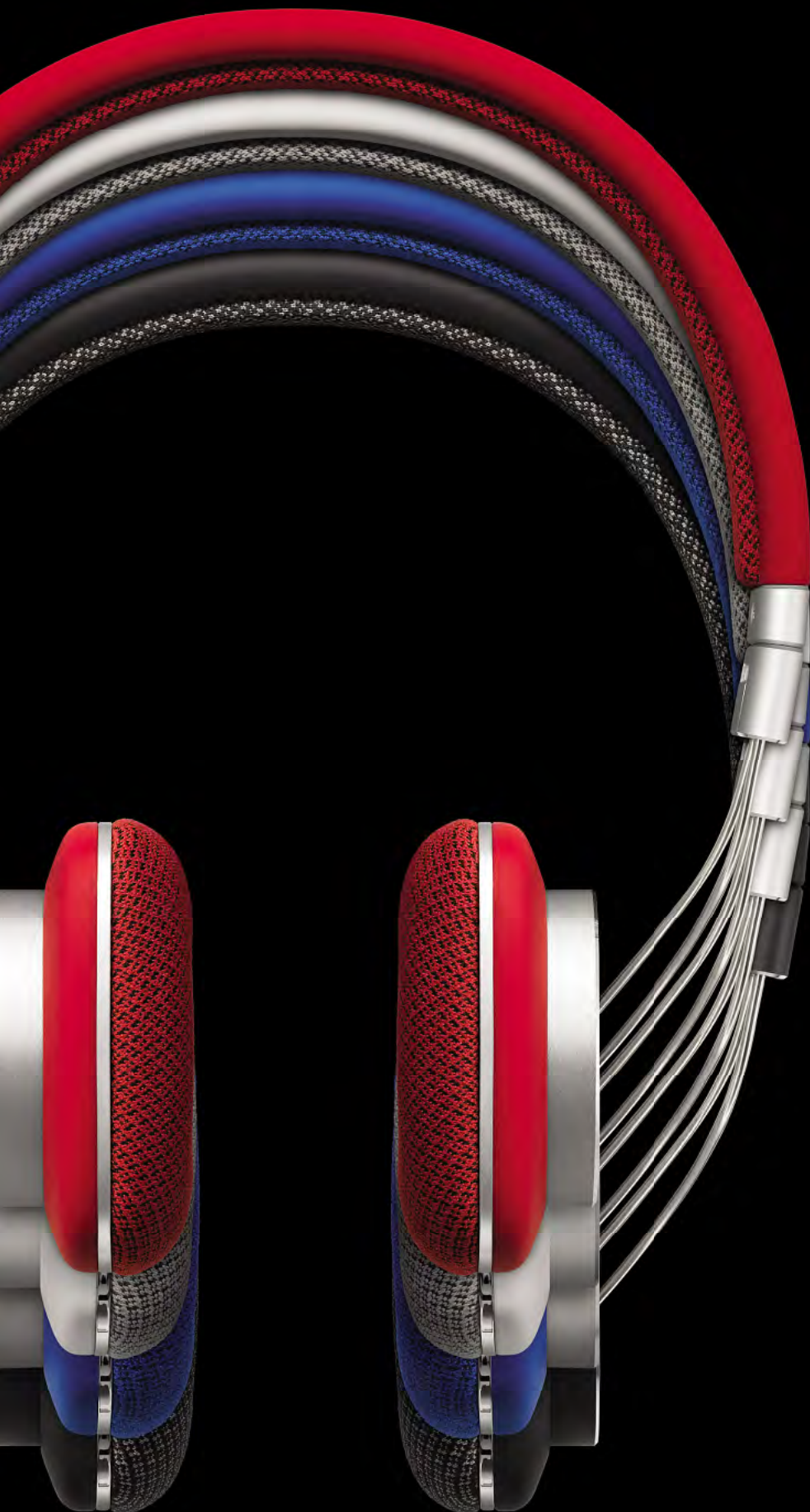
1 Debate over the styling of this new Cyrus machine continues. Our photographer has nothing but love for the controversial design - turns out it makes for quite a nice photo...

2 Cyrus's Cadence app could do with a more polished appearance, perhaps, but the simplicity has the benefit of making it a very effective controller - and that, after all, is what's most important.

3 We've got used to the looks after day three, and now it's the sound we're adjusting too. In a good way: in our experience, Cyrus components don't usually sound this powerful or weighty.

4 We put the Cyrus system through its paces with some high-resolution 24-bit/192kHz tunes and we're delighted to report that the Lyric 09 just loves to lavish you with the extra resolution.

5 We're really impressed by how sympathetically the Lyric 09 handles compressed files streamed over Bluetooth. Our new 2014 Spotify playlist sounds positively superb over aptX.



Hear the full spectrum

P3 Bowers & Wilkins have been established as masters of sound engineering for almost 50 years. We are now able to bring that same expertise to the world of headphones; the same precision, the same care, the same extraordinary range and depth of detail is now available from an ultra-light, highly portable set of headphones superbly designed to fit into your life.

Bowers & Wilkins

Sony UDA-1 | DAC | £500

Versatile desktop audio from Sony

Sony's UDA-1 is a digital-to-analogue converter with a built-in amp. It's designed to form the heart of a computer-based system whether by driving headphones or powering a pair of desktop speakers.

It's a decently equipped product with coaxial, optical and a line-level input alongside a pair of USB 2.0 inputs. The front USB uses a type-A socket and can be connected to and charge an iOS device. Look around the back and you'll find a type-B alternative that can accept files up to 32-bit/192kHz as well as native DSD streams from a computer. DSD is the digital format that SACD is built on.

We start off with the UDA-1 connected to our Apple laptop, using Grado 325is and B&W's P7s headphones in turn. We're pleased with what we hear. A CD rip of Jill Scott's *Golden* shows the Sony has fine clarity and a precise way with the leading edges of notes. There's a good sense of body to her voice and the ability to track low notes with plenty of determination.

We're struck by the Sony's composure when the music gets dense, and its precision when it comes to placing instruments in the sound stage. It's a nice, open and clear presentation

Move onto Mahler's *Symphony No.4* (24-bit/192kHz) and we're struck by the Sony's composure when the music gets dense, and its precision when it comes to placing instruments in the sound stage. It's a nice, open presentation, with really impressive clarity and focus.

Tonally, things are slightly on the lean side, though the Sony's sound never strays enough to dilute a recording's natural warmth and authority too much. It's just an agile and precise performer that delivers a lot of insight into recordings.

It's good regardless of file format; even a 256kbps file of Eric Bibb's *Booker's Guitar* sounded decent. Sony has developed a feature called DSEE, which is designed to make low-bitrate files sound better, and it works quite well. This function certainly made highs smoother and more rounded.

It also increases the sense of space around instruments – a common failing of low-quality files. But, there's a loss of focus too and a slight reduction in drive.

By the highest standards rhythmic ability isn't the Sony's strong point. It doesn't quite latch onto rhythms with the determination of something like NAD's D 3020, let alone more traditional rivals such as Rotel's RA-10. Big dynamics and outright punch are also a touch muted compared with these rivals.

The Sony's digital inputs aren't created equally. Disappointingly, USB performance

USE IT WITH AKG K550

Not the most stylish of headphones but sound as informative and natural as we've heard at this price.



is the weakest. Switch to optical, coax or even analogue and the amplifier is notably more convincing. We hope the forthcoming dedicated Mac driver software helps here.

Excellent for the desktop

Try to use the UDA-1 to fill a room with sound by connecting something like Q Acoustics' Concept 20s and it does reasonably well. We like the clarity and detail on offer but, as the 20W-per-channel rating suggests, this is no powerhouse. It doesn't sound particularly muscular and certainly doesn't deliver the kind of scale or authority that alternatives offer.

However, use it as intended, driving a small pair of speakers on or near a desk, and those shortcomings aren't anywhere near as apparent. In this situation the Sony's insightful yet uncluttered presentation takes centre stage.

The UDA-1 isn't the most musically exciting of performers, but there's enough quality here to keep it a rewarding listen. Add the superb build, finish and (to our eyes at least) classy styling, and we think it makes a pretty appealing proposition.

In detail

1 Digital inputs

The UDA-1 has a decent spread of digital connections. There's dedicated driver software for PCs if you want to stream DSD files; we're still waiting for the Mac version.

2 Analogue friendly

The Sony's heart might be in the digital domain, but it doesn't ignore analogue sources. This makes it even more versatile.



Rating ★★★★★

FOR Superb build and finish; clear, precise sound; composed with demanding music

AGAINST Lacks a little rhythmic drive and a touch of punch

VERDICT Use the UDA-1 in a set-up optimised for desktop use and it's a fine product

Also consider Audiolab M-DAC £600 ★★★★★

If you need a high-quality DAC with a suitably talented headphone amplifier, this is where your money should go. It's nicely made, too.



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Perfect for the Samsung GALAXY range of phones, including Samsung GALAXY S3 and S4.



*Expert Reviews, 26.03.2013. **NFC required for one touch pairing. Manual pairing possible without NFC. Bluetooth required for wireless playback. apt-X compatibility required for lossless playback.

LG 55EA980W | OLED TV | £8000

Curvy OLED is a bendy blinder

This is the second curved OLED TV we've tested in as many months, and we're drawn to it immediately. The curved screen (which has divided opinion in the office) helps, but mainly it's because we've been waiting for OLED for years.

None more black

We can see why curved screens are so fashionable. They're attention-grabbing. OLED panels don't need a backlight, and they can be incredibly thin too: this one measures 4.5mm at its thinnest, which is even slimmer than the iPad Air (see p22).

It's a good-looking screen on the whole, but inspect it closer and there are a couple of flaws. The wafer-thin screen flexes just a little too much, and the stress-marks in the plastic stand are at odds with the quality feel we'd expect from an £8000 TV.

Unlike the Samsung KE55S9C's curved screen, which sits inside a frame that accentuates the effect, the LG's curve is subtler. It sits freely on top of a clear plastic stand, but it's well-supported so we don't feel it's perching too precariously.

Incredibly immersive

All that would be for nought, of course, if the picture was rubbish. It isn't. Play *Pacific Rim* on Blu-ray and our long wait for OLED is immediately justified. Black levels are stunning. They're properly dark, inky-deep and solid - far more than we've previously seen on Full HD LCD and plasma sets. In contrast, white levels are bright and punchy. The picture as a whole is clean, detailed and has a natural colour balance. It's absolutely lovely to watch.

Director Guillermo del Toro uses every colour in the rainbow in his film, and the LG is skilled in conveying that vibrancy. It gets the balance just right, too. Skin tones look natural; browns, reds and yellows are easily discernible in interior scenes; primary colours don't look overcooked.

It's not perfect, though. Detail disappears in dark corners of rooms, and black coats and shirts tend to blend into each other to form a large mass of black. It's an issue we highlighted in the Samsung KE55S9C (the LG's current direct rival) too, and seems to be an issue with current OLEDs. The cost of lush deep blacks and bright whites seems to be a lack of outright subtlety in those areas. A touch more crispness to object edges wouldn't go amiss in this screen, either.

However, we do prefer the subdued quality of the LG to the slightly oversaturated Samsung. The LG's colours are just that bit more subtle and realistic.

Only a few niggles

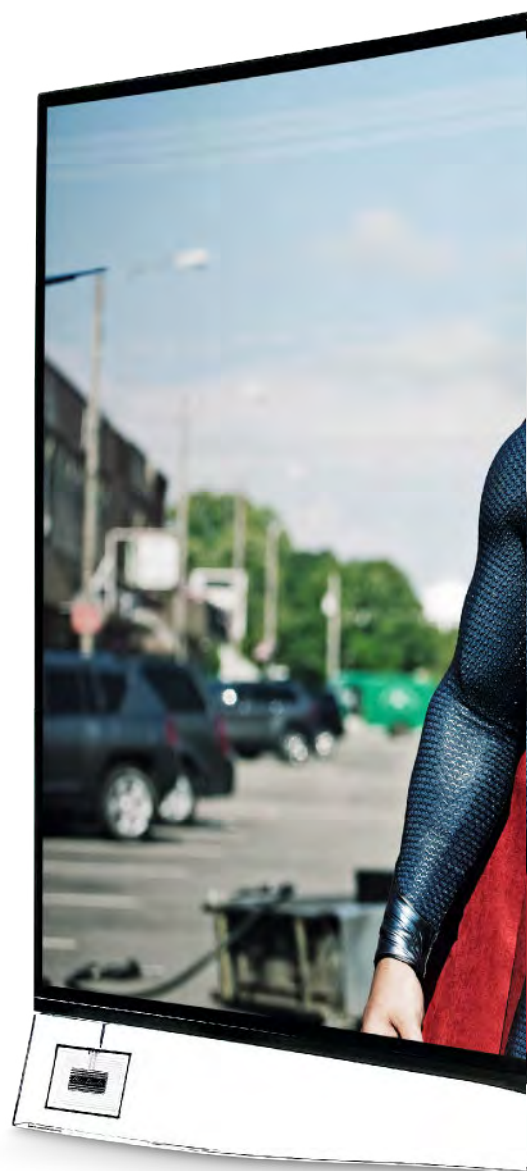
Motion isn't the smoothest, however, which is a more pressing issue than detail. We turn the up the de-judder and de-blur settings a touch, and it smooths out some of the more obvious judders. However, it does accentuate the green-screen effect on the outlines of people on screen.

Broadcast TV and DVDs take a dip in quality, albeit a touch more so than we've seen in the Samsung. We'd like a cleaner, more capable upscaler in a £8000 TV.

The viewing angle is excellent - contrast and colour stay clear even way off to the sides - but the curved screen has its ups and downs. It offers more immersion, but only for solitary viewers. Anyone sitting at an angle will see a slightly distorted picture that changes depending on their position.

Good in (passive) 3D, too

We played *Tintin* in 3D and our first OLED passive 3D experience (the Samsung KE55S9C is an active set) was a mixed bag. Good news first: the screen is bright, even through the glasses. OLED's natural vibrancy delivers a much brighter picture with 3D than we've seen on previous LCD sets. On the downside, the picture could be smoother and more immersive.



We didn't mind listening to the LG 55EA980W's own 'Clear Speakers'. The sound was loud, spacious and more satisfying than the thin performance we've become accustomed to with flatscreen TVs. There are four 10W drivers in total, two of which you can see clearly displayed in the stand. There's decent balance and voices sound direct, if a little indistinct.

Magic Remote

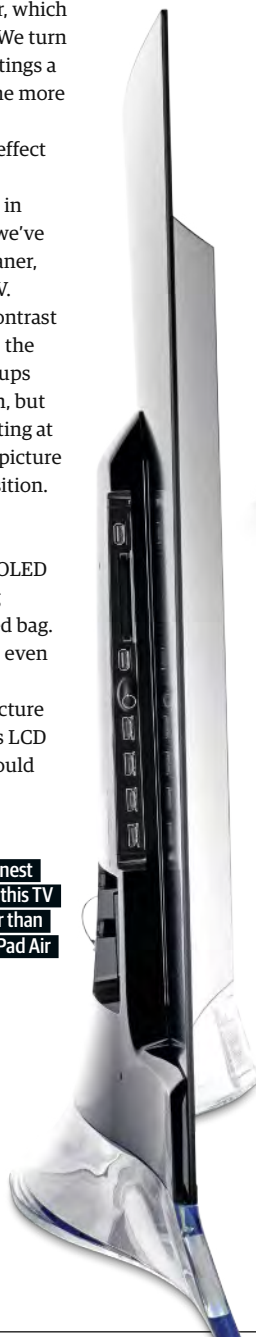
LG offers various ways of controlling the shiny new TV, but our favourite method sways between the standard wand and the Magic Remote. This is a slim controller that curves naturally into the contours of your hand. Point it at the screen to bring up a computer-style cursor and use the click wheel scrolling and selecting. There's a subtle backlight, too.

The flat buttons on the wand offer basic controls of changing volume, channels, accessing the smart TV home page, turning 3D on or off, and activating the (surprisingly decent and versatile) voice control.



At its thinnest (4.5mm), this TV is slimmer than the new iPad Air

Voice control via the Magic Remote actually works here. Other companies, take note



Decent connections

The LG is packed with all the bells and whistles you'd expect from a top-of-the-range screen, from Smart TV content featuring catch-up and on-demand streaming services, to the (decent) voice and (frustrating) motion controls.

Discreetly hidden away under that sleek carbon-fibre back panel is the 55EA980W's stash of analogue and digital connections. Four HDMI inputs is plenty for hooking up your Blu-ray player, set-top box and games console, while one input is marked MHL (Mobile High definition Link - used for receiving HD content from hard-wired Android smartphones and tablets).

Blacks are far deeper than we've seen on LCD and plasma sets, while whites are bright and punchy. Colours are lovely and vivid. It's lovely



There are also three USB ports and a single optical audio output. Composite, component and Scart connections for analogue sources are also available, but you'll need LG's bundled cables and adapters to use them.

A Freeview HD tuner comes as standard, and there's a satellite tuner as well (it's not Freesat). An ethernet port for wired connection is our preferred method of keeping the LG TV connected online, even though the set has built-in wi-fi.

The future is bright

Yes, this is a *really* expensive TV. And yes, it needs a couple of tiny tweaks - but then it does sit at the cutting edge. There are plenty of high points, most notably its sleek design and that utterly involving picture. There's plenty more to praise about the LG than there is to gripe about. If this is the kind of thing we can expect from future OLEDs, then we're very excited indeed.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Amazing black levels; bright and punchy whites; detailed picture; vibrant colours

AGAINST Slight motion issues; could have a touch more subtlety; costs a bit

VERDICT A great first OLED effort from LG. We're blown away by the vibrancy of its picture

Also consider

Samsung KE55S9C

£7000 ★★★★★

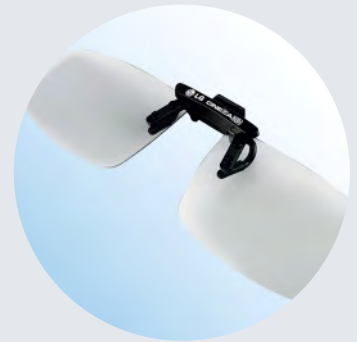
Stunning good looks, fantastic picture, great smart features... and a grand cheaper.



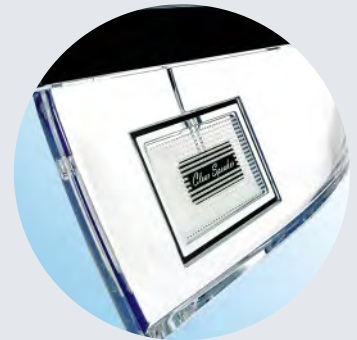
Round the back



The USB camera for Skype and gesture control connects to a hidden USB port on the back.



LG has included clip-on passive 3D lenses for folk who already wear glasses. Thoughtful!



LG's Clear Speakers are embedded in the stand. At 10W each, they sound loud and spacious.

What is OLED?

OLED (Organic LED) screens use pixels that create their own light and colour. They do away with backlights, so when a pixel turns off it goes pitch-black.

The tech aims to deliver even darker blacks than plasma screens, while retaining the punchy brightness of LCDs. Colour reproduction promises to be richer and contrast should be stronger.

On this front, LG's design boffins have a trick up their sleeve. They've added a fourth white sub-pixel alongside the standard RGB (red, green and blue) group, to display more accurate colours and help lengthen the life span of the screen.

WIN WANT THIS TV AT HOME?
Turn to p33 for your chance...



Dali Zensor 3 | Stereo speakers | £300

Fun, dynamic and great value

Dali seriously impressed us when we reviewed the Zensor 1s in 2011. We were so enthused we used terms like “an absolute bargain”. And now we have our hands on the next model up. Can these replicate the success of their little siblings?

Hugely entertaining

Yes, to put it simply. These are stonkingly good. They're engaging and enjoyable enough that we found ourselves going through entire albums at a time, nearly forgetting that we were meant to be testing.

Out of the box, the Zensor 3s don't sound as tightly controlled as they should, and the bass gets a little messy. But give them a weekend to run in and you're in for a treat.

The first thing that strikes you is the scale. The soundstage is airy and open, there's ample headroom and sound is nicely dispersed. It's balanced, too. There's a crisp top-end and a sweet midrange, and the bass response is stunning for the size of the cabinets: there's plenty of deep, tight bass that's rich without ever getting heavy. It's nearly impossible not to be moved by the

What we really like is the Zensor 3s' nature. These are upbeat speakers. Music is handled with addictive enthusiasm thanks to a great combination of energy and punchy dynamics. You also get plenty of detail and clarity

Zensor 3s' take on the *Inception* soundtrack: the power on hand, combined with that scale, is deeply impressive. It's an easy listen too, and never tiring.

What we really like is the Zensor 3s' nature. These are upbeat speakers. Music is handled with addictive enthusiasm thanks to a great combination of energy and punchy dynamics.

You also get plenty of detail and a high level of clarity. It's easy to pick out the individual parts of even the most complex tracks. Play Atoms for Peace's *Ingenue* and the bizarre percussion in the background is clearly a load of water drops, for instance. But it isn't too analytical: disparate elements work with excellent timing and organisation, and come across as a cohesive whole.

If there is a tiny chink in the Zensor 3s' otherwise incredibly shiny armour, it's that they could be a touch more refined. They deliver an expertly controlled performance with very high rhythmic precision, but in absolute terms, the sound isn't quite as organised as the Award-winning Q Acoustics Concept 20s.

The Zensor 3s have a degree of enthusiasm that, combined with their likeable energy, makes for a performance with panache. It's just not the last word in poise or precision. Then again, we were so busy having fun it never really bothered us.

We're also fans of the look. They're not particularly flashy, but they fit the part of a set of £300 boxes. The vinyl-coated cabinets are well built, and the glossy baffles add a touch of sophistication.



The back panel has a reflex port and single speaker terminals

Living with them
After experimenting with positioning, we found that the Zensor 3s prefer to fire straight ahead, rather than inwards.



At the front you get the soft-dome tweeter from the Zensor 1s, and the seven-inch driver from the Zensor 7s. Round the back is a single set of speaker terminals, so there's no biwiring here.

The Dali Zensor 3s are a great success. More than that, they're a treat. They hardly put a foot wrong, and they'll occupy you for hours. If you're after an affordable upgrade, these represent top value for money.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Airy, spacious sound; wide-open soundstage; plenty of detail; punch and dynamics; excellent tonal balance

AGAINST They could do with a little more sonic refinement

VERDICT If you crave entertainment, these deliver in spades – and they're great value too

System builder Total build £1280

DAC

Rega DAC £500 ★★★★★

Use your laptop as a source and put it through Rega's impressive sounding (if not imaginatively titled) DAC. It serves up tunes with real verve.



Stereo Amplifier

Rega Brio-R £480 ★★★★★

The latest version of Rega's long-running Brio is the best yet. It's immensely musical, agile and detailed, and it sniffs out a rhythm track brilliantly.



Also consider

Q Acoustics

Concept 20

£350 ★★★★★

These don't have quite as much enthusiasm, but you do get a bit more in the way of refinement.



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Google Nexus 5 | Smartphone

Is this the best-value Android ever?

LG and Google have struck gold again. They rocked the mobile market last year with the Nexus 4, which offered top-tier tech for a lot less money than rivals, and it's the same deal here. At £300 SIM-free, the Nexus 5 is half the cost of Apple's flagship. There are also great contract deals available.

The Nexus 5 looks and feels lovely. We like the ceramic power and volume buttons. Look to the back, and last year's glittery disco glass has been replaced with a polycarbonate slab that curves gently at the edges to sit nicely in your palm. It has a pleasant silky texture, and is solid enough not to flex and creak.

A metal construction might have more shiny appeal, but what about those keys in



The main attraction is the screen. It's one of the best we've seen on a smartphone. The picture is clean and crisp, colours are nicely judged and there's a good amount of detail in shadows

The Nexus 5 might not have an aluminium back, but the plastic case is lovely to hold

your pocket? Greater dent- and scratch-resistance arguably makes the Nexus 5 just as 'premium' as the HTC One and iPhone 5s.

The face of the phone is made of Corning's Gorilla Glass 3. That means it's super-tough, although we still wouldn't fling it at the ground. The distinctive round earpiece is a nice design flourish, but otherwise the front is rather unassuming.

The main attraction, of course, is the screen. It's one of the best we've seen on a smartphone. The picture is clean and crisp, and colours are nicely judged. With a 4.95in display, the Nexus 5 occupies a comfortable middle ground between the relatively diminutive iPhone 5s and the expansive Samsung Galaxy Note 3. The LG G2's screen is a little punchier, with deeper blacks, but the Nexus counters with better dark detail.

Numbers time. With 1920 x 1080 pixels crammed into 4.95 inches, the screen has a density of 445 pixels per inch. That puts the Nexus somewhere between the HTC One (468ppi) and LG G2 (424ppi). At this level, it's hard to discern a difference without a magnifying glass - and you won't need one to notice the impressive sharpness.

High-res audio support

The Nexus 5 also scores highly on audio. The sound is clean and balanced, with a good degree of dynamism and drive. It has the impressive detail we like in the G2, but with a much greater sense of attack. LG and Google haven't made a fuss about the phone's 24-bit/192kHz high-res audio support, but it's come as a nice surprise. And it works. Our FLAC album of Daft

Punk's *Random Access Memories* loaded up without a hitch and offered up a remarkable boost in subtlety and texture.

Is that enough to topple Apple on sound? Not quite. The iPhone 5s maintains its position as the best-sounding smartphone thanks to better timing and greater confidence. But that doesn't make the Nexus 5 any less accomplished. Overall, it's a competent, likeable performance, and one of the best we've heard from an Android.

Stellar user interface

The real star of the show is the revamped operating system - Android 4.4, codenamed 'KitKat'. The change is minimal (and minimalist) at first glance, but Google has prioritised function over form.

KitKat was designed to be undemanding, working even with low-end phones with little memory. The Nexus 5 has a bountiful 2GB of RAM and a 2.2GHz chip - so it practically flies. This phone doesn't do lag. Ever. There's a lovely smoothness and stability with every gesture.

The other massive overhaul in Android is the integration of nearly everything into Google. Fancy a takeaway? Don't bother looking up a number before grabbing the phone: just type 'pizza' into your phonebook and Google brings up the nearest places. Failing that, there's a Google search bar at the top of every home screen.

Google Now, the predictive element of the search engine, has also been given a boost. It occupies the far left home screen and shows information based on your location and activities. The idea is to get it ready even before you realise you need it.

Camera performance

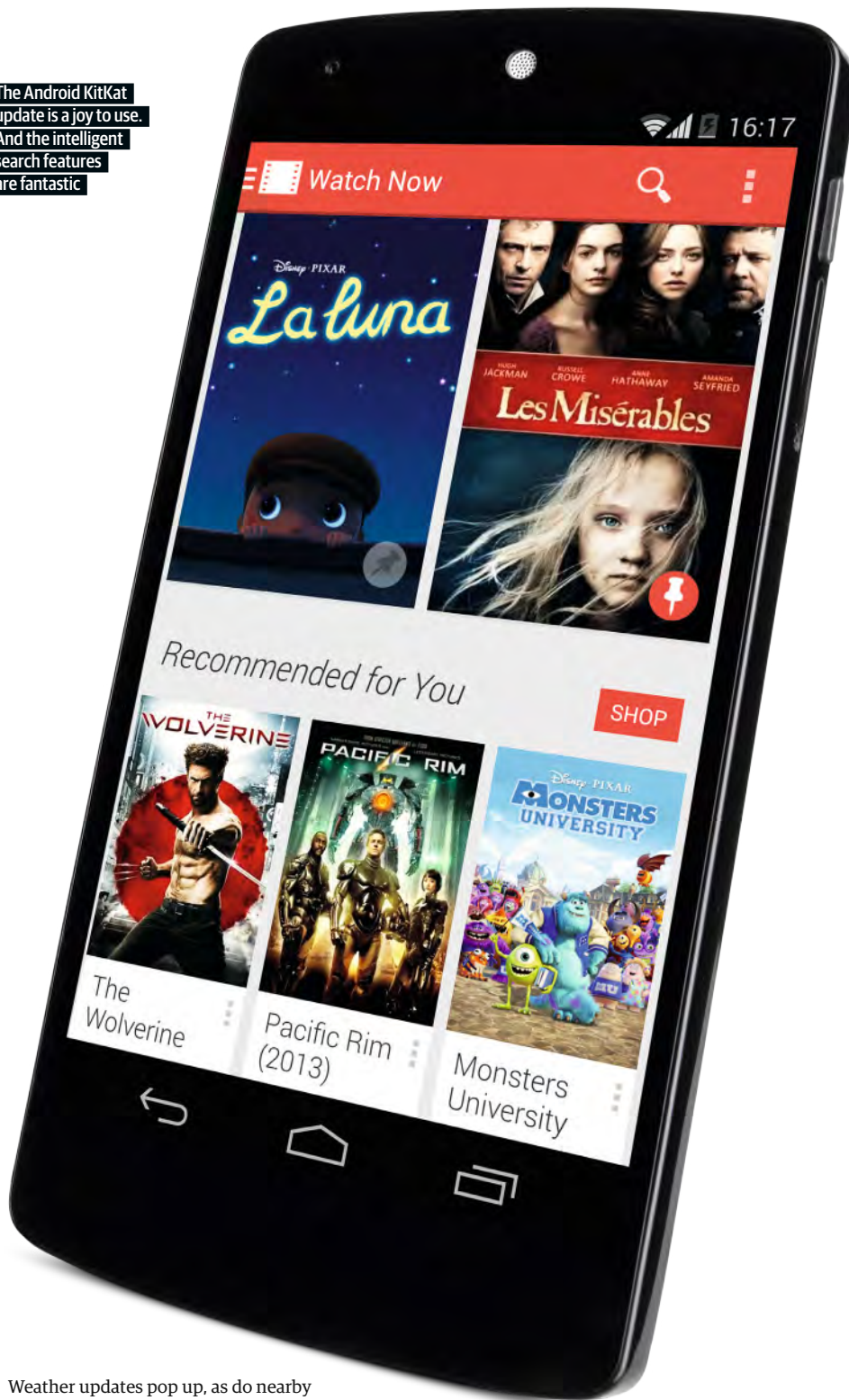


The Nexus 5 has an 8-megapixel camera, while the LG G2 and Samsung Galaxy S4 offer 13MP. In average light we got decent snaps, although they weren't as clean or sharp as ones from an LG G2, which also had more



accurate colours. In bright daylight the Nexus 5 is fairly detailed, but can overexpose. Low-light performance was disappointing. It also doesn't help that the camera interface is fiddly and that the autofocus isn't great.

The Android KitKat update is a joy to use. And the intelligent search features are fantastic



Weather updates pop up, as do nearby cinema times and local restaurants. After a few days, Google had learned roughly when we finish work, offering directions home and an estimated time of arrival.

Some people will find this really useful. Others might find it creepy - and they can disable the function altogether. We think it's a neat idea. It demonstrates a genuine desire to innovate.

We expected battery life to be appalling. But it's pretty good, if occasionally a little unpredictable. Used normally, the battery is more than enough for a day.

But that never happens on Day One: intense faffing about and app downloading meant we were out of juice in eight hours. The screen demands a lot of power, as does

scrambling for reception in areas of weak signal. Thankfully, it charges quickly, gaining 50 per cent in just over an hour.

Day Two: we unplugged the phone at 7am, and kept it connected to either wi-fi or 3G at all times. Location tracking was left on, with Google Now constantly keeping tabs on nearby happenings. We went through a few texts and phonecalls, a lot of emails, and took a dozen photos.

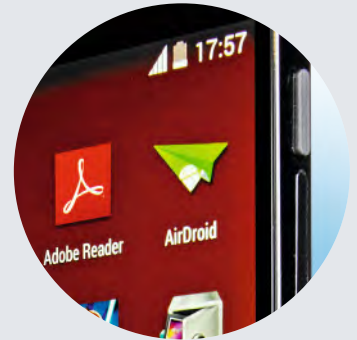
USE IT WITH

Beyerdynamic MMX 101IE

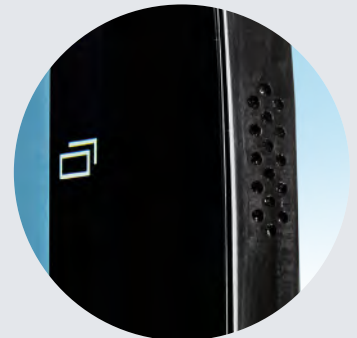
These Award-winning earphones deliver a weighty, dynamic and detailed sound - and their built-in mic and remote makes hands-free calls possible too.



In detail



The only physical buttons are the power and volume keys. They're made of ceramic, and are lovely to press.



The bottom of the phone has two grilles. They're not both speakers, though: one of them is a microphone.

Then we spent a couple of hours with music videos and social media sites. By 11pm, there was still 25 per cent of power left. That's pretty good, although we would have preferred the LG G2's mammoth 3000mAh battery, or the Samsung Galaxy S4's replaceable one.

We really like this phone. Its picture is stunning, and the sound is very good. It's speedy and stable, and it's startlingly clever. There are flaws, but they're pretty easy to forgive. If you want to get a top-tier smartphone but don't want to spend a fortune, the Nexus 5 is close to ideal. Is this the best-value Android ever? Yep.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Clear, sharp screen; engaging sound; super-slick OS; fantastic value

AGAINST Fiddly, fussy camera

VERDICT A top-tier smartphone for much less money than its rivals: the Google Nexus 5 is a powerhouse in almost every respect

Also consider LG G2

★★★★★

The sound is less exciting, but the screen is punchier and the battery just won't quit.



Tannoy Mercury V4i | Stereo loudspeakers | £400

A real up-and-at-'em attitude

At first glance the Tannoy Mercury V4i floorstanders would seem to have their work cut out. Sure, they're from a brand with heavyweight heritage, they're elegant lookers and there's nothing amiss in the way they're built or finished. But there's a stumbling-block: Q Acoustics.

Q Acoustics has a range of speakers that sets new standards at a given price, and among the brightest stars in its range are the 2050i floorstanders. So before the first note is sounded, the V4is have it all to do.

On paper they would appear well equipped for the scrap. They're a two-way design with a 25mm aluminium-dome tweeter between a pair of 15cm coated-paper mid/bass drivers, underpinned by a rear-firing reflex port. A pair of wood-effect finishes - 'sugar maple' (orange) or 'dark walnut' (brown) - looks a little humdrum against the Q Acoustics' glossy modernity, but otherwise the Tannoys read like a confident, competitive product.

A bit of care required with set up

The V4is don't demand all that much running-in time but they definitely prefer being biwired. They also like a little free space, not too close to a corner or rear wall.

Once up and running, the Tannoys sound every bit as confident as we suspected they would. Dish up something assertive like Beastie Boys' *Don't Play No Game That I Can't Win* and the V4is pounce on it, driving through the fast, deep bass-line with speed, accuracy and fine tonal variance. There's just no limit to the Tannoys' enthusiasm for up-tempo, attacking material - the punchier it gets, the more these speakers like it.

A rare skill with vocals

Yet ease back a little with Nick Drake's *Saturday Sun* and the Tannoys demonstrate lovely midrange clarity - the vocal has real breathing space in the spare, open arrangement and is delivered with every fine detail and vocal inflection intact. These speakers really do take singers seriously - from the ragged-gasping-for-breath of Elvis Costello's (*What's So Funny 'Bout*) *Peace, Love and Understanding?* to the silky precision of Nina Simone's *Turn Me On*, the V4is communicate with a directness and explicitness that's rare at this sort of money.

Where out-and-out scale is concerned the Tannoys punch well above their weight

too. Even an enraged symphony orchestra in full attack mode doesn't faze them - they establish a wide, fairly tall soundstage and position each instrument with accuracy. There's not an awful lot of depth to the stage, mind you - the V4is tend to push everything to the lip of the orchestra pit in an attempt to get their 'everything-louder-than-everything-else' message across.

This relative lack of finesse is apparent more or less constantly. Perhaps most problematic, though, is the treble reproduction. There's a slightly ragged, unyielding quality that puts it at odds with the rest of the frequency range.

Maximum attack...

It's this lack of cohesion that proves to be the Tannoys' undoing. We don't doubt for a moment that there are some listeners for whom maximum attack in all circumstances is just the ticket - especially when the lowest frequencies are so rapid, solid and well defined. The midrange will win fans, too - the V4is are brilliantly communicative with singers.

We don't doubt they'll find an audience. But their staunchly up-and-at-'em attitude, along with the dislocated, hard-edged treble, make the Tannoy Mercury V4is rather too narrow in their appeal for us to be unequivocally enthusiastic about them.

Set-up

1 Rear port

The rear-firing port means the V4is are not keen on being placed too close to a rear wall - and we toed them in a touch as well.

2 Biwiring

The V4is benefit from biwiring. It's more expensive of course but, we feel, worth the investment.

3 Spikes

Stability is crucial, so you'll need to make sure the spikes on the base are properly connected.



Rating ★★★★★

FOR Generous, well-controlled low frequencies; midrange clarity; pace and power

AGAINST Treble can be coarse, can sound dislocated; not the last word in finesse

VERDICT An exciting, punchy listen - but there are compromises

Also consider

Q Acoustics 2050i
£440★★★★★

Poised and controlled, the 2050is are brilliantly even-handed all-rounders



These speakers really do take singers seriously - from the ragged gasping for breath of Elvis Costello to the silky precision of Nina Simone, the V4is communicate with a directness and explicitness that's rare at this sort of money

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Sonos Play:1 | **Wireless speaker** | £170

This new arrival is a credit to the family

Sonos has led the multiroom streaming market for years, but it's also been one of the pricier options. So to redress the balance, the company has set the Play:1 at £170. And it proves a rather tempting buy.

Getting the Play:1 up and running is as easy as with any other Sonos kit, although it's worth noting that if it's your first item of Sonos equipment it will need to be hardwired to your router via ethernet.

If you want to put it in a different room to your router, you can pick up the £39 Sonos Bridge to do that job instead.

Whatever you choose to listen to can then be streamed to other Sonos speakers around the house, or you can play different tracks in different rooms. And it's all easily controllable via the app.

While you must use the Sonos app to use the speakers, it's still an open platform, with

Like its Play:3 sibling, the Play:1 can be used solo or with another Play:1 to create a stereo set-up



We're surprised at the sonic scale this small unit can push out. There's impressive weight here, and the performance is as stable as any other Sonos product we've tested

more streaming services being added all the time. We can't imagine there's anything you'd want to stream that the app can't handle - and it's a much more stable connection than Bluetooth or AirPlay.

We're surprised at the sonic scale this small unit can push out. There's impressive weight here, with plenty of power and attack to the punching bass-line of Kendrick Lamar's *The Recipe*. Performance is as stable as any other Sonos product we've tested too, with no dropouts during our test period.

Rich, weighty bass

Elsewhere, the rumbling bass of Kanye West's *I Am A God* sounds rich and solid, but never boomy or out of control. It's a great performance, and certainly shows up the Pure Jongo S3, which sounds lightweight in comparison.

It's not afraid to go loud either, and will easily fill a good-sized room without much issue, despite its small stature. It features new Sonos processing technology that aims to minimise distortion at full volume, and we think it's been pretty successful. There are EQ settings within the Sonos app too.

As for build, you only need to pick up the petite, sleek Play:1 to know it's a premium product - it's solid and pleasingly weighty.

Designed to be used solely as part of the Sonos streaming network, it simply has a power connection hidden on the bottom of the unit and an ethernet input on the back. There's no line-level input for other devices, for example, which is a little disappointing.

On the top of the unit are volume controls and a Play/Pause button, which replaces the mute button found on other Sonos speakers.

As with previous Sonos speakers, the Play:1 is available in black or white finishes. And, like its Play:3 sibling, it can be used with another Play:1 in a stereo set-up.

Configure them like this and performance is bolstered significantly. Bass is even more solid, instrument separation improves, smaller details are picked up with more confidence and sound can go noticeably louder without distortion.

Sonos hasn't forgotten home cinema fans, either. You can add two Play:1 speakers to a Sonos Playbar and Sub set-up to act as

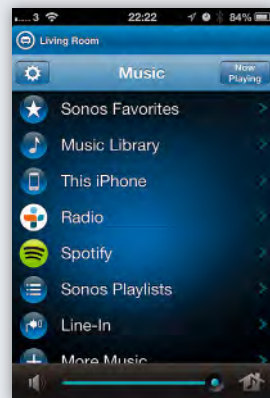
USE IT WITH

iPhone 5s

Add the Sonos app to our favourite smartphone and you have easy access to all manner of streaming services (subscriptions may be required) for using with the Play:1.



In control



The Sonos Controller, which you'll need for set-up and beyond, is available for iOS and Android, Mac and Windows. It connects to the Sonos system using your home wi-fi network. Whichever way you choose to use it, setting up a new speaker is as simple as following its instructions - it took us a matter of minutes to get up and running.

You can then tune in to more than 100,000 internet radio stations; stream from services such as Spotify, Last.fm, Rdio, Napster, Amazon Cloud Player and (if you have premium accounts with these services); and access music stored locally on your device or home network - like on a NAS device, for example.

satellites and create a surround-sound system for your movies.

The Play:1 has won us over in exactly the same way the Play:3 and Play:5 did. It's ease of use is a huge draw, but that's backed up by good sound quality and an affordable price.

Whether you're looking to get started on your Sonos journey, or you're adding bits to an existing set-up, you won't regret finding a spot for the Play:1 in your home.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Solid bass response; good detail and clarity; well-built; well-priced; powerful

AGAINST No inputs for other sources

VERDICT Another strong addition to the Award-winning Sonos multiroom family, which offers much more than its price tag suggests

Needs to beat

Pure Jongo S3
£170 ★★★★★

The Play:1 might edge it for sound quality, but the Jongo S3 is more flexible.



Q Looking for award winning, exceptional value home cinema speakers?

A The answer's black or white



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Apple iPad Air | Tablet | £400

Say hello to the first true iPad killer: the iPad

The new Apple iPad Air is a stunningly powerful and desirable tablet. Promising faster, better performance across the board – and a new, sleeker chassis – the iPad Air is shaping up to be a leaner, meaner machine than its four predecessors.

Hold the Air in one hand and an old iPad 4 in the other and you'll notice differences immediately. The iPad Air is 7.5mm thin, compared with the 9.7mm iPad 4. It has a slimmer bezel, too, and the wi-fi-only version weighs just 469g. The iPad 4 weighs 652g – and now feels quite heavy.

Build quality is impeccable. The unibody aluminium construction is as shiny (and prone to scratching) as ever, and comes in two finishes: Space Grey and Silver. The volume controls and power buttons on the right edge have been given a polish, too. They're easy to find and respond swiftly.

There isn't any change to the overall rich but still natural colour balance during video, either. Detail hasn't increased, but the added crispness makes it a cleaner and even more exciting screen to watch.

Play a 720p iTunes download of the BBC's *Peaky Blinders* and the dusty stylishly stark scenery is full of texture and crisp detail. We're also happy that the improved white tones haven't affected the lush, deep blacks that Apple is so good at delivering. There's plenty of subtlety in shadows, and you can easily discern textures on dark fabric. There's a gratifyingly wide viewing angle, too – which bodes well for sharing YouTube cat videos.

Switch to *MasterChef: The Professionals* in high-definition on BBC iPlayer, and the picture's sharpness, clarity and subtlety are stunning.

We say it with each iteration, but this really is the best Apple tablet yet. The design tweaks, increased power and improvements to video and sound all add up to a stunning piece of tech

It's still a gorgeous object. The iPad 4's curved edges have been reduced to create a lighter, more rectangular design. It might sound like a superficial makeover, but all the tweaks add up to deliver a tablet that is much easier to hold in one hand.

Tapping and swiping feels different, too. Apple has reduced the thickness (well, thinness) of the glass by 17 per cent, along with reducing the depth of other parts, in its bid to create a thinner product.

Stunning picture quality

The iPad's Retina Display screen has always been a stunner, and the Air's is even better. The 9.7in display is crisper, with highlights and whites looking particularly clean and bright. There's been no change to the 2048 x 1536-pixel resolution, but it retains its punchy, sharp, and clear look, with a little more brightness and a touch more crispness to the edges. Web pages look sharper and cleaner than before and images are punchy.

The sound quality of Apple's tablets and phones leads the way, and the iPad Air is no different with its exciting, refined character.

Like the picture, the sound is crisper and cleaner than on older iPads. The richness and warmth of the iPad 4 (which was lovely to hear) has been scrubbed a touch cleaner for a more open, dynamic and precise character. The leading edges of notes are more definite, rhythms sound snappy, and there's a better sense of space. Voices are wonderfully expressive and direct, too.

The Air has speaker grilles either side of the Lightning port. It doesn't do stereo as well as the Google Nexus 7, but it is cleaner, louder and more satisfying than the iPad 4.

At the Air's heart beats the speedy 64-bit A7 processor that's also found in the new iPhone 5s. An additional M7 co-processor takes care of motion-related data collection and processing, such as those used by fitness and sleep-monitoring apps. It only takes switching back to the iPad 4 to realise just how powerful the Air is. It's noticeably

Tablet-specific apps

iOS 7 looks stunning. The tablet version is slightly different from the iPhone's (there's no torch or calculator in the Control Centre, no Rolodex-style tab view in Safari, and you get a full-screen world-clock display). The App Store – Apple's strongest trump card against Google – and the optimised apps, from Spotify to games such as *Device 6* and *The Room*, all look gorgeous.



zippier. Swiping across the Air's screen feels swifter and more responsive: apps open and close with no stutter or judder; flipping between multiple Safari tabs is seamless; iOS 7's animations are much smoother.

Good battery life

The A7/M7 partnership also explains how the claimed battery life stays at the same 10 hours as the iPad 4, despite the Air having a smaller battery than iPads 3 and 4 (39.2 watts/hour compared with 42.5W/h).

We found that the iPad Air lasted a full day of heavy use, including streaming videos and music, playing games and browsing the web using wi-fi. Charging it to 100 per cent still takes ages, though.

Using a large tablet to take photos is awkward. Smartphones are quicker, more intuitive, and the cameras are usually better. We suspect Apple thinks so too, as it hasn't adopted the iPhone 5s's excellent True Tone flash, nor has it enlarged its 5MP camera to the iPhone's 8MP.

System builder Total build £950

Video Streaming Service

BBC iPlayer ★★★★★ £free

A great selection of shows and the ability to watch downloads offline are the highlights of this excellent catch up TV service.



Headphones

AKG K451 ★★★★★ £50

Our favourite portable headphones are punchy, lively, and detailed – perfect to use when listening to music or playing games on the Air.



Wireless speaker

Audio Pro Allroom Air One ★★★★★ £500

Stunning sound, a variety of streaming connections, and a premium finish quality to match.





You can get the iPad Air in two finishes: silver and Space Grey, pictured here

We found it produces a crisper, brighter and more focused image on the whole. It's a cooler colour palette than before, which we think it's taken a bit too much away from the rich, natural hues of the iPad 4.

Decent camera

In natural daylight, the iPad Air and iPad 4 take largely similar pictures. The Air is just a touch sharper and brighter, especially indoors. Edges are more pronounced, reflections are shinier, and it's a cleaner, more focused image. However, we found ourselves preferring the iPad 4's ability to reproduce natural colour better.

Photo quality drops in low light. The Air's camera doesn't capture colours perfectly, blacks aren't as deep, the cooler palette is taken just a little too far. The Air only comes with the lightning cable and charger, the SIM Eject Tool pin, and a quick-start guide in the box.

The pre-installed apps, however, are another matter. You get Apple's entire iWork and iLife suite of apps... free. For

the first time, Pages, Keynote and Numbers (all previously £6.99), and iMovie, iPhoto and GarageBand (all £2.99 previously) are free to download. That saves you about £30, whether you use Pages (which has been given a fresher interface and more editing tools) and iPhoto to edit or not. It's a pretty good deal, considering the price for a shiny new Air has stayed the same as the iPad 4.

The 16GB wi-fi-only model costs £400. But we find that's too sparse for the space-eating apps and videos that you'll want to fill the Air with. It's worth keeping that in mind, as there's no microSD slot for expandable storage. However, Apple does offer larger-capacity models than its rivals.

The 10in tablet market is sparsely populated, with Apple having a comfortable dominance over similar-sized tablets from the likes of Samsung and Google. It's biggest rival, then, is the iPad Mini.

The Air's thinner bezel makes for a much nicer tablet to hold. Lighter, too...

In detail



The aluminium casing is lovely to hold – and the polished side-mounted controls are nice to use.



Two grilles are better than one. The Air's speakers sound surprisingly good, too.

Even lighter, smaller and more portable, and now with a Retina Display, the Mini is fierce competition for the iPad Air. It isn't far off in terms of pricing, either, with the 16GB entry-level model costing £80 less at £320. The gap increases by £100 once you get to the 128GB model, though.

The best iPad yet

You'll see in the Supertest (p36) that we're very impressed with the new iPad Mini, but the iPad Air has just as much going for.

We say this with each iteration, but this really is the best Apple tablet yet. For those wanting a big tablet, this is it. The design tweaks, increased power and improvements to video and sound all add up to a truly stunning piece of tech. We want one.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Fantastic screen; open, dynamic and subtle sound; fast; lovely build; great app range

AGAINST Camera's colours aren't natural; slimmer bezel means more thumbs on screen

VERDICT With improvements everywhere, the iPad Air is a stunning piece of technology

Also consider

Apple iPad Mini with Retina Display From £320 ★★★★★

Smaller, lighter, more portable... and just as shiny.



Cambridge Audio Minx Xi | Musicstreamer | £600

Minx makes all the right connections

Plug 'n' play

The Minx connects easily and quickly, either wired or wirelessly via the supplied aerial dongle. We were up and running in minutes.



Cambridge's new Minx Xi is a terrific streaming system. It's small, nicely made and well thought-out. All you need to add is a stable home network, a NAS full of music and some good speakers (see below).

Cambridge has been careful to keep the Minx Xi as inclusive as possible. To that end it comes pre-loaded with streaming services such as BBC iPlayer Radio, Pandora and Rhapsody, and can connect to external sources wirelessly via apt X Bluetooth.

Should you prefer the wired option there are three USBs as well as optical and coaxial digital inputs. There's also internet radio, with a claimed 20,000+ stations available.

Comprehensive connections

Still have analogue sources? Don't worry; the Minx Xi has a two pairs of RCA inputs on the rear panel and another 3.5mm connection on the front.

The unit can be controlled using the conventional remote, which is nicely designed but makes accessing music from a NAS a little long-winded, or via Cambridge's free Stream Magic app. The app is available in iOS and Android versions and is a fair effort, if a little unintuitive in use.

The Minx Xi's amplifier is rated at 40W per channel, but sounds stronger than that. It has plenty of drive and the ability to

power a wide range of price-compatible speakers with ease. We certainly had no issue with any of the options we tried.

Another plus point is good file compatibility. The Minx replays the likes of FLAC, WAV and ALAC (Apple Lossless) alongside AIFF, MP3 and AAC.

We start off with streaming music from our NAS and the results are impressive. Nina Simone's version of *Strange Fruit* (a 16-bit/44.1kHz CD rip) is an emotionally charged affair, and the Cambridge doesn't dilute it one iota. Simone's vocal is touching and communicated with conviction. The instrumental backing is sparse - just a solo piano - yet it's delivered with real power and harmonic detail.

Move onto higher-resolution recordings - the Minx's limit is 24-bit/96kHz files - and we hear plenty of finesse and composure with Kate Bush's *50 Words For Snow* (24-bit/96kHz) and fine rhythmic drive to make the most of the Rolling Stones' *Sympathy For The Devil*.

DAC fits the bill

We tried the Cambridge's digital inputs and found that the on-board DAC is a good one. It lacks a little tonal sweetness, but the results remain agile and articulate, and have a strong sense of dynamics.

A powerful amp and a capable DAC help the versatile Minx deliver its fine-quality sound

Switch to aptX Bluetooth and the sound takes a dip, just as we'd expect, yet stays entertaining and informative. Try the analogue inputs and you'll see that Cambridge hasn't skimped here, either. The company's impressive hi-fi pedigree is obvious in the balanced yet energetic presentation. Detail levels are high, and the results are as expressive and involving.

We think Cambridge has done a terrific job with the Minx Xi. It's easy to use, well built and sounds great. It would have been nice to play files of higher resolution than 24-bit/96kHz, but that's not a deal breaker.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Great sound; strong dynamics; aptX Bluetooth ability; strong on-board DAC

AGAINST Doesn't play files over 24-bit/96kHz; control app could be better

VERDICT A terrific streamer - more than good enough to frighten Marantz (see below)

Needs to beat Marantz Melody Media M-CR610 £500

★★★★★

This Award-winner has a refined and easy-going sound, not to mention an integrated disc player.



System builder Total build £2049

Smartphone

HTC One ★★★★★

Equipped as it is with aptX Bluetooth, this appealing premium Android phone makes a great partner for the Minx Xi. It's a talented music player in its own right, too.



Laptop

MacBook Pro From £1099

Well able to store a comprehensive library of high-quality files, the Pro also sounds great and can be connected to the Minx via USB.



Stereo Speakers

Q Acoustics Concept 20 ★★★★★ £350

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

Discover more online: naimaudio.com/dac-v1



Revo AXIS X3 | Internet radio | £200

New Axis continues the good work

The X3 is the third iteration of Revo's Award-winning Axis radio – and it continues the very good work of the first two versions.

That means that this is a cover-all-bases table-top unit that takes in FM, DAB and internet radio, as well as being able to stream music over a local area network via DLNA. It offers wi-fi as well as Bluetooth streaming capability – now, new for the X3, with the better aptX codec. Also new for this version is an Apple Lightning dock. There's a basic remote control handset as well.

There are a few units that offer similar features, but the Axis's USP is that touchscreen, through which it proves

decent volumes and without straying into stridency or becoming uncomfortable.

It's not a terribly large box, so bass isn't extraordinary, but it is certainly more substantial than you might expect from such a diminutive enclosure.

It's a consistent sound as well, as happy with FM and DAB as it is with internet stations or streaming over a LAN.

And now that it benefits from aptX Bluetooth, this option becomes very desirable as well: the quality ramps up noticeably over the plain vanilla version.

While this is undoubtedly an easy piece of kit to get your head around and as simple

The sound is solid and approachable. It's particularly strong in the midrange, and it's also quite happy belting out music at decent volumes without straying into stridency

encouragingly simple to negotiate your way around the features – and, more importantly, around the world of internet radio. In less assured hands, it can be such an intimidating experience that even the usually forthright can easily give up before discovering the delights of WFMU or FIP. And that's a shame.

The sound the Axis provides is solid and approachable. It is particularly strong with voices and the midrange, and it is also quite happy belting out music at

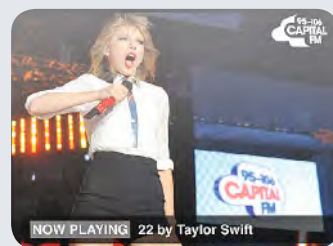
to use as we could wish for, not everything is completely plain sailing.

The touchscreen, so innovative and impressive when we first encountered it almost half a decade ago, now suffers in comparison with the superb screens we are all so familiar with on smartphones. It's just not as responsive and it now feels dated and a slow.

We found this a touch painful when we were setting the Axis X3 up. Rest assured, the process itself isn't complicated. The first time you push an icon that requires wi-fi, the X3 will attempt to connect to your

In detail

As well as being your control panel, the screen will provide images and album art when it's tuned to an appropriate station using DAB slideshow. It's nice to have something more than a station number to look at.



USE IT WITH Apple iPhone 5s

The perfect fit with the Axis: Bluetooth streaming and a good old-fashioned hard link via the Lightning dock



network. It found our router easily, but it was a frustrating experience trying to input the password using the onscreen keyboard, with the letter next to the one we intended to select often being confirmed instead.

That's a one-off process though, and once we were connected, that slowness in the screen is less of an issue. And it's a relatively minor gripe over what is a nicely designed and thought-out radio.

When streaming music over our network, we had no problem finding the music8 on our test-room server, and the X3 was quick to access and replay tracks.

Don't forget it's a dock, too...

You don't have to rely on radio, wi-fi and Bluetooth to get your musical fix. The Axis is now fitted with a Lightning connector, so newer iPhones and iPods will sit happily on the unit playing music while charging up. Or you can use the 3.5mm input at the back to connect pretty much any device.

This, then, is an extremely adaptable and versatile unit that is ideal for listening in a busy kitchen or living room. It will serve very well in the bedroom as well, thanks to its twin alarm functions.

It's certainly got some rivals to contend with, and it might at first seem expensive at £200. That price though, when you think about it, is less than three tanks of fuel for many cars – and this is a machine that you will be wanting to keep for a long time.

The big knob is for volume. Other control is via the touchscreen or remote control



Rating ★★★★★

FOR Good sound; ease of use; a whole lot of functionality; aptX Bluetooth now on board

AGAINST The touchscreen isn't the speediest compared with a smartphone

VERDICT A great little unit. Perfect for radio, it's also nice to be able to stream music

Needs to beat

Pure Evoke F4 £180 ★★★★★

No touchscreen, but our radio Product of the Year ticks every other box



Microsoft Xbox One | Games Console | £430

Big 'box of many tricks

While the hardcore gaming community got all in a tizzy over the prospect of a Kinect-toting, TV-integrating all-in-one entertainment device, we were getting rather excited. Next-gen gaming integrating your PVR via voice control? Count us in.

Alas, in reality the Xbox One is not the harmonious melding of two worlds we were hoping for, but we can't help but be impressed by the attempt, and it's a great games machine all the same.

Bulky presence

It's a shame it looks so dull, though, and it's huge compared with the PlayStation 4. Microsoft has prioritised airflow to maximise reliability, but only time will tell if it's any more or less reliable than its arch-rival.

We're not massively impressed by the user interface, either. A mashup of the Xbox

at your telly. In the long run you'll use voice commands for a handful of features, such as Snapping apps (more on that later) and capturing gameplay videos, but the rest of the time you'll stick to the gamepad, and that's a great shame.

Your interest may have been piqued by the TV features and Kinect, but you're presumably buying an Xbox because you want to play games, and you're unlikely to be disappointed by the One's launch offerings. *Forza 5* (see right) is a cracker, and the glorious 1080p visuals running at silky 60fps are a great advert for the Xbox's power. *Ryse* is similarly spectacular, even if its gameplay tires quickly. The on-paper



There's so much going on here that you'll frequently find yourself wanting to open a number of apps at once - something that the Xbox One supports with its Snap feature

360 dashboard and Windows 8, the constantly shifting and all-too similar icons on the Home tab make navigation less instinctive than it should be. You can at least pin apps, features and games to the tab on the left for quicker access.

Besides, Microsoft's intention is for you to engage with the One using voice and gestures, which is why the Kinect camera is bundled in with every console. It's another hefty unit, but it's exceptionally clever, offering 1080p recording, IR see-in-the-dark skills and quite amazing depth perception. But it's not perfect. Kinect understands you and responds instantly around nine times out of every 10, but that 10th occasion is so frustrating that you'll find yourself shouting

disappointments are *Dead Rising 3*, *Call of Duty: Ghosts* and *Battlefield 4*, which all run at 720p. What's especially troublesome is that the two that are also available on PS4 (*CoD:G* and *BF4*) appear in 1080p on Sony's console, but we challenge anyone to not be impressed by the overall graphical presentation. Make no mistake, these are games that could not exist on Xbox 360.

Integration issues

So, to the TV integration. Here's the thing: it's both the most intriguing and most disappointing feature of the Xbox One. Here's the deal: plug your PVR into the HDMI input on the back of the console and you can watch TV through the One's TV

USE IT WITH

Forza Motorsport 5

The One's must-have game is graphically beautiful, brilliantly responsive and full of clever opponents to crash into spectacularly.



app. Why do that? So you can instantly switch between that and every other app and game, and so you can operate your TV using voice control. Except you can't do that in the UK because you need the OneGuide, an EPG-like extra layer of integration between the Xbox and your TV supplier that's not available in the UK. Over here, once you've opened the TV app you'll need to reach for your PVR's boring old zapper. It's especially annoying because the One already knows your original remote's IR commands because you gave it the remote code during set-up (pro tip: the code for Sky+HD is 1175).

Talking of IR, the One is able to turn your TV and AV amp on and off, which means the dream of being able to turn your whole system on with a two-word utterance - "Xbox on" - is now a reality. If you've got a simple system it works brilliantly (even seemingly through fairly solid objects in our tests) but it's too limited for complicated set-ups because you can't teach it extra commands or macros. That means if your amp or TV are hooked up to an input other than the Xbox one, you're going to need the original remote again.

Round the back

1 Digital interface

Dolby Digital and DTS 5.1 are both output via optical with HD audio via HDMI - good for headsets.

2 Dual-purpose

Kinect connects to this proprietary port, which also supplies power to the camera accessory.

3 IR back-up

Kinect acts like an IR blaster, but if your other kit doesn't respond you can connect a third-party blaster.





Unlike the games it plays, it's not much to look at – but Kinect is a real brainbox

There's a similar mix of good and bad news if you like video on-demand. Netflix, LoveFilm and 4oD are onboard at launch, but BBC iPlayer and Sky aren't, despite their presence on the Xbox 360. You do at least get Xbox Video, which has a vast range of movies and TV shows available on a pay-as-you-go rent or buy basis, right up to 1080p if your connection allows. A little judder means you won't mistake it for Blu-ray, but the quality's still good.

Disc-spinning upgrade

On the subject of Blu-ray, it is thankfully supported this time. A standalone player such as the Sony BDP-S790 produces a crisper picture and more dynamic, more authoritative sound, but the Xbox One is a perfectly respectable disc-spinner. It's very quiet, too, with no background whirring to spoil your movie soundtrack, which is, incidentally, always output as linear PCM, with conversion of DTS HD Master Audio and Dolby TrueHD done in the console.

There's so much going on here that you'll frequently find yourself wanting to open a number of apps at once, and that's something that the Xbox One supports with its Snap feature. Saying "Xbox, Snap..." followed by the name of a Snappable app will split your screen so that the right-hand quarter is given over to the new app. So now you can watch TV while playing a game, or keep track of what your friends are

The controller

The same but different

If you decide to ignore Kinect, at least the gamepad's a good one. The visible tweaks over the Xbox 360 pad are fairly minor, but this is even more precise and ergonomic than before. Only the slightly cheap feel of the d-pad and the fact that it still takes AA batteries disappoints – surely a bundled Play & Charge kit isn't too much to ask for.



playing while you watch a movie. But it's not without issues. You can't adjust the volume of the apps independently, so you can't watch the football on mute and concentrate on *Forza*. Volume levels for TV and Xbox Music are very high, too, so they drown out game sound effects. The fact that you lose a quarter of your screen to pictures of a band just to listen to their music while doing something else is daft, too. It's yet another feature of the Xbox One that could and should be brilliant but is badly hampered by imperfect execution.

Packed with potential

This is a hugely ambitious console, and in time it might realise its potential via software updates, but right now it's just a very good games console. For the time being that will have to be good enough.

In detail



The controller sends IR signals to Kinect, which uses facial recognition to automatically log in the player holding it



Kinect can now see in the dark, and while sitting within 2m is still recommended, we found it still worked well 3m away



The slot-loader on the Xbox One will play Blu-rays – a first for a Microsoft console. The unit is designed to sit horizontally only, though

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Runs quietly; strong line-up of launch games; Kinect is amazing in many ways

AGAINST Flaws hamper every flagship feature; big, ugly box; some games still run at 720p

VERDICT As ambitious a games console as there's ever been, but yet to fulfil its potential

Also consider

Sony PS4 £350

This sets up the console battle of the decade. See whathifi.com for our review.



Future tech



2014: The tech year ahead

High-res audio, curved screens, self-healing smartphones and more at CES

The year in consumer technology kicks off at the world's biggest technology showcase, the International Consumer Electronics Show (CES). From 7th to 10th of January the latest TV, home cinema and hi-fi products will be on display, with the world's biggest companies showing their new products for the year ahead. We'll be on the showfloor reporting live at *whathifi.com*, and revealing our Stars of CES - the most exciting specialist AV products from the show. Allow us to spill the beans with a sneak preview of the products and trends we expect to see...

4K, OLED and curved

Predictably, the big TV companies tend to make the biggest noise on the

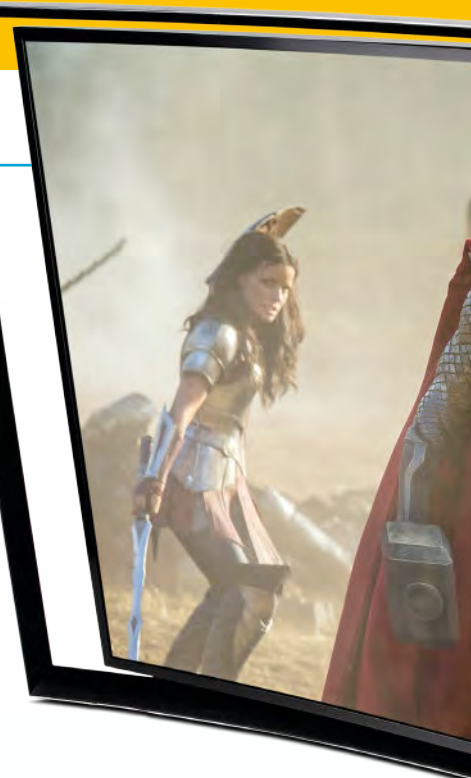
Kimberly Wyatt (us neither) is just one of the latest celebrities to endorse a pair of headphones



showfloor. Last year the Korean giants LG and Samsung surprised us all - and each other - by each revealing curved OLED TVs. They are now on sale in the UK - you can read our review of LG's set in this issue and the Samsung KE55S9C online - and we are hoping to see some flat OLED TVs this year, hopefully in smaller sizes and with more affordable prices. It's a similar story with 4K Ultra HD TVs, where cut-price screens coming out of China should drive 2014's 4K TVs down further in price.



A 6in curved OLED screen on a phone? The LG G Flex even has a 'self-healing' casing



Curved 4K OLED sets could be the missing link in the future TV picture...

Smartphones and tablets

It seems TVs won't be the only curved screens on show, with LG and Samsung again setting the pace with curved smartphones. The LG G Flex, on sale in South Korea and said to be heading to the UK some time soon, not only has a curved 6in OLED screen, it can flex and even heal itself from scratches thanks to a self-healing coating.

Cut-price 4K TVs from China should drive 2014's 4K TVs down in price - and size

With Apple also said to be working on curved iPhones, this trend is here to stay. Based on our experiences so far, a curved tablet could be the sweet spot - read our analysis column (right) to find out why. Will we see one at CES?

High-res audio on a pedestal

On the audio side of things, the high-resolution audio bandwagon continues to roll, with CES set to showcase the format in a new "Hi-Res Audio Experience" area. Sony's flagship high-res audio Walkman should be on show, hopefully being joined by plenty more high-res portables and separates. What about the all-important music? We may well see



Denon's TV Speaker Base will be in our Supertest next month as we look at this new-style of soundbar

*** Linn's free downloads**

Quick! Linn is offering free downloads every day in December, head to the site for details <http://whfcm/LinnXmas>



*** TEAC adds mini stereo amp**

For £850 you can get yourself the new AX-501, a stylish amplifier to join the TEAC Reference range <http://whfcm/TEACref>



Big TVs will be everywhere, but will they all be curved? A 4K OLED set could steal the show

announcements from HRA music providers, with both HDtracks and Neil Young's Pono service hinting at news regarding high-res downloads in 2014. See our high-res audio guide online for more: <http://whfcm/HighResAudio>

Last year's new hi-fi products were dominated by US brands and hefty power amps, but there was room for new DACs, turntables and plenty of new streaming kit: expect more of the same.

Headphones - celebrity-endorsed or not - will be ten-a-penny, and we expect a hefty number of wireless Bluetooth models aimed at smartphone users, while it seems sound plates/plinths/bases are the new shape of soundbars.

In-car tech will be big at CES 2014 too, with nine car makers including Audi, BMW and Mercedes exhibiting.

Whatever shape the new products at CES 2014 take, we will be on hand to bring you news, pictures and video direct from the show in Las Vegas, so keep your eyes on whathifi.com...



Sony gave us a sneak peek of its flagship high-res Walkman at IFA. Expect more at CES, not just from Sony

Analysis

Why curved tablets make more sense than curved TVs



Web Editor Joe Cox

It looks like OLED displays will shape the future of our technology products. And for now, the future looks curved. Curved OLED TVs came as something of a curveball when they emerged at CES 2013, but they were no novelty and are now on sale in the UK. Cheap they ain't, but they're real.

So why are the first OLED TVs curved? If you ask LG or Samsung, then it's all about the performance benefits: improved viewing angles and greater immersion. Our reviewing of curved TVs, however, has certainly told us that the benefit of a curved screen is better suited to lone viewers. Sit off-axis and the curved screen loses its effect, which makes it less practical for anyone not watching TV alone.

So where does solitary viewing make more sense, more of the time - in fact, nearly all of the time? Tablets and smartphones, where one person will watch the vast majority of video content. That's why the curved OLED screens of the recently-announced LG G Flex and Samsung Galaxy Round phones make more sense.

We expect more high-res audio products to be unveiled at CES 2014



Not only will a curved handset theoretically fit the hand better than it will fit your living room wall, but the viewing angle benefits of the curved screen also don't have to work for more than one viewer at a time. A 6in curved OLED screen, as on the G Flex, may not be big enough to bring home the benefits. But how about a 10in screen? If curved TVs don't float your boat and curved phones seem hard to get your head, if not your hand, around, then how about a curved tablet? When OLED first reared its head, there was much talk of screens you could roll up like paper and sling in your bag. Perhaps it's a more subtle curve that will prove most beneficial.

TOP 5 New launches

Cambridge Audio soundbar, Clearaudio turntable, Meridian headphone amplifier

* ATC's latest SCM speakers

A fresh range of ATC speakers is on the way, comprising the SCM 19 standmounters and the SCM 40 floorstanding speakers
<http://whfcm/ATCspeakers>



1 Audio Pro Addon T10 £350

The Addon T10 is a wireless aptX Bluetooth speaker. Two 20mm cloth-dome tweeters and one 13cm bass driver are encased inside a 32cm wide body, which is available finished in this fetching orange gloss lacquer (for a premium). The tweeters and bass driver have their own individual amplifiers, offering a combined output of 80W. RCA and 3.5mm jack inputs are onboard for wired connectivity, and there's also a USB port. Out now, the speaker is also available in black or white (£300). See more: <http://whfcm/AudioProT10>

TOP 5 New launches

2 Clearaudio Master Innovation £14,500

The Master Innovation turntable isn't just innovative by name. It features a floating main platter assembly, which consists of two pieces, an upper magnetic-drive platter and a lower two-piece magnetic-drive platter. Powerful magnets are onboard to prevent the upper and lower platters from touching. For more details head to <http://whfcm/MasterInnovation>



4 Meridian Prime Headphone Amplifier £1200

The Prime Headphone Amplifier features stereo, 3.5mm and asynchronous USB inputs to support a variety of analogue and digital sources. Headphones with 3.5mm and 1/4in jacks are supported, with impedance levels specifically manipulated for

each. Two unique ASP modes are onboard which aim to recreate the sound of a speaker set-up. Digital sources are supported up to 192kHz. The USB input can upsample 44.1/48kHz sources to 88.2/96kHz. An optional £800 power supply is available, too. Want to know more? See <http://whfcm/MeridianPrime>

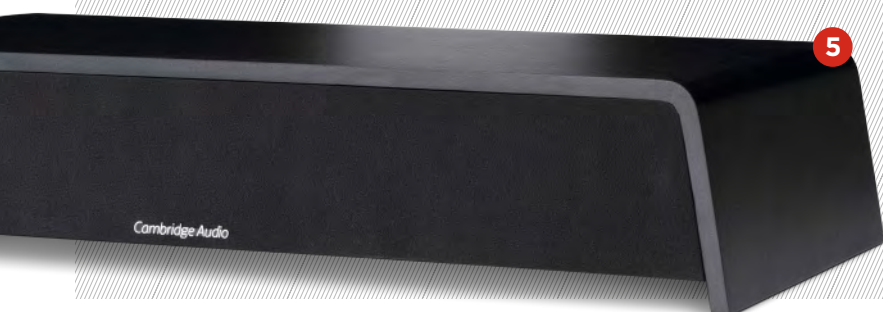
3 Pure Evoke D4 with Bluetooth £150

Pure's latest Evoke radio claims improved, audio capabilities as well as the addition of Bluetooth wireless technology. There's a new, touch-sensitive Snoozehandle, and an auxiliary input for non-Bluetooth devices. 30 built-in presets are on hand with four quick-access buttons for sleep and kitchen timers, plus tone and alarm functions. Available in 'Domino' black and 'Glacier' white, there's also a model without Bluetooth. <http://whfcm/PureEvokeD4>



5 Cambridge Audio Minx TV £200

Something new from Cambridge Audio, the Minx TV is a soundbase that can support TV screen sizes of up to 47 inches. This new style of soundbar seems to be all the rage, and the Minx TV uses BMR drivers in an effort to stand out from the pack. There's a 6.5in downward-firing subwoofer, too. Connection to your TV is done via digital optical, RCA or 3.5mm headphone jack. And as a handy bonus, the Minx TV also features Bluetooth for wireless streaming. See more: <http://whfcm/CambridgeAudioMinxTV>





WIN AN £8000 LG CURVED OLED TV

Here's your chance to own a piece of kit right at the cutting-edge of TV technology. This stunning LG OLED TV has to be won, so why not throw your hat into the ring? For further details on the TV, see our *First Test* on page 12

1 Open to UK residents aged 18 and over. 2 Entries close: 11.59pm on 10 January 2014 3 Prizes are as stated. 4 Prizes are non-transferable. 5 Only one entry per person. 6 Full terms & conditions for this competition are on the entry page.

For full Haymarket terms & conditions see: <http://www.whathifi.com/page/terms-and-conditions>. Promoter: Haymarket Media Group, Teddington, TW11 9BE.

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For a chance to win, visit www.howtoliveit.co.uk/win and answer this very simple question:

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- A ... orange
- B ... organic
- C ... orangutan

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TABLETS

SUPERTEST



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GET THE BALANCE RIGHT

Not everyone wants a hulking great tablet – especially for the commute. Luckily the world's top tech firms are vying for your cash with these miniature marvels

The small tablet market has become quite the fashionable place to be over the past year, with all manner of manufacturers jumping into the ring to offer their take on the sub-8in format.

Some, like the Google Nexus 7, Amazon's Kindle Fire HDX 7 and Tesco's super-cheap Hudl have pitched camp in the 7in corner, while Apple, Asus, LG, Samsung and Archos have settled themselves around the 8in mark, believing it's that screen size which offers the best compromise between portability, ease of use and ability with video and apps.

Prices vary from as little as £120 right through to £320 in this test, from plastic cases to aluminium, but don't be fooled into thinking that the most expensive equates to the best, or vice versa – there are more than a few surprises to be had in this test. Tease, us? Never. Read on to find out which comes out on top...



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What's on test



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Which operating system?

Android

Android is built by Google, but found on a host of devices. It is known for its multiple homescreens that you can customise with apps and widgets. Its app store, Google Play, is open-source, allowing anyone to create an app and upload it. This is great for choice but can lead to quality issues.

iOS

iOS is created by Apple. You'll find it only on Apple devices, including iPhones, iPads and iPod Touches. It's recognisable by its grid-like homepage design and is known for its closed, if vast, ecosystem. This makes it secure, if not the best option for people wanting to truly personalise their device.



Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 7 £200

★★★★☆

Performance is snappy, and battery life is impressive at over 10 hours with general browsing and video playback

There's a lot to love about the HDX 7. It's got a stunning screen, slim and light design and instant access to a whole world of content. As long as the content you want is available through Amazon.

And therein lie both the Kindle Fire HDX's biggest appeal, and its Achilles' heel. It is built around everything Amazon has to offer, from video through LoveFilm to books, music and apps, with a great recommendation system – but its Android implementation blocks access to the Google Play store.

Amazon ecosystem

Amazon's app selection is improving, but there are some glaring omissions – such as Gmail, YouTube and Google Maps. These can be accessed via the browser, but that's not really the point.

You'll also feel a hit in the video department. LoveFilm offers streaming of some TV shows and older movies to subscribers (each tablet comes with a free month), but there are currently no film downloads, and the service doesn't offer the current blockbusters available through Google Play.

If you aren't too bothered by this, the Kindle Fire HDX 7 has the potential to be a real multimedia powerhouse. The simplified operating system takes a little bit of getting used to for anyone used to Android or iOS, but it's easy to use.

Stunning picture

The screen isn't a Retina-competitor, but we still think it's great. Colours are rich and vivid and outlines are crisp and clean. It's close, but we reckon it even pips the Google Nexus 7 for detail and contrast – and it's a brighter screen than the new iPad Mini, too. Our only niggle is a halo that appears around the edge. It's more noticeable in brighter scenes and particularly when reading books.

The Kindle Fire HDX 7 delivers a detailed, composed and rhythmically tight musical performance. Instruments have scale and texture, yet still give space to one another and to vocal parts.

Movies do well from this performance too, with soundtracks backing up strong, clear dialogue. Even the stereo speakers sound good and clear if you're short of a pair of headphones.

Performance is snappy enough, with no stumbles or crashes during our testing period, and battery life is impressive at over 10 hours with general browsing and video playback.

Amazon's Mayday feature is worth a mention. It's a 24-hour video customer service feature – an Amazon rep will help solve your query. That's a definite plus for tablet newcomers, but also a truly helpful feature we could see even tablet know-it-alls getting some use from.

With its fantastic screen, fast navigation and excellent performance, the Kindle Fire HDX 7 is a great tablet that impresses in so many ways but fails in one big one: choice.

The closed nature of the Amazon ecosystem makes us long for the airy openness of Google Play, with its wide selection of apps, games and movies. Give us this tablet with full access to that and it could even give the Google Nexus 7 a run for its money...

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Stunning screen; detailed sound; fast; Mayday customer service; good battery; light

AGAINST Locked into the Amazon ecosystem; no access to Google Play

VERDICT The HDX 7 is excellent, but full-on Android fans could find it a little restrictive

It's close, but we reckon it pips the Google Nexus 7 for detail and contrast – and it's a brighter screen than the new iPad Mini, too



iPad Mini with Retina Display **£320**

★★★★★

The iPad Mini with Retina Display is the Mini we always wanted. The original always felt like the iPad's under-specced smaller sibling. Now all that separates the two is size, and that makes for quite the pint-sized proposition.

Fantastic screen

The big change is in its name – the 7.9in display has been bumped from 1024 x 768 pixels to 2,048 x 1,536, the same resolution as the new iPad Air.

The result is stunning. The screen is bright and sharp, with text and icons well etched and not an identifiable pixel in sight. Colours are rich but natural, and the only thing that will cause pictures to look anything less than crystal-clear is their original resolution. Shadow detail is good too, so you don't lose anything from an image when the Mini does have to reach down to inkier depths. Feed the Mini high-quality images and it will shine, reproducing them with absolute crispness, accuracy and stacks of detail.

And it's hands-down the best video performance we've ever seen on a sub-8in tablet.

It sounds great, too: clean, refined and well organised, with the same crispness of its video performance pulled through to its dealings with music.

The Mini does a great job with rhythm and dynamics, and isn't scared to go quiet when the music demands. Instruments have their place in the music and vocals are direct and expressive – Apple has spent time on this sound, and it shows. Even the stereo speakers sound good, and trounce the tinny, restrained sound of most rivals.

A joy to use

This is all backed up by really speedy performance. Menu swipes are smooth, apps open quickly and web pages load swiftly. Even graphics-heavy games run without a hitch. We did have a small handful of unexpected crashes during testing, but that's just a small flaw in an otherwise very fast, stable experience.

This Mini feels much like the original, with its slim body, curved edges and aluminium case making it as wonderful to hold as ever. It's actually slightly bulkier, but you'd never notice.

The Mini's camera offers more promising results than many tablets – though the size and shape aren't exactly ideal for photography. Apple agrees, it would seem, since it has kept the same 5-megapixel iSight camera from its predecessor, instead of bumping it up the 8MP snapper from the iPhone 5s.

Still, in good light, photos appear crisp and detailed, and it even performs admirably indoors. Colours are well judged and realistic on the whole (if on the cooler side of neutral), with whites remaining bright. Blacks could be deeper though, particularly on indoor shots.

Of course, there's a price to pay for all of this. At £320 for the 16GB wi-fi only version (the Mini now goes up to as much as a £660 for the new 128GB 4G version), it's quite a lot pricier than its main competition, the £200 Nexus 7 at £200. That could make a lot of people's minds up for them. But if you've the cash to splash, the new Mini is a stunner.

Apple's App Store has over 475,000 tablet-optimised apps. Android doesn't even come close to that

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Stunning screen; fast performance; premium design; fantastic app selection

AGAINST Expensive

VERDICT This is an absolutely superb tablet that shows its rivals how it's done – but it comes at a price

Images are reproduced with total crispness, accuracy and stacks of detail. It's the best picture we've seen on a sub-8in tablet



Archos 80b Platinum **£170**

★★★★☆

You can hook the 80b up to your TV via the Micro HDMI output for better-quality video

In an increasingly competitive market, tablet manufacturers can't afford to drop the ball. And while you could forgive the Archos 80b Platinum its shortfalls if it was a sub-£100 slate, at £170 there are more questions to be asked of it.

While its aluminium case and 1.6GHz quad-core processor might sound like a promising iPad Mini alternative, start using it and disappointment sets in.

Its 8GB of storage is an immediate issue for power users. It is expandable via microSD card, but Android doesn't currently allow apps to be stored on an external memory device - so that could be more limiting than you think.

A tad cumbersome

At 440g, the 80b Platinum is heavy compared with the 290g Nexus 7 and the 331g iPad Mini. Its rough-finish aluminium casing also manages to feel cheap rather than premium, particularly when you notice the plastic buttons and open ports along the top.

The 1024 x 768-pixel screen has one of the lowest resolutions we've seen on recent tablets. It looks grainy even

compared with budget tablets like the Hudl (which, ironically, is made by Archos), and its backlight is so weak that using it outside is quite tricky.

But let's look at what it does well. Its quad-core processor does a good job of keeping things smooth, launching apps reasonably quickly and letting you swipe between menus without any noticeable lag (zooming in on web pages can be somewhat jerky, though).

Watch an HD video clip in the stock Android player (Archos' pre-installed video app sadly isn't up to much), and there's an instantly noticeable lack of detail compared with the Nexus 7. Colours have fewer shades, movement feels less than smooth and blacks, while dark, lack the detail to have true depth. Whites could be brighter too. They don't punch through in darker scenes, while thin lines are prone to instability that makes them appear to flicker.

Plug in some headphones and music lacks the scale, warmth and overall detail you can hear in something like the Kindle Fire. There's decent rhythmic ability here and tracks hold together

well, but it's missing the light and shade needed to prevent it from becoming a tiresome listen. It'll go loud, but it seems to shout music at you rather than convey it in the way it's intended.

Music is only so-so

Listening without headphones isn't any better, with one speaker on the left hand-side of the tablet serving as the sole audio output. There's little bass to speak of, but the midrange isn't too bad - vocals in music and dialogue in movies can be heard with reasonable clarity.

Finally, there's the so-so 2-megapixel camera. There's no tap-to-focus or image stabilisation, so images come off soft and lacking detail - especially in low light.

This tablet has many flaws, some of which could be overlooked if it was a lot cheaper. In this fiercely competitive market, Archos simply must do better than the 80b Platinum if it's going to succeed. Disappointing, sadly.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR 8in screen; Micro HDMI output; microSD card slot, quad-core processor

AGAINST Poor-quality screen; little on-board storage; audio could be better; poor camera

VERDICT At its price, this Archos has competition too good for it to be this bad

Its quad-core processor does a good job of keeping things smooth, but the 80b's video and audio performance aren't up to snuff



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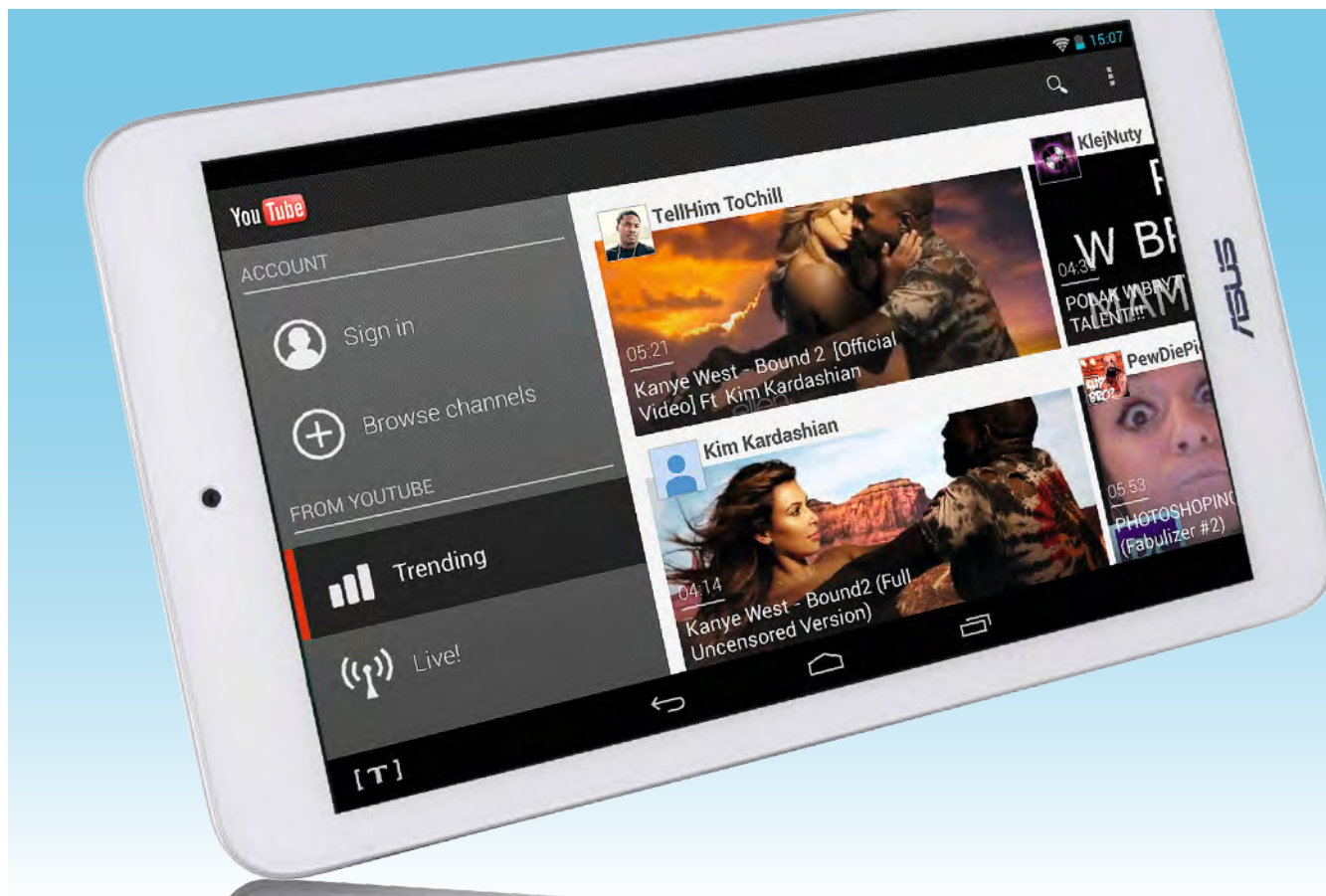
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Asus MeMo Pad 8 £200

★★★★☆

If you have a lot of apps and video, you can expand the MeMo to 64GB with a microSD card

Asus is behind the excellent Google Nexus 7, so we had high hopes for the MeMo Pad 8 - could we have all that brilliance with a larger screen? Sadly, in this case the answer is no.

The MeMo does look the part, though. It's available in black, white and pink, with our white version coming in glossy plastic. It's not the best finish we've ever seen, but it feels sturdy enough.

The MeMo Pad 8 is no slacker inside either, with a 1.6GHz quad-core processor, 1280 x 800 resolution and 16GB of on-board storage - expandable by another 64GB via microSD. Its measly 1GB of RAM is strange choice when it costs a Nexus 7-matching £200, though.

Disappointing colours

We're disappointed by the MeMo's video performance. The 720p display is sharp enough for things like icons and text, but has some way to go before it'll touch the Nexus 7 in terms of detail and clarity. We'd like it to be brighter too.

But it's the MeMo Pad 8's way with colour and motion that proves the biggest let-down. The whole colour

palette feels off - whites are murky and we saw a slight green cast to the picture. Blacks will go deep, but detail becomes non-existent when they do. As for motion, even the slowest pans can be affected by a rather distracting jerkiness.

It's worth noting that we saw a slight improvement in white performance and contrast upon turning off the power-saver feature. While this does a good job of conserving the battery, it does hold back the MeMo Pad's performance.

Best through headphones

Musically, the MeMo has a similar tone to the Archos. It's balanced and relatively rhythmic, but is rather unsuited dynamically and lacks the level of detail and texture that better tablets offer.

It works best in portrait mode for listening out loud - the internal speaker sits along the bottom edge - but with a considered grip, you can make sure you're not covering it in landscape too. Music sounds tinny and a little harsh, but dialogue in movie clips fares better. Headphones offer far more clarity and balance than the internal speaker.

Tablet cameras aren't usually up to much, and the Asus MeMo Pad 8 is no different. The main 5-megapixel unit delivers mixed results, with a tendency to over-expose whites when you use tap-to-focus, or produce dulled, noisy shots when you don't. Give it some bright natural light and results are better, but edges still appear on the soft side and there's a lack of fine detail and depth.

For the most part, you won't see the MeMo Pad 8 stutter in use. It mostly kept up with its Google-badged sibling as we nipped in and out of apps in an attempt to catch it out - but shifting between landscape and portrait modes could be quicker, and graphics-heavy games can push its limits too.

There's no hiding our disappointment with the MeMo Pad 8. We expected better from a brand that's proven itself in the tablet market. And with a price that matches that of the Google Nexus 7, it makes for a hard recommendation.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Cheap 8in tablet; good Android implementation; well-built; reasonably fast

AGAINST Can be slow upon waking; iffy colour palette; jerky video performance

VERDICT If you want an affordable 8in tablet then this is worth a look - but it isn't perfect

The 720p display is sharp enough for things like icons and text, but has some way to go before it'll touch the Nexus 7 for detail



Google Nexus 7 **£200**

★★★★★

The new **Nexus 7** seriously impressed us when we reviewed it in our Awards issue. So much so that it took 2013's sub-8in tablet Award and won Product of the Year over the iPad.

Of course, there has been one small thing to happen since then: the launch of the iPad Mini with Retina Display. The new Nexus brought the fight to the first iPad Mini, but how does it fare now?

In short, very well. Its screen, even compared with the new iPad Mini's crazy-sharp 2048 x 1536 pixel display, still holds its own. While the award for sharpness would have to go to its Apple competitor, the Nexus 7 still remains one of the crispest screens we've seen. It is bright, punchy and packed with detail.

A great screen

Watching video on it is great. Motion never unsettles the Nexus, and strong contrast makes for strikingly bright whites against deep but detailed blacks. Its colour palette is on the cool side, so it isn't as rich as the likes of the Samsung, but it is more subtle, making for a very natural, believable colour reproduction.

The powerful quad-core processor that keeps video running without hitch works alongside Android 4.3 to make the whole Nexus 7 experience smooth and lag free. This version of Android also makes the Nexus 7 a great tablet for families, as it lets parents set up restricted profiles for children.

Strong with audio

Music performance is strong. The iPad Mini has better precision and rhythmic ability, but the Nexus still offers a solid, detailed and accurate sound. Dynamics are handled well and there's an energy here that we found lacking in some lesser tablets. It's easy and enjoyable to listen to over long periods too.

A rather rare occurrence, though, is that the Nexus 7 sounds surprisingly good through its stereo speakers. They produce a solid and relatively rich sound that manages to dodge sounding tinny and closed in (unlike many of its competitors).

The 5-megapixel back-mounted camera is a new addition to this Nexus 7, and joins the 1.2MP front-facer for video

calling. We were surprised by the punchy, crisp photos it's capable of in natural light, with vivid colours and clean, bright whites making our test shots look overall pretty impressive. Take it inside, though, and it doesn't fare as well, with photos looking noisy and washed out. It's inconsistent to say the least, but it does the job for quick Facebook snaps.

And with all this in mind, let's not forget that the new Nexus 7 also has an attractive price. It doesn't sit at the Hudl's budget level, but at £200 for the 16GB wi-fi only version (there's also 32GB in wi-fi only and 4G/LTE), it's £140 cheaper than the new iPad Mini with the same storage. And that's quite a consideration.

The Nexus 7 is the best 7in tablet on the market, not to mention the best tablet of any size at this price. Even if you have more cash to spend, you might question whether you actually need to...

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Crisp, bright picture; great detail; impressive sound; fast; slim and light; price

AGAINST Camera could be better; no expandable storage option

VERDICT The Nexus 7 still impresses with stunning performance at a great price

The Google Play app store might not match Apple's offering, but all the essentials are present and correct

The Nexus 7 sounds surprisingly good via its stereo speakers. They produce a solid and rich sound that manages to dodge tinniness



LG G Pad £260

★★★★☆

As far as storage goes, there's 16GB for you to fill, with a microSD card slot for up to 64GB of expansion

LG made the sensible decision here and stayed clear of the well-populated 7in tablet market, instead opting to fight in the slightly less crowded 8in arena.

Vivid video performance

First impressions are good. It's a mostly aluminium chassis, with a bright 8.3in 1920 x 1200-pixel Full HD screen (a rarity at this screen size until recently). Compared with the Samsung text is sharper and better defined, and images appear crisper - it's hard to recommend anything less than this resolution when you see the differences.

Video benefits from all those extra pixels too. There's plenty of detail to get stuck into, not to mention a handy 16:9 aspect ratio for widescreen movies. Subtle detail is handled better on the new iPad Mini, but that's to be expected with more pixels on tap.

Colours on the G Pad are rich and warm in their presentation, motion is smooth (even on content streamed via wi-fi), and whites are really powerful, with enough punch to stand out against an already bright, vivid background.

Blacks couldn't get much deeper, but there is a loss of finer shadow detail compared with the Mini.

The G Pad offers a rather tired sound. It's nicely judged and balanced, tonally, so there's no harshness or booming bass, but it's missing a sense of attack that leaves lively tunes feeling a little lacklustre. Movies don't suffer as much: dialogue is clear and takes centre stage.

The interface is a bit sluggish

The G Pad's Snapdragon 600 chip is powerful enough, but feels somewhat dated. Performance is largely stutter-free, but transitions between apps and menus aren't always as snappy as some rivals. The G Pad is far from slow, but it isn't the fastest performer out there.

Like its rival Samsung, LG has gone for a rather garish implementation of Android 4.2.2 which we can't say we care much for. The operating system comes with a suite of LG apps and features built-in, which we found to be of varying usefulness.

Our time with the G Pad's 5MP camera wasn't a fantastic experience, but then

tablet cameras are rarely stellar. Colours are reproduced fairly accurately but the touch-to-focus feature often failed, so we were left with blurry snaps that lacked detail. Whites had a tendency to be overexposed in bright light, too.

There really is a lot to like about the G Pad, with its great screen and impressive design showing many of its 8in rivals how it's done. However, some of its specs are a little long in the tooth, and that rubs off on its performance when it comes to head-to-head comparisons.

This we could deal with if it weren't for the £260 price-tag. It leaves it stuck between the excellent Nexus 7 and superb iPad Mini. When you can get better for less, it's hard to understand how the G Pad fits into the market.

This is the only premium 8in Android alternative to the iPad Mini, though. And a price drop to bring it closer to £200 could be all that's needed to make this tablet a success. How about it, LG?

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Great, vivid HD screen; premium design; expandable storage; crisp, detailed video

AGAINST Could be faster; music lacks energy; garish user interface; expensive

VERDICT A premium 8in tablet that looks the part but struggles against rivals at its price

Colours are rich and warm, motion is smooth, and whites are really powerful, with enough punch to stand out against vivid backgrounds

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Powered by music



Samsung Galaxy Note 8.0 **£300**

★★★★☆

The Galaxy Note 8.0 gives stylus connoisseurs a tablet that squares up directly to the iPad Mini. We can't help but think it's picked the wrong battle.

To be fair to the Note 8.0, it was launched towards the start of 2013, when the original Mini was still hot stuff. It pipped it for screen quality and it was quicker too, with a 1.6GHz quad-core processor. But things are different now – not good news for the Note.

S-Pen stylus boost

Most online shops are holding the £300 price, with a few dipping just below, but not enough to make the Note a viable proposition in today's market. Even the £120 Tesco Hudl can claim a better screen and a similar quad-core processor.

Like the iPad, the Note has a physical home button on the bottom bezel, with two touch-sensitive buttons either side to go back and bring up a sub menu.

Slotted into the bottom right-hand corner is the Note's S-Pen stylus, which is bound to one of the big selling points of this tablet. When you remove the S-Pen, a menu is launched showing all

S-Pen optimised apps. You can use the the stylus just like you'd use your finger, but it allows for more precise selection and gives you the option to take and save handwritten notes, for example.

It works well, with taps never missed and pen-stroke always captured – it can even sense the S Pen an inch or so above the screen, with features like Air View allowing you to hover over an email or text message to show you a preview of it.

Like the LG G Pad, the interface is bright and colourful, but feels overly clunky and cluttered compared to the Nexus 7's vanilla Android experience. It's responsive, though, and offers a relatively stutter-free experience.

Performance not up to the best

Rivals such as the Kindle Fire and the Nexus have Full HD screens – and next to these, the Samsung's lower-resolution display is shown up. Text looks softer around the edges and video lacks the clarity on offer elsewhere. Overall there's a lack of subtlety here that means finer detail is lost too, with edges over-etched – which makes them seem fuzzy.

Colours are reproduced well, although the brightness of the whites feels like a result of the downright brightness of the screen. Whack this up to full and you certainly won't have a problem using this tablet in sunlight – though you will see it take a toll on the battery life.

The music performance from the Note is simply OK – it lacks the organisation and cohesion of some of the better tablets, and could do with more punch and precision if it wants to come close to the iPad Mini. But tonally it's balanced, precise with rhythms and proves an inoffensive listen for music and movies.

The Galaxy Note 8.0 showed promise when it was released, but its weaknesses are easily shown up by new rivals – even more so when its price point is among the highest of tablets this size.

It serves as a stark reminder of just how fast technology is moving when a tablet less than a year old looks as outdated as the Note 8.0.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR 8in screen; S-Pen stylus works well; smooth navigation

AGAINST Not a Full HD screen; so-so video performance; expensive; old version of Android

VERDICT The Note 8.0 was a great tablet once, but now it looks outclassed and outdated

We found the battery lasted seven hours with fairly heavy use at mid-to-high brightness. Expect less at full chat

Audio is balanced, rhythmically precise and inoffensive, but it lacks the organisation and solid cohesion of some of its better rivals



Tesco Hudl £120

★★★★☆

By concentrating on the things that matter, Tesco has produced a good, affordable tablet

With its seriously cheap price and connection to a popular supermarket, it would be all too easy to judge the Hudl before even taking a look at it. But that would be a mistake – it's a better tablet than many of its pricier rivals.

No, it's no Apple iPad Mini, but it's not trying to be. At £120 (or as little as £60 if you use Tesco Clubcard points), it's not aimed at the same audience as the £330 Apple device, but you still get an awful lot for your money.

Good credentials

Its spec list makes for good reading, for a start. The Hudl has a 1.5GHz quad-core processor, a 7in screen with 1440 x 900 resolution and 16GB of on-board storage, expandable via microSD card. There has been some scrimping on RAM at just 1GB, though, and the plastic body, though solid, doesn't look or feel quite as elegant as some.

The Hudl is running stock Android 4.2.2, with a few pre-installed Tesco-based apps and widgets that can be deleted if you like. The only permanent Tesco branding is a small 'T' icon in the

bottom left-hand corner, which launches a hub of all things Tesco.

Using the Hudl throws up no real dramas – it's snappy enough, and moving around menus and apps doesn't trouble it one bit. Browsing, movie streaming and game playing are largely smooth experiences, though graphic-intensive games do ask a few more questions of it.

The Hudl's screen appears relatively sharp, although the Google Nexus 7 would beat it for clarity thanks to its Full HD display. We had an issue with the screen brightness, though: it doesn't go as bright as the Nexus 7, which makes outdoor use harder.

This also affects video performance, with colours looking a little washed-out compared with those on Google's tablet, and blacks failing to get as deep as we'd like. Side by side with one of its pricier rivals, though, the Hudl's performance is more than acceptable for its cost.

You can use the Hudl in portrait orientation, but it's set up for landscape use. It seems an oversight, then, that the speakers are exactly where your hands go. Time to reach for your headphones.

Do that and tonally it's well balanced, and doesn't sound harsh or overly bassy. It does, though, lack the precision and punch of tablet big-hitters such as the iPad Mini with Retina Display.

All-day viewing

Battery life falls just a little short of the advertised nine hours of video, but then we had the screen whacked up to full brightness the whole time.

The 3-megapixel camera is no great shakes. You can touch the screen to focus it, but you wouldn't know a lot of the time, as images are regularly slightly blurry. Brightly lit scenes come out best.

Shortcomings are easy to swallow at this price, and for the average user the Hudl will be a great multimedia tablet. It covers the basics and then some, and it does them well. Tesco has been clever in concentrating on the areas that matter most, producing an affordable tablet that's thoroughly enjoyable to use.

Rating ★★★★★

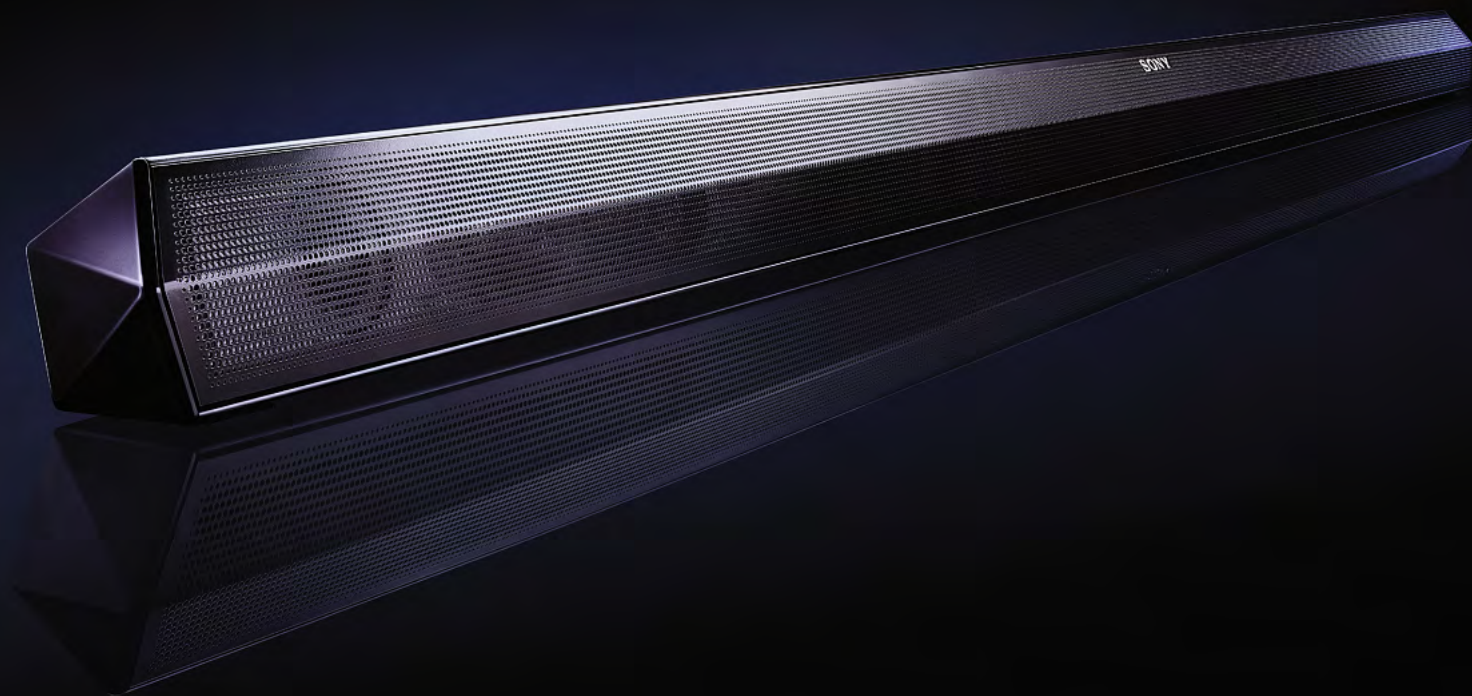
FOR Sharp screen; snappy processor; expandable memory; stock Android; well priced

AGAINST Screen could be brighter; design is on the chunky side; poor camera

VERDICT A superb budget tablet that, while not flawless, shows some pricier rivals the way

It's easy to judge the Hudl before even taking a look at it. But that would be a mistake – it's a better tablet than many of its pricier rivals

SONY
make.believe



HT-ST3, the world's slimmest Bluetooth® Sound Bar*

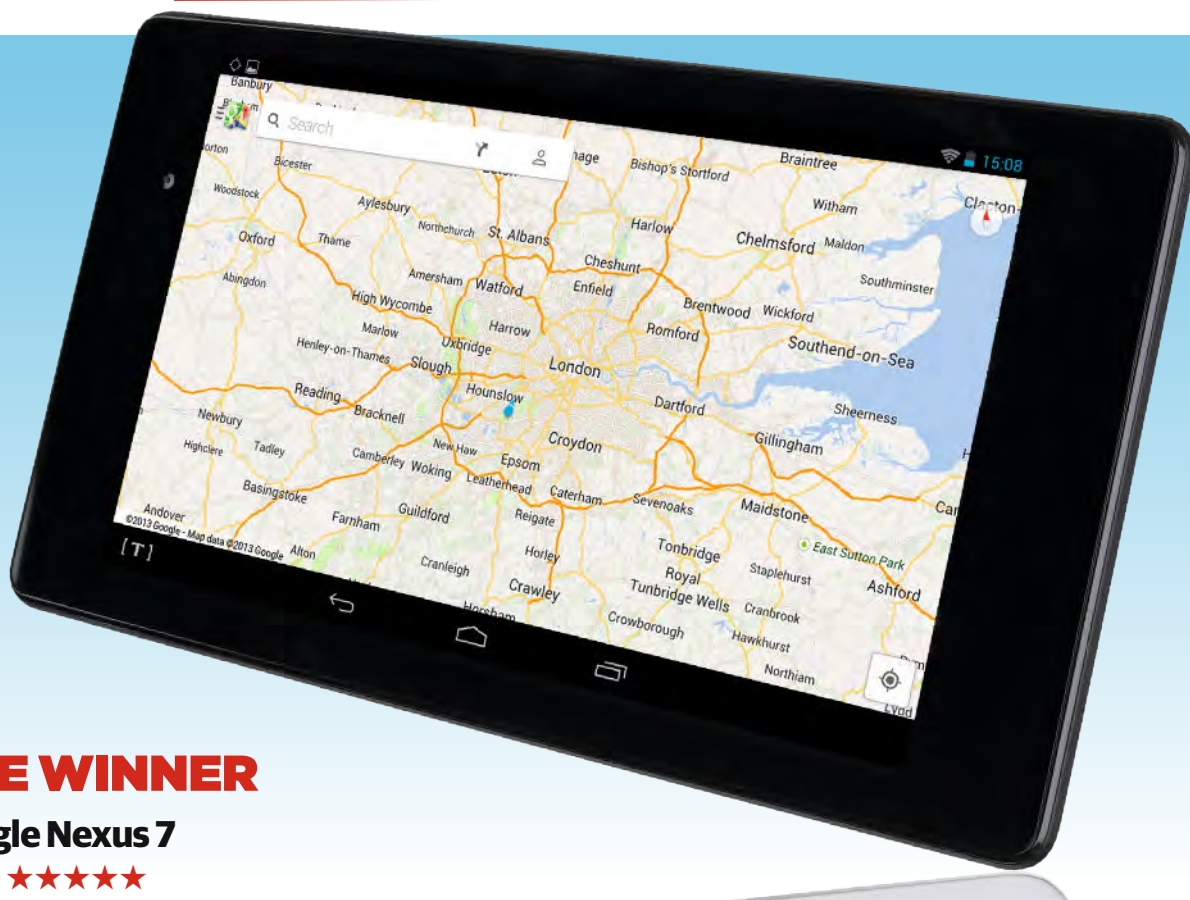
Immersive 4.1ch cinema sound from the ST3 Sound Bar at just 4cm high.
Instantly connect with one touch via NFC, to wirelessly enjoy music with Bluetooth®.



Soul-Shaking Clarity **BE MOVED**
www.sony.co.uk/soundbar

*Specifications based on 40 x 32.5 x 900mm (HDW) and verified as of 26th July 2013. For more information: www.sony.co.uk/ST3research. 'Sony', 'make.believe' and their logos are trademarks or registered trademarks of Sony Corporation. Bluetooth and its logo are trademarks or registered trademarks of Bluetooth SIG, Inc. All other logos and trademarks are the property of their respective owners.

TEST VERDICT



THE WINNER

Google Nexus 7

£200 ★★★★★

Despite the arrival of some new, big-hitting rivals, the **Nexus 7** walks the line between performance and value better than any of them

It's official. The Product of the Year has held off competition from some very well regarded newcomers. It was close though, the new iPad Mini with Retina Display also grabbing five stars. For performance alone, it just takes the Nexus, but that £120 price difference is a mighty big consideration.

There were disappointing showings from the Archos Platinum 80b and the Asus MeMo Pad 8 - doubly frustrating given that both companies make excellent tablets for others (Archos makes the Hudl and Asus the Nexus 7).

At £300, the Samsung Galaxy Note 8.0 showed all the promise of a once-great tablet now out of its depth, and, in the process, highlighted just

how quickly the tablet market is moving and improving.

The Hudl was one of the biggest surprises of the test, offering a stellar execution and doing itself proud with an excellent performance-to-value ratio.

Also falling in at the four-star mark was the LG G Pad, slightly too pricey and underspec'd for the full five.

Content holds the key

Finally, the Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 7 did itself proud, proving a huge improvement on the previous model, yet its roadblock on accessing content via Google Play is a real letdown, and the temptation to turn to the Nexus 7 at the same price is much too high.

The Hudl was one of the biggest surprises of the test, doing itself proud with an excellent performance-to-value ratio

SYSTEM BUILDER



Headphones
AKG K451

£50 ★★★★★

Affordable, comfortable and an exceptional performance from our Product of the Year.



Music Streaming Service
Spotify

£10/month ★★★★★

20 million songs, 320kbps streaming and offline playlists - it's a tablet must-have.



Video Streaming Service
BBC iPlayer

£free ★★★★★

The iPlayer's HD programming is second to none and you can download and watch offline.

Total build £250 (+ Spotify)



Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 7

£200 ★★★★★

Storage 16, 32, 64GB

Storage type Flash

Expansion slot No

Formats MP3, AAC, WAV, MP4

Screen size 7in

Screen resolution 1920 x 1200

Battery life 11 hours (video)

Connections Bluetooth, PC/Mac

Dimensions (hwd) 186 x 128 x 9mm

Weight 303g

Build	■	■	■	■	■
Picture	■	■	■	■	■
Sound	■	■	■	■	■



Apple iPad Mini Retina

£320 ★★★★★

Storage 16, 32, 64, 128GB

Storage type Flash

Expansion slot No

Formats MP3, AAC,

Apple Lossless, WAV, MP4

Screen size 7.9in

Screen resolution 2048 x 1536

Battery life 10 hours (video)

Connections Bluetooth, PC/Mac

Dimensions (hwd) 200 x 135 x 8mm

Weight 331g

Build	■	■	■	■	■
Picture	■	■	■	■	■
Sound	■	■	■	■	■



Archos 80b Platinum

£170 ★★★★★

Storage 8GB

Storage type Flash

Expansion slot Yes

Formats MP3, AAC, Apple Lossless,

FLAC, WAV, MP4

Screen size 8in

Screen resolution 1024 x 768

Connections Bluetooth, USB

Dimensions (hwd) 200 x 154 x 10mm

Weight 440g

Build	■	■	■	■	■
Picture	■	■	■	■	■
Sound	■	■	■	■	■



Asus MeMo Pad 8

£200 ★★★★★

Storage 16GB

Storage type Flash

Expansion slot Yes

Formats MP3, AAC, Apple Lossless,

FLAC, WAV, MP4, DIVX

Screen size 8in

Screen resolution 1280 x 800

Battery life 9 hours (video)

Connections Bluetooth, PC/Mac

Dimensions (hwd) 213 x 127 x 10mm

Weight 350g

Build	■	■	■	■	■
Picture	■	■	■	■	■
Sound	■	■	■	■	■



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
TEST WINNER

Google Nexus 7

£200 ★★★★★

Storage 16, 32GB

Storage type Flash

Expansion slot No

Formats MP3, WMA, FLAC, WAV,

MP4, XVID, DIVX, WMV

Screen size 7in

Screen resolution 1920 x 1200

Battery life 9 hours (video)

Connections Bluetooth, USB, PC

Dimensions (hwd) 200 x 114 x 9mm

Weight 290g

Build	■	■	■	■	■
Picture	■	■	■	■	■
Sound	■	■	■	■	■



LG G Pad

£260 ★★★★★

Storage 16GB

Storage type Flash

Expansion slot Yes

Formats MP3, WMA, WMA Lossless,

AAC, Apple Lossless, FLAC, WAV, MP4,

XVID, DIVX, WMV

Screen size 8.3in

Screen resolution 1920 x 1200

Connections Bluetooth, USB, PC/Mac

Dimensions (hwd) 216 x 127 x 8mm

Weight 338g

Build	■	■	■	■	■
Picture	■	■	■	■	■
Sound	■	■	■	■	■



Samsung Galaxy Note 8

£300 ★★★★★

Storage 16GB

Storage type Flash

Expansion slot Yes

Formats MP3, WMA, AAC, FLAC,

MP4, DIVX, WMV

Screen size 8in

Screen resolution 1280 x 800

Connections Bluetooth, USB, PC/Mac

Dimensions (hwd) 211 x 136 x 8mm

Weight 338g

Build	■	■	■	■	■
Picture	■	■	■	■	■
Sound	■	■	■	■	■



Tesco Hudl

£120 ★★★★★

Storage 16GB

Storage type Flash

Expansion slot Yes

Formats MP3, FLAC, WAV, MP4

Screen size 7in

Screen resolution 1440 x 900

Battery life 9 hours (video)

Connections Bluetooth, USB, PC/Mac

Dimensions (hwd) 192 x 129 x 10mm

Weight 370g

Build	■	■	■	■	■
Picture	■	■	■	■	■
Sound	■	■	■	■	■

4K and OLED are making this an exciting time in the world of TVs, but the latest tech is also making more modest models better and smarter than ever

UltimateGuide^{UG}

Best TVs of the year



Bang & Olufsen BeoVision 11 p56 • **Hannspree** SL22DMBB p53 • **Panasonic** TX-L32E6B p53 • **Panasonic** TX-P42GT60B p54 • **Panasonic** TX-P50GT60B p54 • **Panasonic** TX-P55VT65B p61 • **Samsung** KE55S9C p55 • **Samsung** PS51F5500 p61 • **Samsung** UE65F9000 p59 • **Sony** KD65X9005A p60



Hannspree SL22DMBB £150

There's long been a feeling that small TVs offer poor value for money, with many dinky flatscreens costing as much as a feature-packed 32incher. That's not the case with this Hannspree which, at just £150, is a very affordable way to add a little entertainment to your

TECH SPECS

Resolution 1920 x 1080 • **Type** LCD • **Size** 22in • **Wi-Fi** No • **HDMI in** 1 • **3D** No • **USB 1** • **Tuner** Freeview • **Dimensions (hwd)** 53 x 39 x 17cm • **Weight** 4.2kg

boudoir or spare room. What's more, it's an absolutely cracking performer for the price.

You don't get the fancy features you might get in bigger offerings - so no smart TV or Freeview HD - but the Hannspree does the basics with rare aplomb.

The standard-definition tuner delivers colours that are punchy but natural, there's good range and subtlety to contrast, and enough detail to properly define every one of Bruce Forsyth's ever-deepening wrinkles.

Simple but effective

There's no built-in DVD player as there is on some rival sets at this size, but plug one into the single HDMI socket on the back of this TV and you'll enjoy another great performance.

Whether you're watching a DVD or Blu-ray, what most impresses with this set is the Hannspree's ability to produce both deep blacks and bright whites, even in the same image. Where some lesser performers struggle to pick out the stars in a pitch black sky, the SL22DMBB not only finds them, it makes them positively twinkle.

Add to that enticing mix HD images that are sharply defined without being over-exaggerated and motion that's

impressively fluid and smooth and you've got a set that will happily turn bedtime into movie time.

It even sounds decent

It's a commonly accepted fact that flatscreens rarely sound great - and that usually goes double for a TV as small as this. Which is why it's impressive that, while the sound on the Hannspree is unsurprisingly a bit thin, it manages to avoid the hardness and harshness of many of alternatives.

If you're in the market for a mini telly, it might be tempting to buy one with as many features as possible. Doing so would mean you would overlook this little Hannspree, however.

We'd recommend (unsurprisingly) that you prioritise performance above all else. Do that and the SL22DMBB really should be top of your list.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Punchy, natural colours; good contrast and strong blacks; sharp but subtle edges

AGAINST No smart feature or disc drive; sound is a little thin (though not bad for a flatscreen)

VERDICT Not the most feature-laden little telly, but it is a cracking performer

Panasonic TX-L32E6B £370

We're still coming to terms with Panasonic's decision to cease plasma production but, as the TX-L32E6B proves, the Japanese giant is a dab hand when it comes to LCD, too, even at the fairly small and very affordable end of the television market.

What's initially most impressive about the E6B is the feature set that's been crammed into the slim, stylish chassis. 3D is out (and we'll be surprised if many miss that) but just about everything else is in, from a Full HD resolution to LED backlighting, and USB recording to built-in wi-fi. The last of these brings with it one of the most flexible and customisable smart TV experiences around.

Smarter than your average TV

Every person in the house can register on the TV and personalise the home screen. So when each person uses it they're presented with the apps and features they use the most, whether that be iPlayer, Netflix, Twitter, Facebook or the Media Player that opens up DLNA streaming of music

files stored in formats such as FLAC, WAV, AAC and MP3.

That diverse assortment of features makes it easy to make the case for this Panasonic on paper. And thankfully it's backed up by a great performance.

Excels with colour and contrast

The colour palette is especially impressive - it's expertly balanced and one of the very best sets around for rendering skin tones naturally. But contrast levels are also exemplary - this is one of few sets at this price that can do justice to the detail and occasional shafts of light in Gotham City's otherwise deeply dark nooks and crannies in the Batman movies.

With HD content from Blu-ray or HD broadcast you can add the kind of sharpness and detail that makes edges pop and textures seem entirely real.

The upscaler for standard definition content is slightly less impressive, unfortunately, with blacks appearing a little less subtle when you play a DVD.

And the sound is disappointingly thin even by prevailing flatscreen standards.



TECH SPECS

Resolution 1920 x 1080 • **Type** LED/LCD • **Size** 32in • **Wi-Fi** Yes • **HDMI in** 3 • **3D** No • **USB 2** • **Tuner** Freeview HD • **Dimensions (hwd)** 43 x 72 x 5cm • **Weight** 8.5kg

None of that, though, is enough to put us off what is otherwise an exemplary television at an amazingly affordable price. It needs to be very near the top of your audition list.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Excellent detail and contrast; superbly natural colour; great features

AGAINST Sounds thin; not the best with standard-definition broadcasts

VERDICT Quite simply the best 32in TV around - buy one right now

Panasonic TX-P42GT60B £1000

We've already established that Panasonic can produce a great LCD TV, but plasma is where its passion lies, and with panel production ceasing right around now this is perhaps your last opportunity to pick up a 'proper' GT60. Want to go big? Take a look at the 50in model below. But if it's a 42incher you're after, this is the very best.

A star of a TV

But let's start with the negatives. Compared with many rivals the TX-P42GT60 isn't a particularly attractive TV. Oh, and it's got just three HDMI inputs, which is one fewer than most are fitted with nowadays. As far as criticisms go, though, that's your lot - in every other way this is an absolute belter of a television.

For a start it's smarter than most, with a My Home Screen interface that can be personalised for each person in the house, ensuring they get quick access to their favourite apps and features.

These appear as icons around a mini-display of the live TV feed from either the Freesat or Freeview HD tuner.

Doodle on your screen

The GT60 comes with a wireless Touch Pen that lets you doodle on the screen. No, we don't know why

With the likes of Netflix and BBC iPlayer available to choose from plenty of video on-demand options are covered. There's also a Media Player for accessing video and music files from USB and DLNA, so you can stream to the TV from a networked computer.

It's worth tweaking at least a bit

The picture performance can be heavily customised, too, with the THX and ISF certifications bringing

with them a vast array of settings to tweak. Even if you spend just five minutes with a THX Optimizer disc, you'll get great results.

This television is a brilliant performer, capable of getting the best out of rosey standard-definition feeds and excelling with HD, especially in terms of colour balance and detail recovery. It will even do a magnificent job with 3D if you're still into that sort of thing.

We have tested TVs that sound better, but none in this size that look better. This is a masterfully all-round picture performer - and one of the last plasmas. Get one while you still can.

TECH SPECS

Resolution 1920 x 1080 • **Type** Plasma
• **Size** 42in • **Wi-fi** Yes • **HDMI in** 3 • **3D Active** • **USB** 3 • **Tuner** Freeview HD/ Freesat • **Dimensions (hwd)** 60 x 99 x 5cm • **Weight** 18kg

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Great picture quality from every source; personalisable smart interface

AGAINST Not the prettiest or best-sounding TV in the class

VERDICT Panasonic plasma may be on its way out, but at least it's going out with a bang

Panasonic TX-P50GT60B £1200

If there's one thing that could put you off buying the TX-P42GT60B above, it's that you can get the 50in version of the same telly by spending just £200 more. That's £25 per extra inch, and that's great value if you've got the space to accommodate such a large set.

Performs as well as the 42in set

It's not always the case that different sizes of nominally the same TV perform consistently, but the TX-P50GT60B is every bit as good as its brilliant little brother.

It's got the same excellent My Home Screen interface and solid selection of smart features, which includes Netflix, BBC iPlayer and DLNA streaming. It has the same array of connections, too, from the slightly disappointing number of HDMI inputs (three) to the impressive number of USBs (three). These can be used for media file playback or recording from the Freesat or Freeview HD tuners. As with the 42in version this is a TV that looks decidedly dull next to the Sonys and Samsungs of the world, too, but that's easily forgiven when you turn it on.

Contrast is simply brilliant: even by plasma standards the blacks produced here are remarkably deep, but they share the screen with clean, bright whites that ensure you never miss a detail even in the darkest of scenes. Colour balance, clearly becoming a serious strength of Panasonic's TVs, is once again brilliantly natural while at the same time proving vibrant and rich. Motion is handled with aplomb, too.

Solid with 3D content too

Switch to the active 3D and you get another solid performance. The GT60B even sounds reasonable for a flatscreen at this price - although we trust it goes without saying that we would certainly recommend a soundbar at the very least if you want your audio to match the outstanding visuals.

And we do mean "outstanding". At this size and price the picture quality that this Panasonic provides is simply second to none.



TECH SPECS

Resolution 1920 x 1080 • **Type** Plasma
• **Size** 50in • **Wi-fi** Yes • **HDMI in** 3 • **3D Active** • **USB** 3 • **Tuners** Freesat/ Freeview HD • **Dimensions (hwd)** 70 x 117 x 49cm • **Weight** 22.5kg

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Superb picture, particularly in terms of contrast and colours; strong upscaling; very good price for a 50in TV

AGAINST Three HDMI inputs could be too few

VERDICT A TV of rare ability made even more special by a surprisingly low price



Samsung KE55S9C £7000

Is the future of TV tech 4K, or is it OLED? We think it's probably both, but in these early days for both technologies you have to choose one or the other. We'll get to 4K in a bit, but right now let's concentrate on the curved form of the Samsung KE55S9C OLED model.

The screen itself is actually less concave than it may at first seem. The aluminium frame within which the display is suspended is far more pronounced in its curve, making for a bit

access Samsung's exhaustive selection of smart content.

The advantage of OLED over LCD is that each pixel emits its own light, so there's no need for a backlight and, therefore, there's nothing preventing one pixel from being completely black while the one adjacent is completely white. That's the theory, anyway.

In practice? Contrast levels really are superb - no LCD set we've seen can combine pitch blackness and pure

So why is it curved?

We're not sure there are any technical benefits to the curved design - we suspect it's simply to make OLED stand out

Contrast is superb - no LCD can combine pitch blackness and pure whites in the same image as well as this Samsung OLED

of an optical illusion. The overall look of the TV is certainly stunning, but that curve is not without its practical considerations. Wall mounting, for example, is off the table - if you'll excuse the pun.

One connecting cable keeps it neat

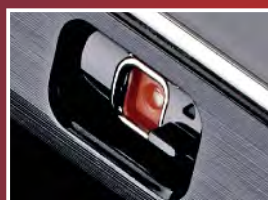
And if you're worried about spoiling the beautiful curvy lines of the television with a bunch of dangling wires, don't be. All of the connections are located on a separate One Connect box, so there's just a single cable connecting that to the screen. Having a separate box is also handy because it means its quite easily upgradeable - it may well be possible to add extra processing power or extra connections in the future.

You already get Freesat, Freeview HD, four HDMI inputs, two USBs and an ethernet socket for those who don't want to use the set's built-in wi-fi to

whites in the same image nearly as well as this Samsung.

Colours are little over-cooked when the KE55S9C first comes out of the box, and while a bit of tweaking does tone things down a bit, they're always a little more vivid than is truly natural, although the impact and punch that provides is impossible to deny.

IN DETAIL



There's a camera for gesture control, but it can be a bit frustrating to use



Headphones in the 3D glasses deliver sound when using the neat Multi-View function

TECH SPECS

Resolution 1920 x 1080 • **Type** OLED • **Size** 55in • **Wi-Fi** Yes • **HDMI** in 4 • **3D** Active • **USB** 2 • **Tuner** Freeview HD • **Dimensions (hwd)** 78 x 142 x 14cm • **Weight** 30.9kg

Detail levels are generally superb, too, even if a little insight can at times get lost in those exceptionally deep blacks.

Superb 3D images - with a twist

This Samsung OLED also supplies one of the best active 3D pictures we have ever seen. What's more it has a neat trick, allowing the active glasses to be used to supply two different images at once if you want to share the screen with someone who wants to watch something different. It also means you can enjoy a two-player game with a full-size image each for each, rather than a split screen.

This large Samsung OLED isn't perfect, but it's an undeniably spectacular TV and a sign of things to come.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Supremely dark blacks; great contrast; lovely looks; crisp and punchy

AGAINST Very expensive; no 4K; some dark detail is missing

VERDICT Stunning, but a couple of flaws and no 4K hold it back from full marks

Bang & Olufsen BeoVision 11 £5250

If you're lucky enough to be in a position to spend thousands of pounds on a television, you have two choices: go for something cutting-edge from the likes of Samsung, LG or Sony, or buy a TV from a company that understands luxury is about more than mere specs. Bang and Olufsen is one such company.

The B&O approach begins with customisation. The BeoVision 11 cabinet comes in black or white, while the large speaker grille can be red, white, black, silver or dark grey instead of the blue of our review sample. The aluminium frame comes in silver or black.

In-built surround processing

As well as looking extremely elegant the BeoVision 11 knows how to treat you right - the motorised pedestal stand (or optional motorised wall bracket) can swivel to preset viewing angles to ensure you and anyone else watching always gets the best view of the screen.

That big speaker grille is more than an opportunity to demonstrate your colour-matching abilities - it also provides an opportunity for B&O's engineers to entirely debunk the notion that a flatscreen can't sound good. Behind the fabric lies a pair of three-way fully active speakers capable of chucking out very impressive audio.

Two speakers not enough for you? Fear not. There's surround processing already built into the TV. To take advantage of it, you can simply add any speakers from B&O's exhaustive (and admittedly expensive) range and you can create almost any surround configuration you could imagine.

You'll need to pay extra for glasses

You can add a 500GB HDD as another (£694) option, which is nice. Less nice is the fact that 3D glasses also cost extra - £120 extra, in fact. That seems a bit steep given the £5000+ starting price.

The BeoVision 11 is a fairly fiddly TV to set up, but in all likelihood - especially after you've invested all that money in it - it will be delivered and set up by a B&O engineer. Once you've allowed them to do their thing (it might be a two-cup-of-tea job) you'll be the proud owner of a brilliantly performing TV.

Picture detail is superb all-round and, considering the set is using an edge-lit LED backlight, the contrast levels are



Streaming pleasure

The BeoVision lacks some smart services but you can stream your own media via a wired or wi-fi network

excellent. Colours are rich without drifting into overblown, and even standard-definition content from DVD (but what are you doing watching standard-def on a set like this?) appears controlled and balanced.

Only a limited smart offering

There's a little blurring to fast 3D motion and the smart offering is admittedly sparse, consisting of little more exciting than BBC iPlayer. Still, the overall performance is excellent.

And, of course, it's combined with a user experience and styling that really is luxurious. If we could afford it, we'd be sorely tempted by a BeoVision 11.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Lovely, customisable looks; luxurious build; awesome, auto-adjusting picture; superb, upgradeable sound

AGAINST Vastly expensive; not so smart

VERDICT You can buy better tech for this money, but not more luxury

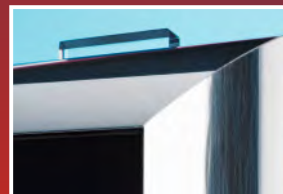
TECH SPECS

Type LCD/LED • Screen size 40in • Aspect ratio 16:9 • Resolution 1920 x 1080 • 3D Active • Tuners Freeview HD • HDMI 6 • USB 2 • Wi-fi Yes • Ethernet Yes • DLNA Yes • Dimensions (hwd) 89 x 96 x 6cm • Weight 41kg

IN DETAIL



There are six drivers behind the grille underneath the screen. Each has a dedicated 32W amp



The light sensor on the TV adjusts the picture in response to changing ambient light



If you're looking at the connections on the back of the BeoVision 11 you're doing something wrong - the very least the shop could do is send an engineer to set it up properly for you.

Two speakers not enough for you? There's surround processing already built in to the TV. You can add any speakers from B&O's range



You can't
eat it.
You can't
drink it.
You can't
mate with
it. Why does
it keep
making
you happier
than almost
anything else
in the world?

All-new Excite.

True to the
music as only
a Dynaudio
can be.
All there is.

The Perfect Gift

Enjoy the sound of Tivoli Audio



Beautifully designed and perfectly crafted radios that are built to last.
Equipped with the latest and futureproof technologies.
Bluetooth, CD, DAB, DAB+, FM,...

30-DAY RISK-FREE HOME TRIAL
See more at www.tivoliaudio.com/gift

Tivoli AudioTM
The Original Radio Company.



Dual remotes

There are two remote controls in the box – a normal, button-covered zapper and a flashier unit with a great touch-pad



Samsung UE65F9000 £5000

Whether you call it 4K or UHD (for what it's worth we've become used to 4K now) video at four times the resolution of Full HD is awesome.

Many of the benefits are obvious – more pixels means more detail and greater sharpness – but 4K can also deliver a wider range of colours, resulting in a picture that can be more natural and more vibrant.

There is a fairly fundamental problem, though, and that's the serious lack of 4K content to watch at the moment.

We plug in a USB stick with demo content, and we're largely blown away by the picture quality: incredible textures and a real sense of depth

We plug a USB stick containing demo content into the UE65F9000 and we're largely blown away by the picture quality: incredible textures, zero grain, and a sense of depth created by the sheer amount of detail on display. It doesn't have the more clinical boldness to edges and purity to whites when compared with Sony's 4K KD-65X9005A, but for us there's a subtlety to the performance that has its own merit.

Besides, the bigger problem is that none of the demonstration material is

stuff you'll actually want to watch. Until more 4K content becomes available you're going to be watching a lot of 'standard' HD material on your very expensive TV.

Upscaling other sources

Thankfully the UE65F9000 is very capable when it comes to upscaling a 1920 x 1080 image to fit its 3840 x 2160 panel. When you take into account that that means the panel is essentially having to make up three out of every

four pixels it displays, the subtlety, control and detail of the image is impressive. As is the combination of dark blacks and punchy whites, especially considering that, when you get down to it, this is an edge-arrayed LED backlight lighting a vast screen.

The 3D performance is similarly accomplished, particularly in terms of overall brightness and image stability. The Samsung also has a decent stab at upscaling standard-definition content from DVD and Freeview,

TECH SPECS

Type LCD/LED • **Screen size** 65in • **Aspect ratio** 16:9 • **Resolution** 3840 x 2160 • **3D** Active • **Tuners** Freeview HD • **HDMI** 4 • **USB** 3 • **Wi-Fi** Yes • **Ethernet** Yes • **DLNA** Yes • **Dimensions (hwd)** 84 x 146 x 4cm • **Weight** 36kg

although you'll want to avoid asking it to do so as much as possible.

On top of that you get all of the frills we've come to expect from Samsung – from a vast range of smart services to a camera-enabled gesture-control system that we don't expect anyone will really use. The set even sounds pretty good.

The current lack of any proper 4K content to speak of is a big problem for a TV costing this much. Without that content it can never quite make up the deficit. Fingers crossed, then, that it gets here soon.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR 4K looks superb; upscales other sources well; connection box opens a degree of upgradability; smart content

AGAINST Could be punchier; lack of 4K content

VERDICT A very accomplished telly, but the lack of 4K content means it's too expensive

An external unit housing inputs keeps bulk down

**The picture is capable of stunning the viewer:
4K demo content (all we can see for now)
looks gloriously sharp, detailed and punchy**

Sony KD-65X9005A £5000

If you've decided that the lack of 4K content isn't enough to put you off forking out for a 4K TV we'll not only applaud your early-adopter ways, we'll help you make the right telly choice.

Even if you ignore that 4K specification, the KD-65X9005A makes quite the first impression. Not everyone is going to love the looks of the width-increasing speaker wings, but everyone is going to love the way they sound. Only the B&O on p56 can beat it sonically.

Capable of superb images

And in terms of picture it's also capable of stunning the viewer: 4K demonstration content (all we can view for now, of course) looks gloriously sharp, detailed and punchy. The image is even bolder than that of the Samsung UE65F9000, and that makes the picture seem more three-dimensional and immersive. It's also got more vibrant colours - but that's not necessarily an

absolute improvement. While it does make the image pop a little more, making this a terrific set for showing off, there's an argument that says greater realism and subtlety will pay off in the long run.

A tricky balance to be had

There's also a slight issue in the black performance. No matter how much we tweaked the settings (and we tweaked them a lot) we were unable to get the perfect balance between black depth and detail. It's not far off, admittedly, but you will lose a little insight if you opt for the deepest blacks.

Its 3D performance is excellent, with Full HD resolution from passive glasses.

With so little 4K content around, you will of course be relying on this Sony set's upscaler a great deal. As with the Samsung it does an impressive job considering the scale of the task. HD from Blu-ray or Freeview HD is clear,

TECH SPECS

Type LCD/LED • **Screen size** 65in • **Aspect ratio** 16:9 • **Resolution** 3840 x 2160 • **3D** Passive • **Tuners** Freeview HD • **HDMI** 4 • **USB** 3 • **Wi-Fi** Yes • **Ethernet** Yes • **DLNA** Yes • **Dimensions (hwd)** 90 x 168 x 10cm • **Weight** 46.4kg

sharp and detailed, with edges snapping into place and clothing textures oozing realism. The huge resolution gap inevitably means that standard-definition fare is far less accomplished. We would recommend avoiding it whenever possible.

This is a flagship set, of course, so there's also the best of Sony's smart features here, including its own Video Unlimited service. This offers newly released movies in HD on a pay-as-you-go basis. It's not 4K - but it will just have to do for now.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Amazingly detailed and punchy 4K; well when upscaling; impressive sound

AGAINST Blacks could be deeper; colours a little overdone; no 4K content

VERDICT A real stunner of a telly, but it's badly held back by a lack of 4K content

Sony's got game

We found the X9005A to be particularly responsive when gaming. It's just a shame the new consoles aren't 4K

Panasonic

TX-P55VT65B £2000

Some parts of this *Ultimate Guide* have probably read like an obituary to plasma, which may soon be shuffling off to join Betamax and HD DVD in the great tech beyond at the end of the year.

If the previous plasma reviews brought a tear to the eye, you should feel no shame in blubbing openly as we mourn the technology's passing while celebrating perhaps the best plasma television there has ever been.

The best picture processing tech

The VT series is reserved for the very top plasma TVs in Panasonic's range. It's little surprise, then, that the TX-P55VT65B has all of the very best picture processing technology the company has to offer - and that results in a truly wonderful picture.

It's a captivatingly immersive image packed with layer upon layer of detail and exceptional definition. That detail extends right into the deepest of dark scenes, despite the cavernous depth of the blacks on offer. That uncanny ability is at least partly the result of quite exceptional contrast.

Even those places where Panasonic used to fall behind its arch-rival Sony are now areas of expertise for the VT65: colours are neutral and natural, while motion is smooth and sharp.

And these impressive traits remain true across all sources and 3D, though the higher the resolution the better they appear to the viewer.

Superb smart interface

Add to the mix one of the best remote control apps on the market, a subtle but stylish design, surprisingly smooth sound and a customisable smart interface that covers all the bases and you've got an enticing proposition.

Even the rather pointless Touch Pen (who wants to write on their TV?) and slightly flimsy Skype camera can't put us off. This is a genuinely spectacular television, and a fitting swan song for plasma technology.

It has dropped in price recently, so don't wait any longer or you'll miss out.



TECH SPECS

Resolution 1920 x 1080 • Type Plasma
• Size 55in • Wi-fi
Yes • HDMI in 3 •
3D Active • USB 3 •
Tuner Freeview HD/
Freesat •
Dimensions (hwd)
77 x 132 x 5cm •
Weight 31.5kg

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Supremely detailed but subtle images; superb grip on motion; lovely colours; impressive remote app

AGAINST Touch Pen and Skype camera

VERDICT Panasonic's last VT plasma is an absolute doozy - we'll miss it

Samsung

PS51F5500 £680

It's not difficult to pick up a cheap telly these days. But picking up a *good* cheap telly is a different matter entirely. A good cheap TV, however, is exactly what the Samsung PS51F5500 is.

It's fair to say this isn't the best looking set we've ever seen. The stand is nice enough but this is one of those old-fashioned chunky plasma chassis. Get past the looks, though, and you get a cracking set of features for your money.

A premium Samsung interface

For a start the smart interface is the same one you get on Samsung's more premium sets, so you get access to one of the broadest selections of video-on-demand and social media apps out there.

You also get Samsung's high-end smart remote - something that the likes of Panasonic and LG leave out at this price. Just don't get overexcited about the voice control - we don't believe it's really worth bothering with yet.

In terms of performance this Samsung outshines its price rivals by a considerable margin. Black levels are seriously impressive, colours are natural

and subtle when they need to be and bright and vibrant when required, and detail levels are very impressive.

And, while all things are relative, this set even sounds good by flatscreen standards. (We'd still invest in a soundbar.) The 3D offered by the two pairs of bundled specs is perfectly passable.

Perfection? At this price?

Things can't be perfect, though, and there is the odd flaw. The upscaler isn't as accomplished as those of more premium TVs (although standard-def content is still perfectly acceptable) and whites could be a little cleaner and more punchy. That, though, is when comparing it with more expensive TVs. For the money you're paying for this unit, it's just a brilliant bit of kit.

The Samsung PS51F5500's picture performance would make it great value without all of those extra features. With them it's a steal.



TECH SPECS

Resolution 1920 x 1080 • Type Plasma
• Size 51in • Wi-Fi
No • HDMI in 3 • 3D
Active • USB 2 •
Tuner Freeview HD
• Dimensions
(hwd) 80 x 119 x 31 •
Weight 20kg

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Lots of screen and very smart for the price; loads of detail; deep blacks

AGAINST SD upscaler could be cleaner; whites could be brighter

VERDICT Great images and features make this a king among affordable TVs

MUSIC IN DETAIL

Look closely and it's clear that not all earphones are the same in the sub-£100 category. We've sorted the little gems from the small fry



1

Audio-Technica ATH-CKX9iS £75 ★★★★★

One of the most common complaints we hear of earphones is that they shift and fall out of place. It's with this in mind that Audio-Technica has made the ATH-CKX9iS earbuds an unusual shape.

The tip goes into the ear canal as usual but the rest sits in your outer ear, held in place by a flexible rubber fin. You get fins in different sizes, as well as several ear tips.

Easy on the ears

Putting them in is a little fiddly, but get the right fit and these are very comfortable earphones, especially if you use the foam ear tips. We also like the flat cable, which is mildly tangle-resistant.

It's clear that a lot of thought has gone into design (even if the mic unit is too far from your face to be optimal for hands-free talking).

Sound is mostly good. These buds deliver a balanced, neutral performance with plenty of detail. We really like the energy and sense of space they convey. Sadly, this is let down a little by a hardness to the sound. These headphones need a bit more refinement to be great.

2

Beyerdynamic MMX 101iE £95 ★★★★★

These have won Awards three years in a row by being utterly brilliant all-rounders.

It's a beautifully balanced performance with a sparkly, controlled treble and the kind of bass that tries to solidify the presentation rather than blowing your ears off. A quick spin of the *Inception* soundtrack shows how easily the Beyerdynamics handle dynamic shifts.

There's plenty of drive and excitement too, as a bit of Eminem demonstrates. Lyrics are spat out with aggression and a good sense of momentum. Essentially, these buds will happily turn their hand to anything and still sound balanced, exciting and detailed.

Understated design

In terms of design, these reigning champs don't seem all that spectacular. They look fairly smart, albeit rather humdrum, right down to the mic unit. There's a single button for control, which might annoy Apple users hoping to change the volume, but Android users will feel right at home.

3

Jabra Vox £70 ★★★★★

We've never reviewed earphones from Jabra before. We tend to associate the brand with Bluetooth products such as in-car headsets. So, how do their buds fare?

First impressions are good. The cable is thick, with a square cross section that aims to prevent tangles. There's a sturdy mic unit with three buttons that click satisfyingly. Slightly further up, but below the ear buds, are magnets for keeping the headphones neat when not being used.

Solid and stable

The earpieces are also very nice. They're solidly built and resemble little chunky boomerangs, a design intended to help keep them place. It works: these are rather comfy.

The sound? It's decent. There's a good sense of energy, although we'd like more in the way of detail and subtlety. The sound also isn't particularly clean. It feels a little murky at the low-end, where the bass could do with more definition, while the treble is on the thin side.

These are fun-sounding buds, but you can buy better for the cash.

4

Jays a-Jays Five £80 ★★★★★

Mobile operating systems make choosing headphones a chore. Three-button remotes nearly always work on iOS, but are unpredictable on Android. One-button offerings nearly always work on Android, but there's no option to change volume quickly.

Three is a magic number

The Jays solution is to make three dedicated versions of the a-Jays Five; one each for Android, iOS and Windows. And it works - just make sure you have the right version.

Besides this considerate attitude to compatibility, the a-Jays Five seem fairly ordinary. The sound is good, but nothing extraordinary. There's a good sense of energy and a decent sense of balance. It's a little brash, however, and dynamics feel a little flat. The sound could also be cleaner: these aren't the most insightful headphones we've heard for the price.

If compatibility is important to you, these are a good option. But if you're willing to sacrifice those buttons, there are better headphones to be had.

5

Philips Fidelio S1 £70 ★★★★★

We're big fans of Philips' Fidelio range. So when we learned that it was being expanded to include earphones, we got quite excited. The S1s don't disappoint. Their sound is clear and precise. It's agile, but there's a good degree of weight and a fullness to vocals.

These buds are nicely balanced: low-end extension is decent, the midrange is clear, and the top-end is pronounced. It's a gentle presentation, however - easygoing and amiable rather than outright attention-grabbing. Some might wish for a bit more engagement.

Smart and non-invasive

When it comes to design, there's a bit more going on than we'd expect from a Fidelio product. But we think it looks smart. There's a tangle-friendly flat cable incorporating a mic unit with a single button; the earbuds have a half-in-ear design - the tip points into the ear canal, and the body sits just outside. The tip is quite shallow, deliberately trading noise isolation for a less invasive fit. It's a bit fiddly, but fairly comfortable.

6

RHA MA750i £90 ★★★★★

These headphones look like they mean business. The cable is much thicker than we would expect from in-ears. The build quality is high, with machined metal parts that feel very sturdy.

The 3.5mm plug even has a spring attached to prevent the cable from breaking free or snapping. There's a three-button remote, which is as thick as a pencil.

That's harsh

Sadly, it's a case of style over substance. For all the fancy design flourishes, the sound is disappointing. The overriding characteristic is the harshness that comes from the abundant treble. It's not adequately balanced by a full low-end, and the result is that everything sounds tinny and sharp.

Listen to Eminem's brash *No Love* and it's difficult not to wince. Admittedly, the level of clarity on hand is impressive, and there's plenty of detail. Unfortunately for RHA, that's not enough to outweigh the rest of the performance, which makes the listening experience more than a little tiring.

7

Sennheiser MM70s £70 ★★★★★

We've seen all shapes and sizes from Sennheiser, but these earphones have to be among the company's most unassuming designs. It's a thin black wire that splits unevenly for a round-the-neck formation. There's a mic unit with a fiddly volume slider, and the buds have a bit of metal amid the black plastic. And that's about it. All the effort must have gone into the sound, because these in-ears sound very good.

High quality at the low end

The whole frequency range is present and accounted for, although the Sennheisers favour the low end. Vocals are prominent and that bass helps to solidify the presentation, which feels nicely rounded. There's also a good sense of space, as can be demonstrated by playing anything with an orchestra.

The Beyerdynamic MMX 101iEs have a greater sense of drive, but the Sennheisers never feel overly relaxed. Thanks to good timing and dynamics, these headphones are never less than engaging.

8

Sony XBA-H1 £99 ★★★★★

We're always a little wary when the official blurb to a product tells us to 'bump up the bass'. It makes us worry about the rest of the frequency range. Thankfully the low-end doesn't drown everything out here. It's weighty, and tonal balance is decent enough. Dynamic reach is impressive, as shown by the drums-and-clapping intro of The xx's *Heart Skipped A Beat*.

The problem here is the clarity and control of the sound. The low-end is a little soft, and everything above that needs more refinement. If the timing were better the lack of refinement might even be exciting, but as it is the presentation feels a touch messy.

Designed for life

When it comes to the design, we're impressed. These in-ears are very well made. The flat red-and-black cable looks smart (if not entirely unique), and the plug looks rugged enough to withstand a lot of use. The buds are easy to fit, thanks to their chunky stature. Don't expect a slim profile, however - they stick out a little.

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WHATS ON TEST**Bayan Audio** SoundBook p66**Beats** Pill p67**Bose** SoundLink Mini p68**Creative** Airwave HD p71**JBL** Charge p72**Panasonic** SC-NA10 p74**Ultimate Ears** Boom p75

CUT THE TIES

Pack your stuff and leave home – there's nothing quite like the go-anywhere freedom of listening to your music with no strings attached. These wireless speakers can help you do just that



They're small. They're portable. They're wireless. This speaker market is growing by the minute, and these seven examples are the cream of the crop. Ranging in price between £120 and £170, they come in all shapes and sizes. Bluetooth is the sole wireless streaming choice, but auxiliary inputs, NFC connectivity and built-in mics all make an appearance.

This is one test where size, convenience and build matter almost as much as sound quality. Read on to see which model nails that formula.



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Connections Tap in to NFC

As well as Bluetooth you can also connect via NFC (near-field communication) tech. Simply tap your NFC-enabled device on the tag inside the cover flap and you're away. An LED display in the speaker grille shows which source you've selected.

Compact, tactile, well finished – the SoundBook scores many design points

Bayan Audio SoundBook £150

★★★★☆

With smart looks, a compact build and clear sound, the Bayan Audio SoundBook is a neat little Bluetooth speaker.

This speaker supports the higher-quality aptX Bluetooth codec, and delivers a clear and fairly precise sound. Stream it a WAV file of Birdy's *Shelter* and the piano notes sound delicate and sweet. The breathy vocals are direct and intimate, and there's a sparkle to the treble that gives the SoundBook bite and attack. There's a good amount of detail; a dash more subtlety and refinement wouldn't go amiss, though.

The top and the middle

There's a bias toward the top and mid frequencies – which are delivered pretty well – but there's not much deep bass to give weight to the sound. Led Zeppelin's *Heartbreaker* has an agile rhythm, but we'd like a meatier, punchier sound.

Next to speakers such as the Ultimate Ears Boom and Bose SoundLink Mini, the Bayan's lightweight sound sticks out. Still, there are no harsh or brittle edges to the treble at normal volume – so it is a pleasant listen overall. We'd be wary of turning the volume up too high, though. It adds solidity, but also further highlights that thinness.

The SoundBook, which has a 10-hour battery life, does go loud, but it isn't a very big or authoritative presentation.

The spirit of radio

The FM tuner is a welcome component. You can search stations manually or press the tune up/down buttons to let the SoundBook find the right frequencies. Music sounds as thin as it does via Bluetooth, but it's also a little rougher and noisier. Voices, on the other hand, come across as solid and robust, so talk programmes and sports commentaries sound fine.

There's also a built-in mic for hands-free calls. The SoundBook is reasonably useful as a speakerphone, but we'd stick to using a smartphone for better sound quality.

The Bayan recovers some points thanks to its smart-looking and well-built form. The nylon cover is robust, and it doubles up as a stand. Simply snap it shut to turn the speaker off – it's a clever touch.

The aluminium panels add a touch of class, and the top-mounted control buttons are responsive and nicely finished. The whole thing is small and light enough to be easily portable too.

Our review sample, with its silver finish and turquoise accents, looks at home on a desk next to a laptop. There's also a black-and-orange version for those wanting an edgier look.

There's a 3.5mm input at the back for connection to music players, while you can plug headphones into the green line output. Both connections retain the SoundBook's sonic character, but we'd be sure use a good pair of headphones, such as the AKG K451s (£50).

We like how easy to use the Bayan Audio SoundBook is. It has some clever design touches that make it an attractive product, and the FM tuner is a bonus. It doesn't deliver the most balanced sound, and the lack of punchy bass may not suit everyone but, despite all that, it is a pleasant and decent enough listen. We'd be happy to perch it on our desk.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Neat, compact design; smart finish; easy to use; clear and snappy sound; FM tuner

AGAINST Thin, lightweight audio quality; bass could be deeper; treble sounds bright at volume

VERDICT A nice-looking, portable and easy to use speaker with a pleasant enough sound

Beats Pill £170

★★★★☆

Beats by Dre audio products are usually big on bass. Really big. So imagine our surprise when we turned the Beats Pill wireless speaker on, and it sounded thin. Really thin.

A matter of coarse

The sound is treble-heavy, but it isn't particularly articulate or smooth. Stream David Bowie's *Ziggy Stardust* over Bluetooth, and the high frequencies sound coarse when pushed too hard. The Pill struggles when the volume is cranked up too: it doesn't go that loud, for one thing, and the soundfield is rather restrained and congested.

Voices sound weak and lacklustre. Even Gotye's delicate vocals on *Somebody That I Used To Know* lack emotion and subtlety, and instruments don't sound nearly tangible or cohesive enough to deliver true excitement.

The Pill doesn't deliver much insight either, instead simply skimming the surface of songs. We wish it would scoop out some more subtlety and bass - and produce better dynamics.

On the plus side, it has decent rhythmic ability, zipping through tracks with agility. It fares best when you play songs with an attacking, bass-heavy

tempo. Justin Timberlake's *Rock Your Body* produces a more confident rhythm, as does Beyoncé's *Single Ladies (Put A Ring On It)*.

Beats is known for its bold designs, and the cylindrical Pill is certainly eye-catching. It does look exactly like an oversized pill. We've seen our fair share of compact Bluetooth speakers, but the cylindrical shape here somehow makes it seem particularly small when we pick it up. The small size does go some way towards explaining why we don't get deep bass, but the Pill sounds thin even after taking that into account.

It does strike a good physical balance, though, between being light enough to carry around and having a sturdy build.

Light but solid

The large 'b' Beats logo in the middle is the Bluetooth pairing button, and glows a striking red when turned on. A small white LED at the back flashes in pairing mode, going steady when a connection is made. You can also connect using NFC - simply tap your NFC-enabled smartphone or tablet to the marked tag.

We like the black finish of our review sample, but the Pill is available in six other bright colours.

A 3.5mm input is standard on most wireless speakers, but the Pill also offers a lineout to connect to other speaker systems, and a headphone output - using AKG's excellent K451s lends the sound a touch more solidity and intimacy.

There are just seven hours of juice on offer, which seems rather paltry compared with the Ultimate Ears Boom (15 hours) and the Panasonic SC-NA10 (20 hours). Make sure the Pill is on full charge before going portable, or keep the USB cable close by to charge via your laptop or computer. A mains adapter is also included, along with a carry pouch.

If you're after that characteristic bold and bass-tastic Beats sound, you'll be disappointed with the Pill. It's pricey, too: we expect a much more engaging and articulate listen for £170. At this price, it's a tough thing to swallow.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Small and portable; easy to use; agile sound; lively with punchy, bass-heavy music

AGAINST Sounds thin; could be more detailed, dynamic and agile; picky with music; pricey

VERDICT All style and little substance - the Pill can't compete with more accomplished rivals



If Beats is responding to criticism of its bass-heavy sound, it's gone too far the other way

Bose SoundLink Mini £170

★★★★★

The Bose SoundLink Mini put a smile on our faces when we heard the lashings of deep, rich bass coming out of such a tiny wireless speaker.

Compact speakers of this kind and price don't tend to dig deep into the lower frequencies, but the SoundLink Mini's bass performance is deep and inviting. More importantly, it underpins the overall sound with a sense of weight that's lovely to hear, enveloping you in a warm, meaty performance - we're really impressed with the depth it packs in.

Stream any song over Bluetooth and it'll sound satisfyingly solid. It's a dynamic sound too, with plenty of punch to the thumping beats.

A welcome change

The rest of the frequency range hasn't been ignored either. Voices are rich and full of detail. The treble is smooth and gentle, and there's no hint of brightness - not even at higher volumes. It makes a welcome change from the wince-inducing harshness of rival speakers from Beats and JBL. That said, we'd like just a little more sparkle and bite.

The strength of that bass performance shouldn't be underestimated; along with the Ultimate Ears Boom it's head and

shoulders above any other speakers in this test, even if its lower frequencies occasionally overwhelm other elements in a way that they don't on the Boom. Play Nine Inch Nails' *Where Is Everybody?* via Spotify, and it's clear the twang of strings and synthesisers could do with a little more clarity.

Back to basics

Bose has taken a 'no frills' approach with the Mini: no NFC, no aptX streaming, no built-in mic for hands-free calls, and no smart app. So, what *does* the SoundLink Mini have? Just simple Bluetooth for wireless streaming and a 3.5mm input for wired connection. Let's keep this about the music, Bose seems to say.

You also get a charging cradle. It's a nice addition; the speaker slots in neatly, it can double as a stand and you can plug the mains charger into either the cradle or the speaker. We're a bit disappointed to see that it lasts a mere seven hours on battery power alone, though.

Pick up the Bose and the first thing you'll notice is how heavy it is, especially for such a small thing. Its weighty metal casing only adds to the premium quality feel. It certainly feels worth every penny of the £170 asking price.

The design looks slightly dated next to the cooler, bolder designs of the Ultimate Ears Boom and Creative Airwave HD, and the sleek modern finish of the Panasonic SC-NA10. But it's a good size, and a decent portable option - as long as you don't mind the weight. The silver aluminium casing is the only finish, but Bose gives you the choice of adding on clear plastic covers with blue, green or orange highlights.

Given the choice between a thin, sharp sound that's lacking in bass, and heaps of rich, deep bass backing a punchy sound, we'd go for the latter. This Bose might not quite have all the features and complete sonic balance of the Ultimate Ears Boom, but its bass depth, build quality and confident delivery make the SoundLink Mini an outstanding contender at this price.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Satisfyingly deep bass; goes loud; good detail and excitement; solid construction

AGAINST Bass could do with a touch more bite to match the best in class

VERDICT This Bose is tiny but its warm, rich, bassy sound is music to our ears

Living with it Easy operation

The grey rubber buttons on top of the SoundLink Mini are functional, easy to the touch and responsive. There's a button each for Bluetooth and auxiliary input, so it's easy to switch between wireless and wired streaming.



Don't be fooled by the understated looks; the SoundLink Mini makes an emphatic musical statement



Lightning does strike twice.



NAD D 3020

Hybrid Digital Amplifier



Legend has it that the NAD 3020 brought true hi-fi sound to music lovers the world over, stunning millions by sounding bigger and way more powerful than it had any right to. NAD now introduces the D 3020 Hybrid Digital Amplifier, a completely modern take on the original NAD 3020 for the digital audiophile. Using the latest lightning fast digital technology, wireless streaming with aptX Bluetooth, an unique implementation of NAD PowerDrive™, and hybrid digital architecture, the D 3020 represents the same game-changing innovation that raised the original 3020 to cult status.

The D 3020 is no accident. Lightning really does strike twice.

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Creative Airwave HD £120

★★★★☆

With its funky design, the Creative Airwave HD wireless speaker wants to be seen as much as heard. It certainly makes a bold visual statement. The triangular form, available in black or red, stands out from the majority of rectangular or cylindrical shapes that pepper the portable speaker market.

Stability and direction

The design is practical - Creative Labs claims the triangular shape minimises vibrations. It's certainly a rigid, stable construction. The tilted baffle also aims to deliver sound directly to the listener, rather than projecting it straight ahead. This is generally a well thought-out unit, although we wish a little more care had been given to the rather flimsy feel of the top-mounted control buttons.

The Airwave HD is perfect for outdoors, rugged use. We're not worried about getting it dirty or scuffed - it's a tough unit. It may not be as compact and portable-friendly as rival speakers such as the Ultimate Ears Boom or JBL Charge, but it can be slung into a backpack easily enough.

Sadly, all this adventurous potential is let down a bit by a paltry seven hours of battery life. Others manage more.

It's the first time Creative Labs has used NFC technology in its products, and other features of this wireless speaker include apt-X streaming support and a built-in mic for hands-free calls. Oh, and it speaks to you, too (see below).

Connecting to the Airwave HD is easy. Simply tap an NFC-enabled Android or Windows device to the back of the speaker (with Bluetooth turned on). Apple devices and computers connect via the more 'conventional' Bluetooth.

Energy supplier

We like the open and spacious sound. There's a lively sense of rhythm and plenty of energy. The bassline may not go as deep as on the Bose SoundLink Mini speaker, but it is solid, and the sparkling treble has plenty of bite.

The wide soundfield is admirable, and turning up the volume gives a larger sense of scale. That increase in volume does, however, expose some of the Airwave's flaws. The treble can sound a touch too hard, and the clash and clatter of percussion gains a bright edge. A bigger problem, though, comes with voices, which start to sound muffled.

Stream Van Halen's *Take Your Whiskey Home* and plucked strings come across

in a detailed and confident manner, but the Airwave loses its composure when the rest of the instruments join in. It sounds a little confused, as if it's not able to juggle all the different elements of a song in an organised manner. It's all a bit messy, and the cohesion of songs is lost.

Switch to the 3.5mm wired connection and voices sound cleaner, guitar strings lose some of that overly hard character for a more musical twang, and it's a touch tauter. However it does sound a little restrained. Switch back to Bluetooth streaming and the large, airy sound returns. You pick your poison...

The HD's talents seem restricted to delivering a big scale of music really loudly. Its energy is commendable, but it doesn't quite excite elsewhere. It's sturdy and well priced, though - just a little rough around the edges.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Sturdy build quality; funky colours; goes loud; big, spacious sound; good for outdoor use

AGAINST Sound is short on detail; needs more precision and clarity; finish could be better

VERDICT It looks striking, but there's nothing remarkable or exciting about its sound quality



Robust, stable and blessed with a big sound, the Creative lends itself well to outdoor use

Living with it A real talking point

Fancy a chat? Just push a button and the Airwave HD will talk to you. A female voice regales you with status updates when you do something, such as 'Powering on', and 'Pairing mode, waiting for device to connect' when you press the Bluetooth button.

JBL Charge £120

★★★★☆

The **JBL Charge** wireless speaker joins a long list of impressive speakers from the company. Most recently, we were smitten with the £100 Flip's attractive build and lively sound. Can the bigger, pricier Charge live up to our expectations?

It's a punchy, energetic performance – hallmark characteristics of the JBL sound – but it also has a rather coarse and harsh treble. It's the first thing you'll notice, and it doesn't quite go away no matter how long the Charge has been run in. We're surprised, and a little disappointed, as there's little sign of JBL's usually full-bodied performance.

Feel the rhythm

There's still plenty of enthusiasm, though, and great ability with rhythm and detail. Play Rage Against the Machine's *Killing In The Name Of*, and the sheer energy bursts through. It's a taut performance: the edges of notes are clearly defined, voices are direct, and the unit can go pretty loud. Despite a lightweight bass that takes away some of the aggression in the song, it still manages to make an impact: the drums hit with precision, and Zack de la Rocha's spitting vocals are full of verve and bite.

Switch to something gentler, such as Doctor Who composer Murray Gold's *Fish Custard* interlude, where a playful oboe takes centre stage. The violin strings and crashing cymbals sound just a little too sharp, and the trombones and tubas don't quite have that rumble and depth that we're looking for, but the JBL Charge easily conveys the lively rhythm and uplifting dynamics of the music.

The clue's in the name

The standout feature on the Charge, fittingly, is the USB charging port at one end. It gives your smart device an extra bit of juice if you're going portable. Just remember to take along a USB charging cable. There's no need to worry about draining the JBL's battery life – it lasts a good 12 hours.

The Charge looks a bit like a large flashlight, but its compact and sturdy build make it easy to carry around and use outdoors. You can play around with positioning, too. Placing it horizontally on its rubber support makes the speaker fire downwards slightly, with its sound bouncing off any surface you place it on. It seems to lose a bit of cohesion like this, so we prefer using it vertically, where it sounds a touch more open.

Elsewhere, the Charge keeps it simple with Bluetooth streaming and a 3.5mm input. It's easy to use too, with the power button/pairing control and volume rocker your only controls. It also comes in four different finishes: grey, green, blue and shadow (it has black accents instead of white).

The JBL Charge is a decent portable option. Its £120 price-tag makes it more competitive than rivals such as the Beats Pill (£170), Beyer Audio SoundBook (£150) and Panasonic SC-NA10 (£130), although its far more capable stablemate, the Flip, remains its biggest competition at just £100.

The JBL Charge's harsh treble might be hard to get over for some buyers, but there's a punchy and enthusiastic sound underneath that coarse surface that's worth a listen.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Punchy, energetic sound; good detail; portability; charges smartphone; price

AGAINST A rather coarse treble; needs more refinement; could do with deeper bass

VERDICT While we'd love more weight, the detail, portability and price make it worthwhile



JBL keeps it simple with Bluetooth and a 3.5mm input – but it also has a USB charging point

Goliath, Meet David.

This legend is more than just a shot in the dark. Crafted with the same high-gloss wood finishes and sensuous curves, combined with state-of-the-art driver technology and cabinet construction, the Imagine mini and Imagine T2 might sound like the classic underdog tale but it isn't. Both are cut from the same stone for an equally seamless 'true-to-nature' performance full of rich musical detail.

PSB Imagine mini



PSB Imagine T2



Available at all Sevenoaks Sound and Vision Stores.

REAL SOUND for REAL PEOPLE

www.PSBspeakers.com



An elegant, practical and solid design in almost every respect – it's just a shame about that cabinet...

Panasonic SC-NA10 £130

★★★★☆

The SC-NA10 oozes class and subtlety. It's a wonderfully refined, detailed and rhythmic wireless speaker, but with one flaw that stops it from going straight to the top of the class. The entire cabinet vibrates, leading to a bloated, distorted bass that inelegantly sticks out from the rest of the frequencies.

Clear, open and articulate

It's a real shame as, for the most part, this speaker is absolutely lovely to listen to. It sounds clear, open and articulate. Stream David Bowie's *Sound and Vision* over Bluetooth, and his voice is nuanced, expressive and packed full of detail. The rhythm is lively and precise, and the guitar twangs sparkle without sounding sharp or bright in any way. There's punch, weight and warmth – it's mostly a musical and utterly captivating sound.

The dynamic highs and lows are conveyed with ease and composure, and it can go pretty loud too. We switch to a wired connection, using the 3.5mm input to plug in our Apple iPhone, and the sound retains its sonic character. It's a touch tauter and cleaner, but it sounds just a little more spacious via Bluetooth.

There is, though, this glaring problem. Play Stevie Wonder's *Superstition* or Big

Bad Voodoo Daddy's *Mr Pinstripe Suit*, and the deep basslines and drumbeats sound far too thumpy and out of sync with the rest of the frequencies. It's not a problem with the drive unit or amplifier, but the construction of the Panasonic's cabinet that's the issue here. It resonates at the same frequency as the lower end, and it feels as if the 8cm passive driver is trying to burst out of the casing. The entire casing vibrates. A lot. We're disappointed, as this Panasonic speaker is excellent in every other regard.

That includes the gorgeous finish of this small speaker. It's a sleek shape, the silver aluminium finish is classy, and the control buttons are discreetly placed along the side. The cover can be swapped for other finishes, and it looks smart. It also opens and folds into a nifty stand.

Boost your battery life

Technically, this speaker lasts for 20 hours, but that's only when it's in LP (Long Play) mode. Press the LP button on the side, and you'll hear a softer, less powerful sound that uses less power so that the battery can last longer.

You can connect to the SC-NA10 via NFC (Near Field Communication) and Bluetooth. Simply tap your NFC-enabled

device (Android or Windows) to the tag on the top of the speaker, or use the standard Bluetooth link (Apple). The Panasonic can also be used to charge your smartphone while playing music.

You can also download the Panasonic Music Streaming App and create playlists from songs stored on your smartphone, and there's a built-in mic, so you can take calls and use the SC-NA10 as a speakerphone.

We're equally smitten and disappointed with the Panasonic SC-NA10. It shines above the rest of the competition with its greater subtlety, clarity and rhythm than price rivals such as the Ultimate Ears Boom, Bose SoundLink Mini and Beyer Dynamic SoundBook. It's immaculately finished too, but the problem of that vibrating cabinet simply won't go away.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Subtle detail; punchy dynamics; agility; solid, smooth sound; classy design; portability

AGAINST Cabinet vibrations are distracting and disappointing; over-prominent bass

VERDICT If it weren't for the vibrations, this Panasonic would have been a serious contender

Ultimate Ears Boom £170

★★★★★

This is a cool product. It has the looks, the build, and the extra features to make it an extremely attractive proposition. And it sounds great, too.

Essentially, the UE Boom is really fun to listen to. It has bags of detail, heaps of energy, and is wonderfully engaging. It's meant to be positioned upright, and the 360-degree effect promised by Ultimate Ears pays off - the soundfield is wide and spacious. It's a satisfyingly weighty and involving sound.

It can go loud, too, and retains its composure at higher volumes. It also has a better balance across the frequencies than most other speakers of its type and price. There's bite and attack, punch and impact, and the Boom keeps the music cohesive and exciting thanks to an agile sense of rhythm. It's not picky with genres, either, so you can enjoy Nina Simone and David Bowie alongside Amanda Palmer and Warrant.

Getting the balance right

The Boom doesn't veer towards a thin and bright sound like the JBL Charge, Bajan Audio SoundBook or the Creative Airwave HD, nor does it drown in deep bass like the Bose SoundLink Mini. In absolute terms, it could do with a touch

more refinement and transparency, as delivered by the Panasonic SC-NA10, but overall the Boom is a speaker that you can enjoy from the second you turn it on.

Attractive extras

It's not all about sound quality, though. The Ultimate Ears Boom has one or two tricks up its sleeve, including Double Play (see below), and its cool app.

The UE Boom app is one of the most useful and well designed apps we've come across. You can use it to scroll through an illustrated manual, access EQ settings ('Out Loud' and 'Intimate' were our favourites), check the battery percentage, and set an alarm. You can pick which song to wake up to from your smartphone's music playlist, or simply pick the 'Last Music Played' option. The app will prompt you when there's an update available, and you can run a software upgrade via an internet-connected computer.

The Boom is tough and sturdy, with a 'plasma-coated' finish that's water- and stain-resistant. It also lasts for a respectable 15 hours on a full charge.

The power and Bluetooth-pairing buttons are discreetly in-laid on the top of the speaker, and light up when in use.

There's also an accompanying drum beat for each action - it's a fun effect.

Bluetooth pairing is fast and easy, and you can connect via NFC - just tap your compatible device against the Boom's side strip, and you're connected in seconds. Hidden underneath the speaker is the USB charging port and 3.5mm input, and there's a built-in mic so you can use the Boom as a speakerphone.

We're impressed with the Ultimate Ears Boom. It's compact, and has some great features that you simply don't see in most wireless speakers. Plus it's designed to be as easy to use as possible. More importantly, it sounds fantastic. There could be some subtle tweaks, but its big, spacious sound has excellent detail and rhythm, and is exciting and engaging. Give the UE Boom a go - we think you'll have as much fun as we did.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Cool, easy-to-use design; big, fun sound; good dynamics; great app and extra features

AGAINST Only a slight lack of refinement

VERDICT It looks fun, it sounds exciting, and there are plenty of nifty features to play around with. This is a great little speaker

Sometimes a speaker just hits on the right blend of style, quality and featuring. That's what's happened here



Double Play Two become one

The highlight of the Boom's special features is the ability to link two of them together. You can choose 'Double Play' (which plays both speakers together for a bigger, louder sound) or play them in stereo mode. Yes, you'll have to buy a second Boom, but we think it's worth it.

TEST VERDICT

THE WINNER

Ultimate Ears Boom

£170 ★★★★★

All these speakers know which ingredients to use, but only the **Ultimate Ears Boom** serves up a truly satisfying sonic feast

The **Ultimate Ears Boom** stands out from the crowd of portable wireless speakers. It's cool, and has entertaining sound and features.

But this wasn't a clear-cut test. These wireless speakers are all well matched: they're compact, portable, and they all feature Bluetooth streaming. But their sonic characteristics differ wildly, and it was a bumpy ride to finding a winner.

Weight problem

The overriding issue with most of the speakers here is a lack of solid, weighty sound. First to fall at this hurdle is the Beats Pill. It's petite and well-made, but with a sound too weak and brittle to really get our groove on. Or to justify £170. If you're looking for Beats' usually big, bassy sound, you won't find it here.

It's a similar story with the JBL Charge and Beyer Audio SoundBook; both four-star speakers but both

These speakers are all well matched: they're compact, portable, and they all feature Bluetooth streaming. But they also differ wildly and it was a bumpy ride to finding a winner

delivering a slightly thin sound. The Charge swaps rich tones for a rather unrefined treble, but the JBL's energetic core is still apparent in its lively rhythm. The 15-hour battery life and £120 price tag got the thumbs up from us.

The neat Beyer Audio focuses all its energies on delivering the mid-to-top ranges with finesse. The presentation may be on the thin side, but it sparkles with a detailed and engaging sound.

The Creative Airwaves HD is good but not quite good enough. It's bigger, louder, and more spacious-sounding than most here, but doesn't do anything remarkable elsewhere and lacks a little refinement in sound- and build quality.

The biggest disappointment for us is the Panasonic SC-NA10. Gorgeous looks,

a classy finish, a subtle and articulate sound - apart from that disengaged bass and vibrating cabinet. It's such a shame, as it's an excellent speaker otherwise, and would've been a runaway winner.

Two clear leaders

And that leaves us with two five-star speakers that really raise the game. The Bose SoundLink Mini shows it's possible to deliver a deep, warm, rich sound from a small speaker. Take note, Beats. But it's the **Ultimate Ears Boom** that ticks all the right boxes. It's an attractive product, its extra features are fun and useful, and it delivers the most balanced sound here. Detailed, engaging and dynamic - it's the speaker we had the most fun with, and the one we'd most happily take home.



SYSTEM BUILDER

Perfect partners for the Ultimate Ears Boom



Smartphone

Apple iPhone 5s ★★★★★

Intuitive interface and ample storage make this great for streaming to a portable speaker



Musicstreaming service

Spotify ★★★★★ £10/month

Millions of songs at your fingertips, plus Spotify Connect for switching 'twixt devices



Another wireless speaker

Ultimate Ears Boom ★★★★★ £170

You can pair up two Boom speakers to play in tandem or in stereo mode - it's a fun feature

Total build £340 (+ Spotify)

**Bayan Audio SoundBook****£150** ★★★★★☆

Bluetooth Yes

AptX Yes

NFC Yes

Aux in Yes

Battery life 10 hours

Dimensions (hwd) 9 x 16 x 4cm

Weight 562g

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

**Beats Pill****£170** ★★★★★☆

Bluetooth Yes

AptX No

NFC Yes

Aux in Yes

Battery life 7 hours

Dimensions (hwd) 5 x 19 x 5cm

Weight 325g

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

**Bose SoundLink Mini****£170** ★★★★★★

Bluetooth Yes

AptX No

NFC No

Aux in Yes

Battery life 7 hours

Dimensions (hwd) 5 x 18 x 6cm

Weight 655g

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

**Creative Airwave HD****£120** ★★★★★☆

Bluetooth Yes

AptX Yes

NFC Yes

Aux in Yes

Battery life 7 hours

Dimensions (hwd) 10 x 26 x 10cm

Weight 980g

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

**JBL Charge****£120** ★★★★★☆

Bluetooth Yes

AptX No

NFC No

Aux in Yes

Battery life 12 hours

Dimensions (hwd) 7 x 18 x 7cm

Weight 464g

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

**Panasonic SC-NA10****£130** ★★★★★☆

Bluetooth Yes

AptX Yes

NFC Yes

Aux in Yes

Battery life 20 hours

Dimensions (hwd) 10 x 20 x 3cm

Weight 520g

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

**Ultimate Ears Boom****£170** ★★★★★★

Bluetooth Yes

AptX No

NFC Yes

Aux in Yes

Battery life 15 hours

Dimensions (hwd) 16 x 7 x 7cm

Weight 538g

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

WHAT TO LOOK FOR**Battery life**

The longer the better, especially if you're going portable. Seven hours is OK, but 10+ is possible. Bonus points if your speaker has a USB port to charge your smartphone.

Build quality

A portable speaker needs to be compact and light, but still sturdy and well-finished. Check it doesn't feel flimsy or cheap, that it won't get too scuffed or dirty if it's used outdoors, and that the controls are responsive and easy to operate.

Auxiliary input

Bluetooth is most convenient, but a wired connection can often sound better. Make sure your speaker also has a 3.5mm input.

AptX

We wouldn't get too hung up on aptX support, as these speakers aren't transparent enough to fully reveal the benefits of this format.



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You don't need to spend a fortune on a Blu-ray player to get stunning images, terrific sound – and serious smarts



The budget end of the Blu-ray player market is seriously crowded.

These disc-spinners come in all shapes and sizes, and they all want a piece of your living room space.

Most will give you superb pictures and decent sound, and some have even received the fancy smart features found on pricier models.

We've assembled five affordable candidates, which can be had from £80. They all have different strengths – and weaknesses, of course – but there's a player here to suit you.

WHAT'S ON TEST

LGBP630 p80

Philips BDP3380 p81

Pioneer BDP-160 p82

Sony BDP-S4100 p85

Toshiba BDX5400 p86

We start off with a Blu-ray of *The Lone Ranger*, and there's a good sense of detail to Johnny Depp's painted face. It's a gritty movie and the LG does a decent job with the rough textures



If it's smart features you're interested in, this LG is well worth a look. It's a competent player, but can't compete with rivals for ultimate picture quality

LG BP630 £90 ★★★★★

Consider if

Features are more important to you than performance.

Avoid if you have a big collection of DVDs. The upscaler isn't as good as it is on rivals here.

Highlight The smart interface. There's a decent selection of apps, and you can stream your own content too.

This is the middle unit in LG's 2013 family of Blu-ray players. It sits just below the flagship BP730, which had a few party tricks but disappointed us with lacklustre picture and sound. Will its little brother suffer the same fate?

Well, the picture is fine. We start off with a Blu-ray of *The Lone Ranger*, and there's a good sense of detail to Johnny Depp's painted face. It's a gritty-looking movie and the LG does a decent job keeping up with all the rough textures.

When we switch to something a bit more colourful, however - the neon-lit Japanese scenes of *The Wolverine* - the LG begins to creak. Contrast could be stronger, and colours need a dose or three of vibrancy. It's watchable all right, but it feels a touch subdued.

The 3D performance is competent, but the picture at its weakest with standard def, the LG struggling at upscaling. The image is softer and noisier than some, while maintaining the lack of punch.

The sound is a bit like the picture in that it needs more dynamism. We watch

robots fighting sea monsters in *Pacific Rim* and there's good weight to the performance, but the delivery feels flat. We expect rumbling bass to accompany a creature picking up an oil tanker, but that sense of power doesn't come across.

Things don't get much better as we play music from CDs and music Blu-rays. The LG doesn't have a great grip on timing, and organisation is a little messier than we'd like. The sound is listenable, but it doesn't draw you in.

A superbly featured player

If you're more interested in features than performance, LG has you covered with a smart experience comprehensive enough to rival pricier Blu-ray players.

You get a proper smart hub with pages of content: 'Smart Share' shows you the content on your other devices; 'Premium' is the page for video-on-demand apps, where YouTube is joined by BBC iPlayer, Lovefilm, Blinkbox and Netflix; more apps can be downloaded on the next page, 'LG Smart World'.

Connections are par for the budget Blu-ray course. You get a single HDMI socket and an optical output, while an ethernet port offers a more stable alternative to the built-in wi-fi. At the front is a USB port, hidden behind a flap. We like the brushed metal effect on the entire top surface, which makes the machine look classier than you'd expect from the price tag.

The LG BP630 is a mixed bag. Its smart offering is impressive for the money, but the picture is merely decent and the sound is disappointing. For the money (or less) you could buy a better Blu-ray player.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Smart interface has a decent selection of apps; good looks

AGAINST Picture lacks vibrancy; sound needs better organisation and timing

VERDICT It looks nice and has good features, but sound and picture could be better

The Philips is an honest, robust player that does all the important things very well. It lacks only the final polish of the very best performers here



We're impressed with the picture quality. It's dynamic and punchy, colours are vibrant but not overblown and contrast is strong. Sound quality also impresses with plenty of insight

Philips BDP3380 £80 ★★★★★

This Philips isn't a jack of all trades, rather a simple, robust offering that will get the job done without resorting to bells and whistles.

The BDP3380 isn't much of a looker. It's not unattractive, but it doesn't have the bold crystal-bling approach of the Sony BDP-S4100, nor the classy, traditional look of the Pioneer BDP-160. Then again, you may be looking for something inconspicuous, in which case this will do nicely.

Connections are decent: there's one HDMI socket at the back, with digital coaxial and analogue audio outputs. You get composite video - rare these days. There's also an ethernet socket, but no built-in wi-fi. We don't think it's a big deal, because Philips hasn't gone for all-singing, all-dancing smart features. Go to the home screen and you'll find only YouTube and Picasa. You won't be doing anything smarter here than video and photo sharing, though DLNA certification means you can stream content from a networked computer.

Moving around the menus is a pleasure. The interface is big, responsive, and simply laid out. The remote control, too, is nice to use. There's also the Philips MyRemote smartphone app for Android and iOS, which works just as well but doesn't seem formatted for larger screens.

A dynamic and punchy picture

Time for a Blu-ray, and we put on *Man of Steel*. We're impressed with the picture quality, even as the film disappoints. It's dynamic and punchy - colours are vibrant but not overblown, and contrast is strong. There's plenty of detail, and subtlety of shading is up there with the best at this price. It's competent with 3D as well. Overall, though, the Sony BDP-S4100 has the edge.

It's much the same as we move down to a DVD of *Star Trek: Into Darkness* - an attractive picture that's a little short of the best. We're happy with the upscaling quality: the drop in crispness and bump in picture noise is offset by strong contrast, solid edges and fairly smooth motion.

Sound quality also impresses. The Philips is an exciting listen, with good dynamic reach. There's plenty of insight thanks to a high level of detail and clarity. It's a weighty sound with gentle edges, which leads to a full, round presentation.

We're happy with the BDP3380. Its picture and sound performance is strong. It may be lacking in smart features, but that's offset by a swift, responsive user experience that makes it a joy to use. This is a great value player, and it's only the presence of the very best at the price that keeps it from earning a fifth star.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Punchy picture; weighty sound; clean, responsive interface

AGAINST Could do with more features; no built-in wi-fi

VERDICT A very good performer with impressive ergonomics, but beaten by the best

Consider if you're after a Blu-ray player that has a full set of analogue outputs.

Avoid if you're after the latest smart features. You only get Picasa and YouTube.

Highlight The interface. It's big, clear and responsive, which is arguably better than a smart system that stutters.

What a performance it is: we're impressed by the bold and punchy picture. And the sound is just as impressive. It seems that focusing on performance has paid off for Pioneer



The Pioneer lacks a little, perhaps, in specification for a modern Blu-ray player - but for us its performance more than makes up for that

Pioneer BDP-160 £120 ★★★★★

Consider if you want a traditional-looking Blu-ray player that puts disc-spinning above features.

Avoid if you want to download apps such as BBC iPlayer. You only get YouTube and Picasa for video and photo sharing.

Highlight The punchy picture and weighty sound make this one of the best Blu-ray players we've seen for the money.

Some manufacturers go for flashy styling. Others offer fancy tricks. Pioneer has a different approach here: the BDP-160 is a budget Blu-ray player that's most concerned with performance.

And what a performance it is: we're very impressed by the bold and punchy picture. We start off with a Blu-ray of *Pacific Rim* and contrast is strong, with vibrant but nicely balanced colours. It's a detailed picture too. The Sony BDP-S4100 may be a touch more nuanced with finer details and subtle shading, but there's not much in it.

We switch to a DVD of *Return Of The King* and the Pioneer shows itself to be a good upscaler too. There's an inevitable drop in sharpness and clarity, but the picture is still punchy, with good colours and plenty of detail.

And the sound is just as impressive as the picture. It's tonally even, the BDP-160 taking as much care with dialogue as it does with robots punching monsters in the face. There's also a good sense of texture to sounds.

That carries over to music and a Blu-ray of Beyoncé in concert. The sound is wide, and atmospheric. It's balanced, detailed, and comfortably weighty with CDs as well, relishing Eminem's *Marshall Mathers LP2*.

Its performance with 3D is competent rather than earthshattering, but perfectly acceptable for the price.

Solid features for the money too

It seems that focusing on performance has paid off for Pioneer. And that doesn't mean the machine is lacking elsewhere. This doesn't look or feel like a budget machine - it's solid and substantial, which is in stark contrast to most rivals.

There's a decent set of connections. You get one each of HDMI, digital coaxial and two-channel analogue outputs. There are also two USB ports, to play files from a memory stick.

A LAN socket and built-in wi-fi give you access to YouTube and Picasa. That's all you get, but there are network-based features such as DLNA (stream from a

networked computer) or wi-fi direct (copy your smartphone's image on screen). It's a reasonable, if not class-leading list.

The remote control is nicely laid out and clearly labelled. If you want something a little fancier, there's the Award-winning Pioneer iControlAV2013 smartphone app for Android and iOS.

The Pioneer BDP-160 has shown that you don't need shiny looks or snazzy features to be really good. This entry-level unit may be a simple affair, but where it counts it's up with the best at this price. It's no all-in-one media box, but if you're after a no-frills Blu-ray player, you need to give this a go.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Punchy picture; weighty sound; high build quality

AGAINST Rivals pack more features; sparse menu system

VERDICT This no-frills contrast to the usual feature-packed box makes a refreshing change

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We're rather taken with the Sony's crystal-inspired design. But we're utterly smitten with this machine's sublime performance



It's the performance that really impresses, with the picture scoring very highly. It's crisp and clean with an astonishing level of fine detail. Sound is lean and agile, like all Sony players

Sony BDP-S4100 £80 ★★★★★

This machine won an Award from us this year, so it's the one all the others here have to beat. It's an unusual design, with a sloping, angular shape inspired by rock crystal. Even the control buttons along the top surface are shaped like tiny crystals. Don't look too closely: the casing is mostly plastic, and is a little susceptible to scuffs. It's a well put-together unit, though.

The BDP-S4100 sits at the lower end of Sony's latest range of Blu-ray players, just below the BDP-S5100. This one doesn't have built-in wi-fi - you'll need a wired connection or USB LAN dongle for internet access. That's the only thing on paper that differentiates it from its big brother, which costs an extra £50. So you do get (decent) 3D and SACD ability, USB playback and DLNA for streaming from a networked computer or storage device.

It's the performance that really impresses, with the picture scoring very highly. It's crisp and clean, and there's an astonishing level of fine detail. The Pioneer BDP-160 has an edge when it

comes to boldness of colours, but the Sony offsets this with a greater degree of punch, thanks to impressive contrast and cleaner whites. We're also pleased with the Sony's performance with dark scenes, where there is good detail.

The Sony is also a strong upscaler when playing a DVD. Lines are drawn solidly and there's still plenty of detail. It even makes a decent fist of noise reduction.

It's a tight, fast sound as well

When it comes to sound, the BDP-S4100 is like a lot of other Sony Blu-ray players: lean and agile. Explosions are taut and precise - it's an exciting, attacking sound that succeeds in conveying mood. We play a Blu-ray of *Pacific Rim* and skip to the appearance of the first sea monster: as the beast rises out of the water in front of the fishing boat, the sense of power is tremendous. There's also remarkable detail and texture in the roars and guttural breathing sounds.

Despite putting out an impressive performance, Sony has also seen fit to

cram in a very decent smart experience. You get video-on-demand apps such as Netflix, Lovefilm and BBC iPlayer, all wrapped up in a slick and responsive interface. At this price we wouldn't expect such a comprehensive service - we're more concerned about video and audio quality - but we wouldn't turn down such a fine feature.

We think the picture and sound performance alone is worth the price of admission. The fact that you get a top-quality smart experience as well is a lovely bonus. The BDP-S4100 is a brilliant Blu-ray player, and very good value for money.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Punchy picture; agile sound; good features that belie the price

AGAINST We're stretching a bit here, but if we must: no built-in wi-fi

VERDICT An almost-flawless budget Blu-ray player and top value for money

Consider if you want a talented all-rounder that gives you a punchy performance in picture and sound, but also offers a satisfying smart experience

Avoid if you're after a meaty sound. The Sony sacrifices a bit of substance for agility and attack.

Highlight the 'sense of quartz' design, which we find distinctive - in a good way.

We load up a Blu-ray of *Wolverine* and it looks... fine. It's a punchy performance: colours are vivid, edges are sharp and there's a decent amount of detail. It is a bit brash, however



This unit is small, even by modern-day Blu-ray player standards. It's reasonably well specified as well - but sadly its performance lets it down

Toshiba BDX5400 £80 ★★☆☆☆

Consider if you still have a big DVD collection. The lower resolution doesn't show up as many of the flaws.

Avoid playing Blu-rays, because high-def content will make the flaws more apparent.

Highlight It looks nice, and takes up very little space under the telly.

The BDX5400 isn't a Blu-ray player. It's a media box that plays Blu-rays. Well, that's what Toshiba said at CES 2013. Sounds flash, but sadly this unit doesn't really excel at being a smart device or a Blu-ray player.

It is, though, one of the smallest Blu-ray players we've seen. It will easily fit under your TV.

Let's start with the picture. We load up a Blu-ray of *The Wolverine* and it looks... fine. It's a punchy performance: colours are vivid, edges are sharp, and there's a decent amount of detail. It is a bit brash, however. The colours are a bit bright, and it's lacking in fine texture, especially in the darker areas. The likes of the Sony and Pioneer dig up more detail, and deliver motion in a far more stable and convincing way.

3D performance is decent, thanks in part to the darkness of the glasses making the picture more gentle on the eyes. It still needs more insight, however.

The video shortcomings are less apparent in the switch to DVD. It's a

decent upscaler: the picture is fairly free from noise and lines are reasonably solid. But again, it's not very subtle.

And the 5400 seems to have the same attitude to sound as it does video: it's a bit shouty. It's a loud, brash presentation with a decent amount of detail, but we found the sound hard and often bright. Dynamic reach is decent, but the overall sound is more tiring than it is exciting.

In memory of Acetrax...

A middling audiovisual performance, then, but how about all the smart stuff? Well the system interface is easy to navigate, but not always responsive. It's not the best smart experience we've had.

The neat tile layout provides a smattering of apps - YouTube, Picasa, Netflix, BBC iPlayer and Facebook. But taking centre stage is a massive tile that serves as a shortcut to Acetrax for video on demand. Nice idea, but Acetrax is no more, so this is literally a waste of space.

You can also access your own content, via a USB stick or a networked computer.

We used the unit primarily on wired LAN. There is built-in wi-fi, but it's picky about connection and not very stable.

At the back is a basic set of connections: digital coaxial, HDMI, LAN. There is a USB port on the side, which means memory sticks are vulnerable.

The build quality is solid enough, although the disc drive is audible during quieter scenes.

We're frustrated by this Toshiba. It's an attempt at both Blu-ray and smart content, neither of which comes off. It's hard to recommend, even if you're tight on space. You can do much better for the money.

Rating ★★☆☆☆

FOR Small size; good looks

AGAINST Brash picture and sound performance; smart interface needs more variety and stability; unpredictable software

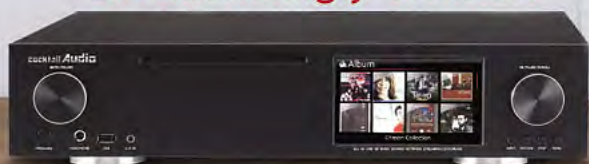
VERDICT A disappointing Blu-ray player (that looks good and saves space)

cocktail **Audio X30**

Listen to the future

HD music server, network streamer, CD
ripper and power amplifier.

**Stunningly simple.
Breathtakingly brilliant**



**‘A modern-day music
centre all in one box’**

Superfi

FEATURES:

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- ⊙ Playback in lossless formats

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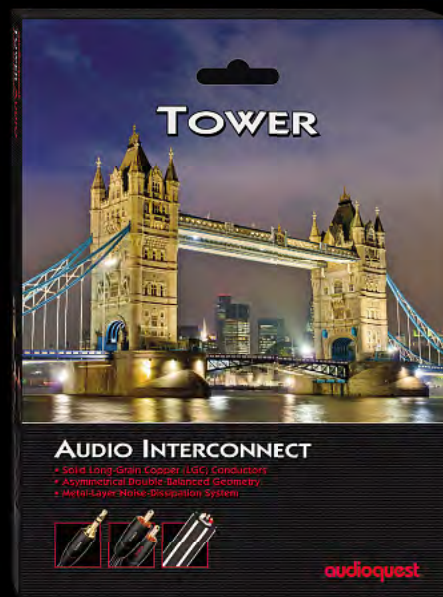


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TEST VERDICT

THE WINNER

Sony BDP-S4100

£80 ★★★★★



Its combination of terrific performance and fine smart functionality means the **Sony BDP-S4100** takes the spoils once again

It's another win for Sony. We're not remotely surprised, given the way Sony dominated the Awards (again) this year. Having said that, it wasn't as easy as some might have thought.

For the Pioneer BDP-160 put up a very good fight. It managed to match the Sony BDP-S4100 for picture and sound, and its strong build quality certainly helped.

Ultimately the Sony came out on top because of its more extensive smart features - and a newly lower price sealed the deal.

Coming in a respectable third place we have the Philips BDP3380. It's a simple, likeable player that focuses on thrills rather than frills. It demonstrated serious talent in picture and sound, and we really like the big, clean interface, but it's just edged out of the full five stars by the very best. Still, it's worth

consideration if you want a disc-spinner that simply gets the job done.

Beneath that is the LG BP630, which prioritises features over performance. It offers a smart experience that's almost as comprehensive as the one on the Sony, but sadly its picture and sound needs improvement.

Bringing up the rear is the Toshiba BDX5400, which has the same features-over-performance attitude, but without the skills to back it up.

Its smart offering is disappointing and the software is unstable. Top that off with a disappointing picture and sound, and there's very little cause to consider it. It is tiny, which might appeal to those really tight on space.

So there you have it: five Blu-ray players that won't break the bank, and three of them heartily recommended. But only one winner...

SYSTEM BUILDER

The fantastic Sony needs some excellent budget partners to go with it. Here they are



Television

Samsung PS51F550, £700 ★★★★★

A superb all-rounder that combines fantastic picture quality with a strong feature set



AV receiver

Yamaha RX-V375, £250 ★★★★★

Energetic and punchy surround sound performance that will thrill and engage



Speaker package

Tannoy HTS-101 £400 ★★★★★

Small but perfectly formed, with an open sound and good integration

Total build £1430



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

Facts & figures



LG BP630
£90 ★★☆☆☆

Video scaling 1080p •
24fps Yes • **Connections**
HDMI, optical digital out •
Dolby/DTS decoding Yes/Yes
• **SACD** No • **Dimensions**
(hwd) 4 x 43 x 21cm



Philips BDP3380
£80 ★★★★★

Video scaling 1080p • **24fps**
Yes • **Connections** HDMI,
composite out, coax digital out
• **Dolby/DTS decoding** Yes/
Yes • **SACD** No • **Dimensions**
(hwd) 4 x 44 x 21cm



Pioneer BDP-160
£120 ★★★★★

Video scaling 1080p •
24fps Yes • **Connections**
HDMI, coaxial digital out •
Dolby/DTS decoding Yes/Yes
• **SACD** Yes • **Dimensions**
(hwd) 6 x 44 x 25cm



Sony BDP-S4100
£80 ★★★★★

Video scaling 1080p •
24fps Yes • **Connections**
HDMI, coaxial digital out •
Dolby/DTS decoding Yes/Yes
• **SACD** Yes **Dimensions**
(hwd) 4 x 36 x 20cm



Toshiba BDX5400
£80 ★☆☆☆☆

Video scaling 1080p •
24fps Yes • **Connections**
HDMI, coaxial digital out •
Dolby/DTS decoding Yes/Yes
• **SACD** No **Dimensions** (hwd)
4 x 29 x 18cm

BELIEVE YOUR EYES

OLED TV has been just over the tech horizon for a decade but LG is finally bringing the screen to lucky living rooms. Believe the hype? You will when you see it

Sometimes, seeing is believing. It's fine being told that OLED is the future but it's only when you see the tech first hand that you realise what a jump OLED represents. Better, more vibrant, more accurate colours. Superior viewing angles. Lower power consumption and, of course, a thinner, more beautiful TV.

Don't be fooled by the apparent similarity in names between LED and OLED TVs: an OLED TV is to an LED TV what the Space Shuttle is to a biplane. LED TVs use a handful of edge-mounted backlights to illuminate the individual pixels that make up the screen. This is by no means an inefficient process: LED TVs are thinner than ever, they don't use much power, and as anyone with an LED TV will attest, image quality isn't exactly deplorable. The LED remains a great example of perfectly-working current-generation technology.

But OLED is going to blow your mind. First, the technology means the screen is unfeasibly thin – as thin as a mobile phone – and the screen can curve (more on that later). Where LED TVs use a handful of backlights, every single pixel in an OLED TV is its own light source. That

means more uniform brightness across the display, so there aren't darker areas in evenly lit scenes; OLED TV has an effectively unlimited contrast range. That's because when an OLED pixel is off, it's really, properly off. It emits no light. It is black. On an LED TV, a small amount of backlighting still bleeds through; the darkest colour possible is a dark grey.

LG's OLED TV has gone one step further and actually makes use of an extra colour. Where most TVs mix three colours – red, green and blue, LG's OLED adds white meaning greater colour consistency. As a result, LG's OLED TV offers more immersive viewing all round, whether you're watching a vibrant, primary-colour cartoon or a moody noir thriller.

For those on the fence, the final sweetener comes when you finally turn LG's OLED TV, the 55EA980W, off. TV has never looked so good: 4.3mm at its thinnest and with a hugely tempting 55in diagonal, the 55EA980W is a looker whether it's pumping out a blockbuster or sitting in the middle of a powercut. And the 55EA980W curves. Yes, curves. Gently inwards. The curve gradient has been precision-calculated to provide incredible viewing for a true cinematic experience.



THE LG 55EA980W CURVED OLED CINEMA 3D SMART TV

- FOUR COLOUR PIXEL
- INFINITE CONTRAST
- ABSOLUTE MOTION CLARITY

- PERFECT VIEWING ANGLE
- CURVED SCREEN
- CLEAR SPEAKER
- CRYSTAL STAND



LG Model shown 55EA980W

3 INCREDIBLE FILMS FOR AN LG OLED TV

1

IRON MAN 3

The third instalment of Tony Stark's adventures in his metal suit sees huge explosions and epic destruction mix with the complex emotions of being a flawed superhero. This is a massive cinema film best viewed on a massive cinematic screen.

2

LIFE OF PI

With some of the most convincing special effects ever, this story of a boy (Suraj Sharma) on a boat with a tiger (impressive CGI, mostly) is worth watching simply for the sensation of having your eyeballs caressed in extreme beauty – as well as being a multi-oscar winner.

3

THE ARTIST

Brilliant from start to finish, shot in black and white, and with barely a word of dialogue. Give The Artist the high-contrast-ratio treatment it deserves with an LG OLED TV.



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 **LG**
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TEMPTATIONS

“The most versatile high-end preamp we’ve tested”

■ **McIntosh C2500** Preamplifier

■ **£7495** ★★★★★☆

McIntosh's C2500 must be the most versatile high-end preamp we've ever tested.

Look beyond the distinctively gothic appearance and you'll find a forward-looking, comprehensively equipped product that can easily form the heart of any top-end stereo set-up.

The visuals are all McIntosh. The brand has such a strong identity that this preamp really couldn't be from anywhere else. The traditional output meters used in the C2500 are lit in the company's trademark blue. We're not sure how useful they are; we just know we like them. A lot.

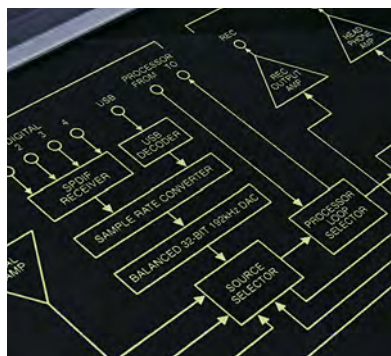
There's more to the McIntosh's visual idiosyncrasies than those gauges; there's also the black glass front panel and the distinctively traditional control design shared with other products in the range. Only the more conventional, large central display suggests there's something modern going on here.

The big news here as far as features are concerned is the integrated digital-to-analogue conversion circuitry, which works in tandem with inputs for USB, coaxial and optical connectors.

Digital yet traditional

Reassuringly, the headlong rush to accommodate most things digital hasn't seen traditional sources being ignored, either. Unlike most rivals - which are usually line-level-only units - the C2500 has a built-in phono circuitry that will handle both moving-magnet and moving-coil cartridges.

Take a look round the back and you'll find a plentiful supply of line-level connections of both the single-ended and balanced XLR variety. This preamp



has three XLR outputs, two of which are switchable - handy for use with secondary power amplifiers operational in other rooms.

And let's not forget about the headphone output. Most high-end rivals are more than happy to get rid of their headphone capability on the grounds of improved sound quality (and cost, no doubt). But McIntosh has taken things seriously and delivered a good-quality design that mirrors the performance of the main outputs - which is not always the case, even at this level.

The preamp's build quality is good, as is its finish. It feels solid and functional rather than luxurious, and its controls

work with precision. We'd like just a touch more weight and resistance to the volume knob and input selector though, just to reinforce the quality message.

For the most part this preamp feels like a focused tool to do a specific job as opposed to being something to show off with, and we're fine with that.

Illuminating experience

However, it wouldn't be a true McIntosh product if there weren't some form of visual excitement. Alongside those lovely meters you also enjoy the option of having the valve compartment lit. The three pairs of small valves - the heart of the C2500's electronic circuit - are clearly visible through a window at the top, and the extra light just makes them look a little more special. The effect is marked, but understated enough to leave on all the time.

The company has also printed a full set of technical specifications on the top panel. Useful? Possibly not, but the inner nerd in us quite likes it. You never know just when you might need to know the frequency response or the rated harmonic distortion in a hurry...

The C2500 is a big unit. Make sure you have a big enough, sturdy enough support for it - something that also leaves a good amount of space for air to flow, so preventing the preamp from getting too hot.

Versatility on set-up

Once that's sorted, set-up is relatively straightforward. Delve into the unit's menus and the inputs can be renamed, while the sensitivity and tonal balance for each one can be tweaked to taste without too much fuss.

TECH SPECS

Type Preamp
Line level in 8
MM phono in 1
MC phono in 1
Tape loops 1
Preamp out yes
Balanced out yes
Headphone out yes
Tone controls yes
Remote control yes
Dimensions (hwd)
19 x 44 x 46cm





**A full set of specs is printed on the top.
You never know when you might need
to know the rated harmonic distortion
in a hurry, after all...**

We're big fans of the McIntosh sound. It's huge, spreading the soundstage well beyond the outer edges of our reference ATC SCM 50 speakers. Partnered with Bryston's 4B SST2 power amplifier the stereo imaging is pleasingly precise. Each sound is crisply focused, and stays stable even when things get busy.

Scale and authority

Listening to Mahler's *Symphony No.4* (through USB) is a real treat. The preamp has a large-scale, authoritative presentation that also demonstrates lovely delicacy when required. The McIntosh's overall tone is on the rich side of neutral, but never seems overly rounded at higher frequencies. There's plenty of bite in the treble but a pleasing refinement too, which stops the preamp getting unnecessarily hard-edged even when the recording is.

Playing alt-J's *Dissolve Me* (from our Naim NDS/555PS streamer through the analogue inputs) shows off the McIntosh's lovely, full-bodied midrange,

Behind the music Charlie Randall McIntosh President



"While maintaining the romantic sound of tubes, the C2500 also manages the best measured performance of any

single-chassis McIntosh tube preamplifier. It does this by separating the power supply, and digital and control circuitry from the noise-sensitive analogue audio sections.

Six dual triode tubes are used to optimise pre-amplification of high level sources and phono playback, and you can assign tone controls to individual sources as needed. Digital sources can be output at up to 32-bit/192kHz.

Up to three stereo power amplifiers may be connected at one time and you can switch two on and off to simplify whole-house audio distribution."

The three pairs of neatly branded valves are on view at all times but, to enhance the effect, you can have them lit up



Round the back



1 Home install The home install market is massive in the USA (McIntosh's home). These connections make it easy to integrate the C2500 into such a setup and control things such as powering up and down.

2 Connectivity There's a huge range of single-ended and balanced XLRs. You can even connect three power amplifiers, with the ability to switch two of them - ideal if you have a setup with additional speakers in other rooms.

3 Moving coil/moving magnet Most high-end preamps we test tend to be line-level only units - most vinyl enthusiasts will probably have an outboard unit. But the C2500's phono stage is good: transparent, detailed and with a good sense of life.

4 Good-quality DAC The DAC built in to the C2500 is no poor relation to the line-level circuits. It's capable of replaying 24-bit/192k material to a high standard. In absolute terms a standalone unit is more expressive, but it adds a box.

and its ability to keep the music's rhythmic elements in place. While it doesn't convey the full force of momentum in the track, the C2500 still manages to charge along with enthusiasm. Low notes have real power, and are tracked with a decent degree of precision.

Move to vinyl and the C2500 continues its good work. We plug our reference Clearaudio Innovation Wood package into the C2500's moving coil input and are treated to plenty of detail and a refreshingly low noise floor.

A play of Dave Brubeck's *Take Five* shows off the McIntosh at its best. Here the preamp delivers a sound with lots of space, with real sparkle to the cymbals and plenty of punch to the drums. The rhythmic elements are nicely delivered but most of all the slightly rich tonality gives the sound a really appealing solidity. There's a pleasant warmth to the

presentation and an easy-going attitude that not only particularly suits Brubeck's legendary composition but also makes the C2500 a very tempting long-term proposition for all manner of music.

Distinctive personality

Personality and sonic preference play key roles here. If you're looking for absolute transparency we don't think this McIntosh is for you, despite its able DAC and versatile featuring. Its smooth, full-bodied character is a little too dominant to deliver that. But if you want an easy-going, comprehensively equipped preamp - with its own very distinct visual and sonic personality - that treats analogue and digital sources with equal respect, and delivers a refined, entertaining sound, give this one a listen. Hooked up to the right partnering kit (transparent, agile), it deserves serious consideration.

A play of Dave Brubeck's *Take Five* shows off the McIntosh at its best. Here the preamp delivers a sound with lots of space, real sparkle to the cymbals and punch to the drums

Profile

Consider if you want top-quality sound and plenty of features from your high-end preamp.

Make sure you don't tuck the C2500 away in some hidden rack. It would be a shame not to enjoy those blue-glowing output meters and the extravagantly lit valve complement.

Avoid partnering this McIntosh with overly smooth or rich-sounding kit. The results will lack excitement.

Highlight It sounds great, and has a packed feature list, but our highlight has to be the appearance. Few components look this cool.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR A refined yet still-entertaining sound; impressive range of features; capable DAC; fine phono stage and headphone output; distinctive appearance

AGAINST Needs care in partnering; not the last word in transparency or rhythmic precision

VERDICT We love the way the C2500 looks and its comprehensive feature list. It has an engaging way with music replay too



WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION

iPAD EDITION


January issue available on iTunes now



What are active speakers?

Unlike powered speakers, which carry a single internal amplifier, active speakers have dedicated power amplifiers for individual drive units. Linn has long specialised in this type of speaker, and with five separate amps for its six drive units, the Akubariks are about as active as you can get.





Tech highlights include room-matching gain controls and a downward-firing pair of bass drivers

“Power way beyond what we would normally expect”

■ Linn Akubarik Stereo speakers

■ £15,600 ★★★★★☆

Linn's new Akubarik active floorstanders are about as technologically dense as speakers get. Each sleek cabinet has six drive units, driven by five power amplifiers, plus all the other filtering and power supplies a fully active set-up needs.

That's impressive, but no more so than Linn managing to fit all of that in a neat, relatively compact, 105cm-high package. The Akubarik's crisp cosmetic detailing and nicely judged proportions also make these towers far easier to accommodate than many rivals.

Linn has obviously put a great deal of thought into how its speakers work in a listening room. Tucked away behind a top-panel grille are additional adjustments to control bass reach and level - problems with room matching at low frequencies are the main issues that larger speakers have.

While that price tag looks sky-high it's worth remembering that you don't need to pay extra for power amps. Each speaker contains 600W-worth of amplification, of which 300W goes to the three-dome drive-unit housed in that exotic-looking front array. This is made up of a 7.5cm polyurethane midrange driver, a 25mm tweeter and a 13mm tweeter. The larger tweeter uses a polyurethane diaphragm like the midrange unit, while the smaller one uses a more conventional silk dome.

Below this trio sits a 15cm treated-paper upper-bass driver driven by yet another 100W amp. Its sealed enclosure arrangement should make for better-controlled, more precise lows.

Look at the base of the Akubariks, above that distinctive plinth, and you'll see yet another drive unit. This is part of

a downward-firing isobaric pairing made of two 20cm woven carbon-fibre cones mounted face to face. A 200W amplifier module is dedicated to driving this.

It became clear from our first listen that these are very capable performers. There's an impressive degree of clarity here; even music as complex as Massive Attack's *Heligoland* is delivered with unerring directness. Getting a sound this cohesive from a five-way design is some achievement - the integration between the drive units is superb.

We also noticed a good degree of punch and a firm grip of the lowest frequencies. The additional complexity of the isobaric arrangement pays off big time in songs such as *Atlas Air* - lows dig deeply and have a sense of power way beyond what we would normally expect from floorstanders of this size.

Fine detail, extreme clarity

The Akubariks are agile and explicit in the way they deliver detail. There's no fudging of the leading edges of notes, which leads to an outstanding impression of clarity.

Less welcome is an overly taut quality to the presentation, and a lack of natural warmth that dilutes the emotional impact of music such as Johnny Cash's version of *Hurt* - and that's something we really don't want. In this set-up the speakers don't quite grasp the nuances of timing either, lacking the skill to track changes of pace properly.

Swapping an Akurate DSM player for our reference (and far pricier) combination of Naim NDS/555PS and Bryston BP26 preamp helps a lot. All the good things remain undimmed. The Akubariks have a no-nonsense approach

TECH SPECS

Type Floorstander
Sensitivity n/a
Impedance n/a
Max power handling 600W
Biwireable No
Finishes 200+
Dimensions (hwd) 105 x 35 x 45cm

to music replay that we really like - and with the changed front-end electronics, now display a degree of dynamic subtlety that they merely hinted at before. The presentation is more full-bodied and expressive without losing its clarity. The ability to convey shifts in pace and rhythmic momentum is improved to a certain degree too.

There's still the feeling that the presentation edges more towards clinical analysis rather than communicating the emotional message, but there are enough magic musical moments to prevent us being too hard on this aspect.

Whether or not the sonic presentation works for you, there's no denying Linn's achievement here. It's delivered a beautifully made and engineered product that's easy to accommodate in most homes - not something that can be said for most rivals. As for as sound, for us there's much to admire, if not love. Listen in and see if they suit your tastes.

Profile

Consider if your priority is a high-quality set of floorstanders but you don't want the usual massive alternatives.

Highlight It's got to be the tech content; it shines through in the performance.

Rating ★★★★★☆

FOR Agile and articulate sound; detail; lovely cohesion between drive units; superb build

AGAINST Presentation veers towards the clinical; not great with subtle shifts in pace

VERDICT Deeply impressive engineering, but the forthright presentation won't appeal to all

“Harmonically rich, solid and expressive”

■ **Esoteric K-05** SACD/CD player

■ **£7495** ★★★★★

It took just five seconds of Beethoven's beautiful *Moonlight Sonata* for the Esoteric K-05 to show that it's a brilliant disc player. In fact, it's not strictly just a CD player: it's capable of spinning high-resolution SACDs and has a full range of digital inputs too.

Ordinary CD players tend to struggle with complex instruments such as pianos, but the K-05 sets up a convincing three-dimensional acoustic space and plants the piano firmly in the middle of it. The instrument sounds harmonically rich, solid and dynamically expressive.

Move on to SACD and things get even better. We listen to a range of discs, from a live recording of The Police to the large-scale, dramatic *Carmina Burana*, and the Esoteric doesn't let us down.

With the Police's *Roxanne*, the K-05's presentation positively brims with energy. There's plenty of slam to the

drums, not to mention a rhythmic coherence most players - no matter how expensive they are - rarely hint at. There's a real sense of drive here, and a superb ability to convey momentum. Sting's vocals are as hard-edged as they should be, and cut through the hectic musical backdrop with ease.

Carmina Burana lets the Esoteric show off its sonic authority and its ability to render a huge soundstage with class-leading precision. The sound is convincingly layered and displays an Everest-like stability, even during the highly charged crescendos.

Delicacy with power

Listening to our range of SACDs makes us a little sad, too. It's a shame this format didn't gain true mass-market acceptance; through a quality machine such as the K-05 it can sound truly

TECH SPECS

Type SACD/CD player

Inputs USB, Coaxial, digital, optical digital

Outputs Coaxial, digital, optical digital, XLR, RCA

CD text No

Memory Yes

Remote control Yes

Finishes 2

Dimensions (hwd)

13 x 45 x 36cm

The brand name implies exclusivity, and the K-05 does more than enough to stand out from rivals

Round the back

1 Digital inputs These let you connect other digital sources to benefit from the K-05's top-drawer DAC. The USB input has a range of options; the basic setting allows a wide compatibility but is limited in resolution to 24-bit/96kHz. We

used the most capable setting, which is asynchronous and accepts signals up to 24-bit/192kHz.

2 Analogue outputs The RCA and XLR ports are switchable. The player can control volume too.

3 Clock input As befits a player of this quality, the K-05 has a high-quality internal clock to govern its digital circuits, but if you want to improve its performance further by adding an even better clock, here's where you connect it.



lovely, both delicate and relentlessly powerful at once if required.

There's never a guarantee that a fine disc player will also make for a good DAC, but in this case the Esoteric is a talented number-cruncher too. The machine's USB input can be configured in a number of ways, with differing compatibility and resolution limits. We went for the most capable option, which is asynchronous and supports 24-bit/192kHz data streams.

The sound through USB - using an Apple MacBook as source - is excellent, retaining all the stability and composure we heard through the integrated disc transport. High-resolution recordings such as Mahler's *Symphony No 4* (24-bit/192kHz) and Dire Straits' *Brothers in Arms* (24-bit/96kHz) are



The sound through USB is excellent, retaining all the composure of the disc transport

a real treat to listen to, delivering plenty of detail, great dynamics and real punch. We're also struck by the K-05's bass clout. It's rich and weighty without any sacrifice to precision and agility.

The story is similarly positive through the optical and coaxial inputs. Both can support 24-bit/192kHz data streams.

Digital customisation

If you like to tweak then you're in for a treat. The K-05 has a range of digital filters - we preferred the one marked 'S_DLYT' (which has no pre-echo with an impulse function). It produced the most expressive and entertaining sound. The K-05 also lets you adjust the amount of upsampling that goes on internally.

Straight from the box it's clear that the K-05 is a thoroughly engineered piece of

kit. It feels solid enough to make even a bank-vault feel insecure. From the quality of the parts to the standard of the finish, everything is geared towards maximising transparency and reducing distortion.

The K-05 is without doubt a great machine, but it's not quite flawless. It's a little dim-witted in use and doesn't respond to commands with the swiftness we'd like. Given a little patience everything works fine, though.

If you've spent years upgrading your hi-fi and are now in a position to buy your final disc-player, the Esoteric K-05 is a great place to start. It's built to last a lifetime and sounds good enough to make us want to keep it that long. Yes, it's expensive, but if you have a large disc collection and a decent library of music files the K-05 is sorely tempting.

Even for this price, the quality of build and finish on the K-05 is uncompromisingly high

Profile

Consider if you want a high-end SACD/CD player that also has digital inputs - this will do the job very nicely.

Highlight We love the K-05's sound, but it's the deeply impressive mechanical engineering that impresses most.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Transparent and detailed sound; excellent dynamics and fine timing; class-leading sonic stability; powerful, articulate bass; superb build

AGAINST Not the most responsive player we've ever used

VERDICT Looking for your final disc player? This Esoteric is as good a place to start as any

PLAY LIST

The movies, music and games to test your system

Out this month...



Superman is rebooted using *The Dark Knight* as a template, and the fun disappears with Planet Krypton

Superman? Not as we know him...

Man of Steel

Blu-Ray

Out Now

★★★★☆



Special Features

- All-Out Action
- Krypton Decoded
- Strong Characters, Legendary Roles
- Journey of Discovery: Creating *Man of Steel* (on Ultraviolet only)

Duration 143m

Audio English: DTS-HD
Master Audio 7.1

Picture 2.40:1, 1080p

Picture	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Extras	★★★★★

It's not Superman. It's the story of a man, and the title just happens to be Superman's nickname.

That worked for Batman, after all. You see, in order to be taken seriously, you can't admit to making a superhero movie.

And so Superman is rebooted using *The Dark Knight* as a template, and the fun disappears with Planet Krypton. Humour and wonder is replaced by 'realism', and everything is weighed down with emotional baggage.

Clark Kent spends his days as a beardy nomad, wandering to avoid attention. But he always ends up saving the day somewhere and attracting attention anyway. And that, of course, can only lead to more wandering.

There are a lot of flashbacks, which look at Superman's childhood as an alien with limitless power. We like the focus on Superman as an alien.

Snippets with Kevin Costner trying to raise a terrified, lethal child are fresh and effective. After a while, the serious approach starts to pay off. Themes of rejection and solitude hint at a more human story, making it easier to care.

Drawn-out action sequences

But a two-hour identity crisis isn't engaging enough. So we revert to Superman, hero with fists.

For director Zack Snyder this is means a lot of action. It's an excuse for drawn-out sequences of utter chaos, where buildings smash in the name of Excitement.

There's a lot of energy in the first few punches, but it rapidly becomes tedious. Around a third of the running time is dedicated to indestructible beings beating the CGI out of each other.

Then it just keeps going, and you can't help but wonder what you ever did to deserve it.

To make things worse, the camera is relentlessly shaky. Is it a bird? Is it a plane? It's hard to tell. We've seen more stability from smartphone home videos. Tedium and nausea: that's time well spent.

It's also a waste of a good character. The lonely, terrified child becomes a generic thug who smashes half a city trying to defeat a single villain. No, it's definitely not Superman.

At least this makes for a good test disc. For all its flaws, the film sounds great, and all those crumbling buildings give your system a good workout in DTS-HD Master Audio 7.1.

There's also a stirring score from Hans Zimmer, even if it's entirely forgettable filler when compared with John Williams' iconic original.

Fans of big, brash action will probably find plenty to enjoy in *Man of Steel*. Everyone else should proceed with caution.

Spotify highlights [Join us on Spotify tiny.cc/playlist2013](https://tiny.cc/playlist2013)



Jackie Brenston & His Delta Cats: Rocket "88"

The first rock'n'roll record? Debate continues. Either way, it's a deliciously exciting listen.

Billy Bragg: The Milkman of Human Kindness

"If you're poorly, I will send poetry. I love you. I am the milkman of human kindness. I will leave an extra pint"

Green Velvet: Bigger Than Prince

Curtis Alan Jones is variously known as Cajmere, Geo Vogt, Half Pint, Curan Stone... but for now you can call him Green Velvet.

Bob Dylan: Make You Feel My Love

Apparently there are people – otherwise sensible, trustworthy people – who think this an Adele song. So this is by way of correction.

Music

GAMES, MOVIES
& FORTHCOMING
RELEASES
p102



Download, CD, vinyl



BROKEN BELLS After The Disco Out 13th January

★★★★☆

Imagine the erudite pop nous of The Shins married to a straight-edged early-'80s Gang of Four-style dancefloor sensibility. That's the sound of *After the Disco*, and it's not all that surprising given Broken Bells is James Mercer of The Shins and Brian 'Danger Mouse' Burton, hitmaker by appointment.

The follow-up to 2010's eponymous debut, *After the Disco* incorporates elements of white-boy funk, lo-fi acoustic scratchiness and powerfully melodic pop. There are enough squelchy analogue keyboard

sounds, enough phasey drum loops and enough bug-eyed bass-lines for the gloss of modernity to be deep and lustrous but, at heart, this is an album of sturdy, craftsmanlike indie pop songs. Which is no bad thing. *Perfect World*, *Leave It Alone* and the title track ably illustrate how far sounds, tempos and arrangements can be pushed while still orbiting around a melodic, classically structured core.

A decent system test

While there's an audible degree of compression in evidence here (it's not at the farcical 'mastered for iTunes' level, happily), there's still more than enough going on to give your set-up a decent examination. Where stereo focus, separation and midrange fidelity are concerned, this recording is a tester, and low-frequency speed and extension are crucial too. Unless your system can integrate these elements smoothly, *After The Disco* sounds more like The Morning After.

Specifications

Duration 45m 53s

Standout track

The Remains of Rock and Roll
"I'm off to the Promised Land if anyone needs a ride..."

Download, CD, vinyl



NILS FRAHM Spaces Out now

★★★★★

You really ought to know the rules before you start breaking them. It's safe to say Nils Frahm, who as a child studied piano under a student of Tchaikovsky's last scholar, knows all there is to know about the instrument. Which is what makes his deconstructions and subversions of the rules so thrillingly rewarding.

Spaces comes from that under-explored area where live performance meets field recording. Each of these pieces, as well as being a muscular/tender/lyrical/obtuse demonstration of Frahm's virtuosity, is given colour

and texture by ambient sounds (nowhere is this more obvious than on the self-explanatory *Improvisation For Coughs And A Cell Phone*).

Spellbindingly immediate

Throughout, Frahm musters the kind of intensity that really should be beyond one man equipped only with treated piano, keyboards and sequencer. When he's not calling down earthquake weather, Frahm can be playful, soothing or abstract as the mood takes him.

Cut-and-pasted from various performances over the past two years, *Spaces* is nevertheless a unified, coherent whole that easily transcends the more usual 'memento' purpose of live albums. At times it sounds spellbindingly immediate – if your system has the necessary powers of detail retrieval, transient speed and dynamic attack, *Spaces* could conceivably give it a workout well beyond the ability of other wordless recordings.

Specifications

Duration 75m 10s

Standout track *Says Starts* like a Jean-Michel Jarre tone-poem, finishes like Usain Bolt.

Listen to it this way

The system

Arcam FMJ A19 £650 ★★★★★

The Arcam's levels of detail, hint of warmth and dynamic prowess are just what this record needs

Rega RP3/Elys2 £550 ★★★★★

The heavyweight pressing of *After the Disco* is exactly the sort of thing the Rega laps up

Tannoy DC6 T SE £1000 ★★★★★

Purposeful and assertive, but capable of great subtlety too, these Tannoys are superb



After The Disco is a great test of stereo focus and separation

Listen to it this way

The system

McIntosh C2500 £7495 ★★★★★

Spaces is available in two strengths of download – the McIntosh prefers the 24-bit flavour

Apple MacBook Air £1100

The McIntosh will take of DAC duties, leaving the MacBook Air to store music and look good

Linn Akubarik £15,600 ★★★★★

Agile, detailed, monstrously powerful active speakers with bomb-proof build quality



This album deserves a serious digital hi-fi set up such as this

Movie shorts

The Lone Ranger

It turns out the Ranger isn't alone at all, just severely lacking in charisma. It's bland, and we're getting a little tired of Johnny Depp's schtick.

Jurassic Park 3D

The adventures of Sam Neill and His Dinosaur Pals is the latest to get unnecessary 3D post-conversion, but sound tremendous nonetheless.



The Wolverine

The angriest X-Man goes to Japan and loses his powers. Good. Then he gets them back and fights a large adamantium samurai. Oh dear.

The Following (Season One)

Kevin Bacon takes time out from EE adverts to track down James Purefoy and his merry band of serial killers. Starts off gripping, ends up messy.

On-screen

System tester



Pacific Rim Blu-ray Out now

★★★★☆

Pacific Rim has a simple premise: colossal robots in a fight to the death with massive monsters.

It's Guillermo Del Toro's attempt to show the West the Japanese genres of mecha and kaiju, which are all about piloted heavy machinery and city-destroying beasts.

But let's not get too academic. This film certainly doesn't. It's honestly silly, and is all the better for it.

There are no pointless side plots or tonal detours. You don't get thinly veiled advertisements for the armed forces.

It's all about the spectacle. The robots are mechanically intriguing, and the set pieces are imaginative. Machines the size of buildings take on otherworldly monstrosities in imaginatively choreographed and beautifully shot sequences.

Top it off with a pinch of humour and handfuls of cheese – Idris Elba declares he will cancel the Apocalypse – and you have a near-flawless popcorn flick.

Next-gen games

Forza Motorsport 5 Xbox One Out now

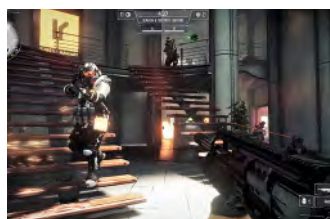
★★★★★



It looks incredible, but next-gen Forza is about more than simple pixels. It's really about the advanced physics, which give you a much better idea of what your car's doing underneath you, especially when combined with the One pad's targeted vibrations. More tracks would be nice, though.

Killzone Shadowfall PS4 Out now

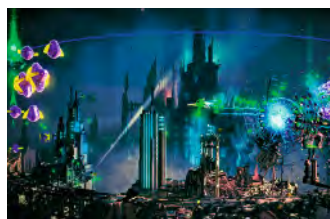
★★★★☆



Terrifically crisp 1080p visual, hugely detailed character models, massive explosions and glorious lighting, all running at a silky smooth 60fps, Killzone is one game that really delivers on the next-gen promise, even if the level design gets a little staid before the end.

Resogun PS4 Out now

★★★★☆



Resogun plays like a graphically glorious mashup of *Defender* and *Super Stardust HD*. Scrolling around a cylindrical world shooting waves of aliens and rescuing civilians might not sound particularly next-gen, but this is brilliantly fast-paced, colourful and explosive, not to mention addictive.

Ryse: Son of Rome Xbox One Out now

★★★★☆



Ryse sees you hack and slash your way through ancient Rome relieving barbarians of their limbs. With gameplay barely distinguishable from the cut scenes, this is a real graphical showcase for the Xbox One, although the button-mashing action gets rather samey rather quickly.



Watch it this way

The system

Samsung PS51F5500

£700 ★★★★★

A superb big-screen budget TV

Sony BDP-S790

£200 ★★★★★

Our Product of the Year for 2013

Sony STR-DN1040

£500 ★★★★★

And our Product of the Year amp, too

Dali Zensor 15.1

£980 ★★★★★

A superb package for the money

MIRROR TV's

Frameless or choice of decorative frames



As seen on 60 minute makeover

	RRP	SPECIAL PRICE
32" LED Smart TV inc. Frame	£1,999	£1,199
40" LED Smart TV inc. Frame	£2,699	£1,499
46" LED Smart TV inc. Frame	£3,499	£1,899
32" 3D LED Smart TV inc. Frame	£2,499	£1,299
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To fit to your own TV



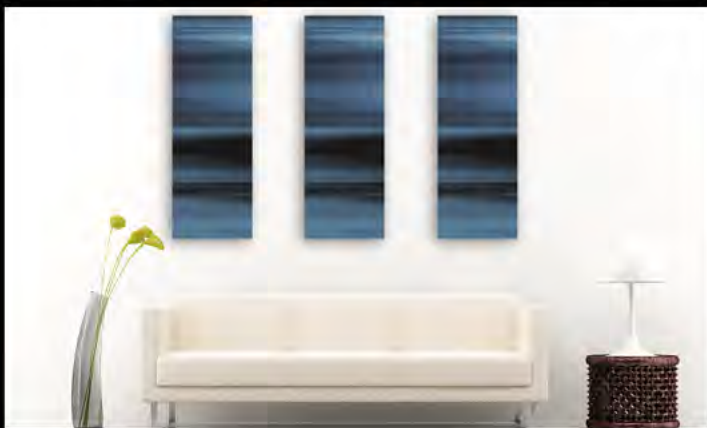
Frameless or choice of decorative frames

	RRP	SPECIAL PRICE
32" Framed Mirror TV Overlay	£1,199	£799
40" Framed Mirror TV Overlay	£1,499	£999
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70" Framed Mirror TV Overlay	£3,499	£2,199

We also offer custom designs with our shaped or oversized optical mirror glass panels for wall mounting or integration into AV furniture, cabinets, wardrobes etc. For more information contact our sales team.

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Our flat panel art speakers are available in a range of sizes and designs. Their decorative appearance will complement the décor of any room, filling the space with crystal clear non directional sound.

HD FRONT PROJECTION SYSTEM

No need to turn down the lights



As seen on Peter Andre's 60 minute makeover

	RRP	SPECIAL PRICE
80" 16:9 Framed Screen & Projector	£4,499	£2,999
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What we are waiting for...

Movies (cinema)

Anchorman 2 (20th December)
The legend continues: The Channel 4 team join a 24-hour news channel. Don't act like you're not impressed.

Movies (Blu-ray)

The Hobbit, part 2 (13th December)
In which Smaug is desolated. The unexpected journey continues, and it looks like it won't stop any time soon.

Music (Download, CD, vinyl)

The Notwist - Close to the Glass (24th February)
German glitchtronica pioneers, newly signed to Sub Pop! More fun than it sounds!

Music (Download, CD, vinyl)

Mogwai - Rave Tapes (20th January)
We're particularly keen on the vinyl box-set with book, coloured-vinyl singles and cassette.

December in Hi-Def

The best on the box



We've waited two years to find out how Sherlock survived that fall. We're looking forward to John punching him again

Drama

Doctor Who: The Time Of The Doctor

BBC One HD

After a brilliant 50th anniversary special that had every Whovian jumping in joy across the globe, we're back to gloomy Trenzalore for the Christmas special, where we bid farewell to Matt Smith's 11th Doctor. His childlike wonder and love of fezzes and bowties will be sorely missed. But the end of Smith's reign as the Time Lord means a regeneration. Enter Peter 'Malcolm Tucker' Capaldi as the 12th Doctor. We're giddy with excitement, but are also expecting a few tears as we visit the Doctor's grave once more, where 'Silence Will Fall' at long last.

Sherlock

BBC One HD

We've waited two years to find out how Sherlock survived that fall,

and we're finally going to get our answers. Our favourite consulting detective is alive and well, back on screen at the end of December/early January. What do we know about series three? It's been three years since Sherlock's death, John Watson's future wife Mary Morstan appears, and there's a brand new nemesis in blackmailer Charles August Magnussen. All good stuff.

We're mostly looking forward to John punching Sherlock in the face again.

The Tractate Middoth

BBC Two HD

It wouldn't be Christmas without a ghost story. Writer and director Mark Gatiss brings back the tradition of airing M. R. James's cherished ghost stories for the festive holiday. This half-hour drama is based on a short story set in an academic library, where scholar John Eldred seeks out an old and obscure Hebrew text - The

Tractate Middoth - with the help of young Mr Garrett. But all is not what it seems, and the story takes a chilling turn as terrifying apparitions appear and vengeful spirits awoken from the grave.

Charlie Brooker's Screenwipe

BBC Two HD

Sick of the same old Christmas pop songs, the shopping crowds, the merriness and the mince pies? Tune in to an hour-long Christmas special of grumpy Charlie Brooker eviscerating the media and the news to appease the Scrooge in all of us. Bah, humbug!

Downton Abbey

ITV HD

The Americans are coming. Paul Giamatti and Shirley MacLaine reprise their roles as Cora's brother and mother respectively, bringing culture shock, trouble and sass to the festivities at Downton. Elsewhere, pregnant Edith has fled

to Switzerland, Mary is still single, Bates is once again under a murder investigation, and fan favourite Violet Crawley (played by Maggie Smith) has been poorly... Could Julian Fellowes be planning yet another Christmas tragedy?

Death Comes to Pemberley

BBC One HD

Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* turned into a murder mystery? Are they sure? This is no zombified adaptation, however, it's renowned mystery writer P. D. James taking us back to the 19th century novel, six years after Lizzie and Darcy get married.

So what happens after 'happily ever after'? Murder, apparently.

It's an excellent cast: Anna Maxwell Martin and Matthew Rhys play the star couple, Jenna Coleman stars as the flighty Lydia, Matthew Goode as Wickham, and Rebecca Front plays the indomitable Mrs Bennet.

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS HIGHLIGHTS 2013

Awards highlights 2013

Weighed, measured and handsomely rewarded

Each year, the *What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision Awards* celebrates the absolute best of the year's new (and sometimes returning) crop of consumer electronics. The decisions don't happen overnight: the awards marks the culmination of another year of rigorous testing and measurement, followed by a whirlwind of impassioned debate by the *What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision* team. And the event grows in size and standing every year as the field of included product categories expands. Here we bring you a taste of some of the finest Hi-Fi equipment and accessories from across the awards, from a fantastic pair of AKG headphones for just £50 to the four-times award-winning Roksan stereo amp for £1695. In fact, along with a helping of the stellar AudioQuest FLX-SLiP 14/4 cable, all that's needed is a best-in-class set of speakers and you've got yourself an entirely award-winning Hi-Fi setup.

What the team say

"In the end there were 99 trophies awarded in total, including 22 Products of the Year - that's more categories than ever before"

Turntables

Best turntable up to £400 Pro-Ject Essential II £209

What it is

It's a straightforward, no-frills record player from a company that's done as much as anyone to facilitate the current vinyl revival. Stripped back, but with high-quality components where it matters (motor, bearings, arm and cartridge particularly), the Essential II is the latest in a long line of frill-free, high-quality Pro-Ject turntables.


Why it won

Without hyperbole, this may well be the best pound-for-pound source of music in this whole magazine. The Essential II delivers rhythms crisply, has abundant drive and punch, and delivers low frequency with a depth and nimbleness that's strongly at odds with its pricetag. Dynamic, detailed and with timing to die for, this record player gets to the heart of the music.

To find out more:

Visit henleydesigns.co.uk

Call 01235 511 166

 @HenleyDesigns

Buy direct today:



What the team say

"What's perhaps most remarkable is the way the Essential II excels in those areas - such as scale and composure - where you'd least expect it to"



CD players**Best CD player £1500+****Roksan Caspian M2 £1800****What it is**

It's a four-time Award-winner, that's what it is. In some ways the Caspian M2 is unremarkable - it isn't as brimming with features as some of its nominal competitors - but as a package it's got enough to frighten CD players at two or three times the price. On the outside it's built like a bank-vault, while inside its independently suspended disc transport is a work of thorough delicacy. The Roksan's also unfussy about the electronics it's asked to partner, and it's logical to use either via the fascia buttons or remote control.

Why it won

Put simply, it's about performance. And don't forget, this is performance that has seen off the best rivals for four years now. It's a full, smooth and engaging listen, rigorous enough to express the finest details in a



WHAT HI-FI?
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CD PLAYERS
BEST CD PLAYER £1500+
ROKSAN CASPIAN M2

tender vocal while remaining an easy fit into systems of all kinds. Forceful and dynamic if your tunes demand it, utterly commanding of a soundstage and with an effortless grasp of timing, the Caspian M2 has the sort of all-court game that could make a competitor weep. Don't bet against it showing up in this slot a year from now.

What the team say

"If you want your CD player to do stuff beyond play CDs, look elsewhere. But if sound quality is your be-all and end-all, there's nothing to touch it"

To find out more:Visit henleydesigns.co.uk

Call 01235 511 166

@HenleyDesigns

Buy direct today:**Stereo amplifiers****Best stereo amp £1500+****Roksan Caspian M2 £1800****What it is**

Just like its CD-playing sibling, this is the Caspian M2 amp's fourth consecutive Award. And, for the fourth time, the Roksan's been recognised thanks to an unbeatable combination of attributes. Built to withstand small detonations, engineered to feel every penny's-worth when you're using it and with a competitive feature-count, this amplifier could turn out to be the last one you ever need to buy. It's ready to survive any number of upgrades to the electronics you partner it with, and capable of bringing the best from each and every one of them.

Why it won

At this price, sound quality has to be stunning, and the Caspian M2 never comes close to disappointing. This is an amp to satisfy every one of your hi-fi requirements.



WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
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STEREO AMPLIFIERS
BEST STEREO AMP £1500+
ROKSAN CASPIAN M2

Detail resolution? In spades. Stereo focus and separation? Class-leading. Hair-raising dynamic prowess? Of course. In every meaningful act of music-making, the Roksan gets the job done with the sort of casual authority that's the mark of a master. It's powerful, it's composed, it likes all your music and it will keep you coming back for more. After four years our admiration hasn't dwindled in the slightest.

What the team say

"The overall package is brilliantly judged. There isn't a single area where the Roksan doesn't compete, and it leads the way in most of them"

To find out more:Visit henleydesigns.co.uk

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Buy direct today:



Wireless speakers & docks

Best wireless speaker £400+ Audio Pro Allroom Air One £500

What it is

If you need to be made to feel good about your purchasing decisions, the Air One will reassure in a big way. A sophisticated AirPlay/DLNA wireless speaker available in several real-leather finishes, the Audio Pro will create its own wireless network in case you don't have one. It's a premium product in every respect.

Why it won

On top of all the visual and tactile pizzazz, this is a wonderfully balanced-sounding speaker. Integration of the frequency range is silky smooth, and there's a winning combination of refinement and excitement to the Audio Pro's presentation. It's weighty and dramatic at the right time, but delicate and precise when it needs to be too - this is the way to spend £500 without feeling any guilt whatsoever.

To find out more:

Visit audioprodirect.co.uk
Call 01908 282498

Buy direct today:



What the team say

"If you're looking for the convenience of a wireless speaker but in a premium package with premium sound quality, well, here it is"



Headphones

Best portable on-ears up to £100 AKG K451 £50

What it is

A light (120g), sturdy, easy-to-stow pair of on-ear headphones that are comfortable in situ and built to last. They'll stay in place under even under 'sprinting for the train' duress and the snug fit, combined with the closed-back design, inhibits sound leakage. Throw in an in-line remote with mic and the K451s want for nothing. But the best news of all is that when the K451s first won an Award in 2012 they cost £80.

Why it won

What really elevates the K451s is their sound. They dig deep and punch hard, with ample control over bass sounds, while the midrange is expressive and detailed. There's enough bite at the top end, scale and dynamics impress, separation is excellent... All this for £50? It wasn't difficult to give the AKGs another Award.

To find out more:

Visit uk.akg.com
Call 01707 278113
 @AKGheadphones

Watch video:



What the team say

"You can buy flashier or more colourful headphones, or headphones with fatter bass. But you can't buy better for £50. No chance"

Accessories

Best equipment support Atacama Eris Eco 5.0 £460

What it is

Here's a handsome, high-quality, modular equipment rack that offers superb isolation from vibration and sonic resonance for your electronics. It's made from steel and bamboo, which simultaneously maximises its chances of doing the job properly while keeping ecological considerations to the fore.

Why it won

The key is resonance and vibration control, of course, and put simply the Atacama Eris Eco 5.0 performs better than anything else we've come across this year. Whatever the characteristics of your electronics - detail, dynamism, bass definition, whatever - it's given greater expression via the Eris Eco 5.0 than on any alternative. And the flexibility of the modular design means it can grow with your system.

To find out more:

Visit atacama-audio.co.uk
Call 01455 283251

Buy direct today:



What the team say

"A good kit-rack is a must-have - and not only does the Atacama perform brilliantly, it's modular and it looks good too"

Accessories

Best speaker cable AudioQuest FLX-SLiP 14/4 £5.80/m

What it is

Every stage of your system is critical, of course, but there's nothing more important than the union between amplifier and loudspeakers. Which is where the superb AudioQuest FLX-SLiP 14/4 speaker cable comes in. It's sturdy, flexible, has integrity enough to perform perfectly over very long lengths and, best of all, it does its job brilliantly.

Why it won

Back-to-back Awards tell their own story. The AudioQuest facilitates a balanced, well-organised and natural sound, impressively rhythmic and dynamically assured. The attack and decay of individual notes or hits is described with something like fanaticism. But what's most impressive about the FLX-SLiP 14/4 is how it just gets out of the way so you can enjoy the music.

To find out more:

Visit audioquest.com
Call 01249 848873
 @audioquest

Find your local dealer:



What the team say

"It all comes together in the most natural and unforced way - nothing is stifled. Recordings simply sound open and clear"

WIN

Ten Tivoli Albergo+ DAB/FM/Bluetooth digital radios to be won!

We've teamed up with those nice folks at Tivoli Audio to give away ten Albergo+ Bluetooth-streaming digital radios worth £200 each

Tivoli Audio™

The Tivoli Albergo+ digital radio is now available in five colour options, and we have two of each version to give away in graphite, white, blue, green and red.

This compact and stylish system is equipped with DAB+/DAB/FM RDS radio tuners as well as Bluetooth A2DP wireless streaming capability, so you can play tunes from your PC, phone or tablet through the system.

It also has a dual alarm function, sleep timer, remote control, auxiliary input and headphone socket.

And if you want to turn it into a full stereo system there's an optional £79 add-on speaker. Sound is reproduced by the same 3in, full-range, long-throw driver as used in the Tivoli Model One table-top radio. For more details go to www.tivoliaudio.co.uk.



To enter, head over to www.whathifi.com/win, log in and submit your entry online. Terms and conditions apply.
Deadline for entries: 11.59pm January 10th, 2014

The No.1 source of clear, expert and independent advice

BUYER'S GUIDE

NEW

Bought a new TV? It won't be at its best out of the box: our tips on **calibrating your set** will help it perform at its optimum ability

Curious as to quite what a **preamplifier** does? Wonder no more, as we explain the ins and outs – and why you want one



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 whatifi.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...



Cambridge Audio DacMagic XS

"On paper, the Cambridge Audio DacMagic XS USB DAC seems too good to be true"

p135



LG G2

"Due for an upgrade soon? This is a seriously tempting proposition"

p165

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Your essential system set-ups

BEST BUYS

GET THE
BEST KIT
FOR YOUR
BUDGET

Home Cinema Systems

BLU-RAY PLAYERS



SONY BDP-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.



PANASONIC PT-AT6000E
★★★★★
£3000

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.



AUDIOLAB 8200CD
★★★★★
£800

This player, with its stunning sound, a great DAC and digital inputs, is a big achievement.



ROKSAN CASPIAN M2 CD PLAYER
★★★★★
£1695

Combines bite, refinement and rhythm better than anything else we've heard at this price.

AMPLIFIERS



ROTEL RA-10
★★★★★
£350

Our 2012 stereo amp Product of the Year has a level of control and poise above and beyond what we'd expect at the price.



ARCAMA19
★★★★★
£650

A refined amp with full-bodied tonal balance, this is a deeply impressive piece of hi-fi for the money.



ROKSAN CASPIAN M2 AMPLIFIER
★★★★★
£1695

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.



PMC TWENTY 23
★★★★★
£2300

They're petite, but these Best Buys are wonderfully expressive, with firm control and superb detail.

Budget System

Mid-range System

High-end System

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

Panasonic PT-AT6000E £3000

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

LG NB4530A
£300

Philips HTL 9100
£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

Great savings in-store and online. For the latest prices and offers visit www.ssav.com or contact your local store

SALE



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.



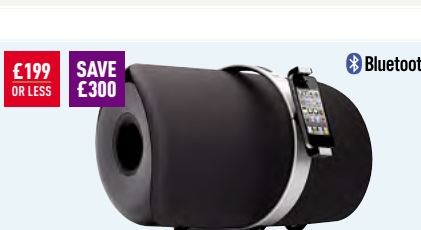
CYRUS • 8 DAC • AMPLIFIER / DAC
A powerful integrated amplifier with its 2 x 70 w power output. Includes six analogue inputs, five digital inputs, a headphone amplifier and pre-amplifier output.



NAD • C 326BEE • AMPLIFIER
The latest in NAD's range of affordably priced, yet very high performance amplifiers. Features 7 line inputs, including tape in/out and delivers 2 x 50W continuous power into both 4 ohms and 8 ohms.



YAMAHA • CRX-550 • CD / DAB SYSTEM
Yamaha's CRX-550 offers excellent audio quality from a CD / DAB System. Includes iPod digital connection for superior audio performance, USB input and subwoofer out.



NAD • VISO 1 • WIRELESS MUSIC SYSTEM WITH DOCK
Ideal for wirelessly playing music from your iPod, iPhone, iPad or any Bluetooth device enabled smartphone, tablet or laptop with renowned NAD performance, simplicity and value.



PIONEER • XC-HM81 • CD / NETWORK SYSTEM
Play audio from your Apple device, smartphone or external storage device via a USB connection or stream directly via AirPlay® and DLNA when connected to your home network.



OPTOMA • HD30 • 3D PROJECTOR
Producing a stunningly bright image with perfectly balanced vivid colour and crystal clarity, the HD30 provides the exceptional light and shade detail only possible with a high contrast projector.



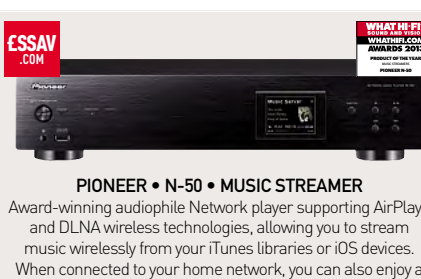
MONITOR AUDIO MASS SPEAKER PACKAGE
Enjoy jaw-dropping audio dynamics and décor-friendly styling. MASS makes the introduction of high quality home cinema sound into any living space a simpler and more satisfying experience.



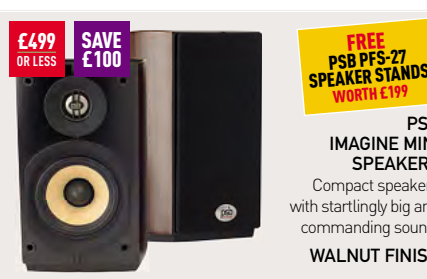
YAMAHA • RX-V675 • AV RECEIVER
New highly capable and versatile 7.2-channel Network AV receiver with multi-zone compatibility. Also Available: YAMAHA RX-V375 & RX-V475



REL • T-7 SUBWOOFER
Delivers the exceptional low-bass performance, rugged build quality and unique design of larger REL models at a more affordable price. T7 can be used to wonderful benefit to underpin both two-channel and multi-channel systems.



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.



PSB IMAGINE MINI SPEAKERS
Compact speakers with startlingly big and commanding sound. WALNUT FINISH
Also Available: PSB IMAGINE B £699 SAVE £200

PLEASE NOTE: SOME BRANDS/PRODUCTS ARE NOT AVAILABLE AT ALL STORES. SPECIAL/ADDED VALUE OFFERS ARE NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER (NICWAOO). ADVERT VALID UNTIL 10/01/2014. E&OE



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2013
WINNER
CD/DAB SYSTEM

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2013
WINNER
SPEAKERS

Denon's D-M39DAB, CD/DAB system boasts serious hi-fi quality sound in a compact body and is complemented with the award-winning 2020i bookshelf speakers.

*Standard Finishes

DENON & Q ACOUSTICS
D-M39DAB • CD/DAB SYSTEM
2020i • SPEAKERS*

£299

SAVE £129



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2013
WINNER
HEADPHONES

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2013
WINNER
DAC

SENNHEISER & HRT
MOMENTUM • HEADPHONES
MICROSTREAMER
USB DAC / HEADPHONE AMP

£379

SAVE £59



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2013
WINNER
AMPLIFIER

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2013
WINNER
SPEAKERS

A truly remarkable package combining the NAD D 3020 with the Concept 20 speakers. Delivers a level of performance previously only available to audiophiles investing in high-end models.

NAD & Q ACOUSTICS
D 3020 • AMPLIFIER / DAC
CONCEPT 20 • SPEAKERS

£629


SAVE £119



NAD
VISO HP50 • HEADPHONES
D 1050 • DAC/HEADPHONE AMP

£549

SAVE £99



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2013
WINNER
CD/DAB SYSTEM

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2013
WINNER
SPEAKERS

Enjoy great sounding music from diverse sources, including CD, Internet radio, music-streaming services, mobile devices, TV and other digital audio sources.

MARANTZ & MONITOR AUDIO
M-CR610 • CD/NETWORK SYSTEM
BRONZE BX2 • SPEAKERS

£579

SAVE £169



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2013
WINNER
HEADPHONES

GRADO & MERIDIAN
SR80i • HEADPHONES
EXPLORER
DAC/HEADPHONE AMP

£279

SAVE £69



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2013
WINNER
AMPLIFIER

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2013
WINNER
SPEAKERS

The stylish and compact D 7050 combines NAD's most advanced digital platform, Direct Digital technology with Apple Air-Play creating the ultimate plug 'n play solution for wireless music.

NAD & KEF
D 7050 • NETWORK AMPLIFIER / DAC
LS50 • SPEAKERS

£1399

SAVE £199

DACS



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.

£539

OR LESS



NAIM AUDIO & TANNOY
UNITIQUE 2 STREAMING SYSTEM
DC6T SE SPEAKERS

Combines high-resolution 32bit/192kHz streaming capability and a DAB/ DAB+ tuner.

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2013
WINNER
AMPLIFIER

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2013
WINNER
SPEAKERS

£1899

SAVE £250



ARCAM & Q ACOUSTICS
FMJ A19 AMPLIFIER
2050i SPEAKERS*

Award-winning amplifier and floorstanding speakers.

*Standard Finishes

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2013
WINNER
AMPLIFIER

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2013
WINNER
SPEAKERS

£899

SAVE £209



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.

£539
OR LESS

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2013
WINNER
DAC

£449

OR LESS



MERIDIAN • DIRECTOR • DAC

Featuring a range of connectivity. Director can be used with a wide selection of traditional components as well as high-resolution USB based sources. Director features technology drawn from Meridian's award-winning Reference 800 Series, offering up to 24-bit resolution and 192kHz sampling.

FREE CHORD USB SILVERPLUS (1.5m)
WORTH £55

£449

OR LESS

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and online.

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and offers visit
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SALE



KEF • R500

The smallest floorstanders in the R Series. Uses the latest generation Uni-Q driver array and two 5.25-inch aluminium bass drivers. Its slim proportions make it perfectly suited for any interior.



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.



PMC • TWENTY-23

An open, engaging and communicative loudspeaker that defies its size both the depth of bass and scale of presentation by taking any music or film material in its stride. The sound is vivid and dynamic and delivered with authoritative bass.



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.



MONITOR AUDIO • BRONZE BX2

Award-winning stand/bookshelf speakers featuring a 25mm C-CAM tweeter and 165mm bass/mid driver. Compact in size, but equipped to reproduce sound of immense stature and detail.



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.



SONOS THE WIRELESS HI-FI SYSTEM

FREE BRIDGE
FOR EASY WIRELESS SETUP
WITH PURCHASE OF PLAY:1, PLAY:3,
PLAY:5 OR PLAYBAR
Promo ends Dec 31, 2013. While stocks last.



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PSB PFS-27
SPEAKER STANDS
WORTH £199**

SONOS & PSB PACKAGE

- CONNECT: AMP
 - IMAGINE MINI SPEAKERS
- WALNUT FINISH ONLY



PRO-JECT • ESSENTIAL II • TURNTABLE
Entry-level "plug n' play" two speed turntable with single piece aluminium tonearm and pre-fitted Ortofon OM5e cartridge.



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.



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.

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Real Stores

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision have 26 stores nationwide with plans to open more during 2013. 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 (NICWA00).

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SEVENoaks

SOUND & VISION

GREAT SAVINGS ON HOME CINEMA PACKAGES

YAMAHA & TANNOY

RX-V375 • AV RECEIVER
HTS-101 • SPEAKER PACKAGE



£499
SAVE £309



PIONEER & Q ACOUSTICS

VSX-923 • AV RECEIVER
2000i 5.1 • SPEAKER PACKAGE*



£799
SAVE £299



*Standard Finishes

YAMAHA & MONITOR AUDIO

RX-V675 • AV RECEIVER
MASS • SPEAKER PACKAGE



£899
SAVE £399

YAMAHA & Q ACOUSTICS

RX-V675 • AV RECEIVER
Q7000i • SPEAKER PACKAGE



£1099
SAVE £299



YAMAHA & KEF

RX-A1030 • AV RECEIVER
E305 • SPEAKER PACKAGE



£1649
SAVE £249

PIONEER & B&W

SC-LX57 • AV RECEIVER
MT-50 • SPEAKER PACKAGE



£1999
SAVE £289



AV RECEIVERS



ESSAV
.COM

ARCAM • FMJ AVR380 • 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 AVR450 & AVR750



ESSAV
.COM

DENON • AVR-X2000 • AV RECEIVER
7.1-channel receiver featuring support for Apple AirPlay, DLNA 1.5 compatibility and online music services such as Spotify.
Also Available: DENON AVR-X3000 & AVR-X4000



ESSAV
.COM

ONKYO • TX-NR626 • AV RECEIVER
7.2-channel receiver with excellent audio and video performance plus Internet radio and music streaming services.
Also Available: ONKYO TX-NR828

BLU-RAY

SAVE £400
WHEN YOU TRADE-IN ANY
ARCAM DISC PLAYER



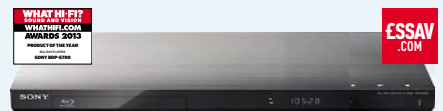
£999
OR LESS

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



ESSAV
.COM

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



ESSAV
.COM

SONY • BDP-S790 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER
Give your movie collection the red carpet treatment with this award-winning player with advanced networking features, superior audio performance and support for SACD.
Also Available: SONY BDP-S4100

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and online.

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and offers visit
www.ssav.com or
contact your local store

SALE

GREAT SAVINGS ON TV & SOUNDBAR PACKAGES

PANASONIC & B&W
TX-P55VT65 • 55" 3D PLASMA TV
PANORAMA 2 • SOUNDBAR

£3249
SAVE £799



PANASONIC & YAMAHA
TX-P42GT60 • 42" 3D PLASMA TV
YSP-1400 • SOUNDBAR

£1299
SAVE £299



SONY & B&W
KD65X9005 • 55" 4K 3D LED TV
(ULTRA HD)
PANORAMA 2 • SOUNDBAR

£5499
SAVE £1149



SONY & MONITOR AUDIO
KDL-47W805 • 47" 3D LED TV
ASB-2 • SOUNDBAR

£1699
SAVE £299



SAMSUNG & B&W
UE55F9000 • 55" 4K LED TV
PANORAMA 2 • SOUNDBAR

£4199
SAVE £749



SAMSUNG & SONOS
UE55F8000 • 55" 3D LED TV
PLAYBAR • WIRELESS SOUNDBAR

£2399
SAVE £599



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We have a national network of stores and a hard-won reputation for outstanding customer service.

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Visit our new website for a streamlined on-line experience with a better defined product section, more product choices and an improved search engine.

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Bishop's Stortford • 01279 506576
Bristol • 0117 974 3727
Bromley • 020 8290 1988
Cambridge • 01223 304770
Chelsea • 020 7352 9466
Cheltenham • 01242 241171
Chorleywood • 0845 5046364
Epsom • 01372 720720

Exeter • 01392 218895
Guildford • 01483 536666
Holborn • 020 7837 7540
Kingston • 020 8547 0717
Leeds (Wetherby) • 01937 586886
Loughton • 020 8532 0770
Maidstone • 01622 686366
Norwich • 01603 767605
Oxford • 01865 241773

Reading • 0118 959 7768
Sevenoaks • 01732 459555
Sheffield • 0114 255 5861
Southampton • 023 8033 7770
Tunbridge Wells • 01892 531543
Weybridge • 01932 840859
Witham (Essex) • 01376 501733
Yeovil • 01935 700078

Please Note: Some brands/products are not available at all stores. Special/added value offers are not in conjunction with any other offer (NICWAO).

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SEVENOAKS

SOUND & VISION



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
Hannspree SL22DMBB	135	11.13/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	09.13/ST	★★★★★	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
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 UE32ES5500	400	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Exciting, but the same money could buy better	LED	32	1920x1080					3	45x74x5
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 40TL868	480	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Formidable value meets good performance	LED	40	1920x1080					4	63x92x24
Toshiba 32L6353	450	09.13/FT	★★★★★	A decent TV for the money but response times can be sluggish	LED	32	1920x1080					4	44x76x7
£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
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

TELEVISIONS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	Active 3D	Passive 3D	Freeview	Freesat	HDMI	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
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	08.13/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	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	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	700	10.13/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	
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	

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YAMAHA



YSP-1400

DIGITAL SOUND PROJECTOR

The new 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

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YAS-101
SOUNDBAR

The Yamaha YAS-101 Soundbar combines two 6.5 cm cone speakers with a 7.5cm dual-driver sub woofer, driven by a digital amp with a total output of 120W. Although compact, its excellent structural design provides a large volume enclosure for both the speakers and subwoofer. The result is powerful, high quality sound that makes TV and movies much more enjoyable.



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WIRELESS
ACTIVE
SUBWOOFER

YSP-3300

DIGITAL SOUND PROJECTOR

The YSP-3300 from Yamaha is a slim, high sound quality Digital Sound Projector with a Wireless Active Subwoofer that delivers exceptionally high surround sound performance with wireless music streaming.

Also Available: Yamaha YSP-2200



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Other brands available include:

DENON ONKYO Pioneer

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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 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
Toshiba 46YL863	1200	05.12/GT	★★★★★	A breathtaking television in its class	LED	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	4	77x127x3
Up to £5000													
Bang & Olufsen BeoVision 11 40	5250	04.13/FT	★★★★★	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 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	2400	07.13/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	12.13/FT	★★★★★	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	12.13/FT	★★★★★	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 KD-65X9005A	5000	12.13/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

5 ways to... calibrate your TV



1 First things first Make sure all cables and connections are secure, that your room's lighting is as it will be when you normally watch TV, and that the screen's been powered up for at least half an hour.

2 Dig out a disc If you've bought DVDs in the past few years you'll almost certainly be in possession of an Optimiser menu. Check www.thx.com for a full list of titles that include THX menus.

3 Wield those remotes You'll need your disc player's remote control to navigate the Optimiser, and your TV's handset to make adjustments to your screen's contrast,

colour, brightness and sharpness. Use the Optimiser movie clip to finesse motion processing too – it's an easy one to overlook.

4 Spend a bit more £5 or so put the way of www.thx.com buys you a pair of blue-lensed glasses, which you'll need to adjust your screen's tint (colour temperature).

5 Spend a lot more The Imaging Science Foundation trains TV dealers to calibrate TV to professional standards, and for the not-inconsiderable sum of £250 they'll visit your home and make sure you're getting the very best from your TV. If fine-tuning is your thing, it doesn't get better than this.



Blu-ray players

Smart ability _____ Extends the viewing choice beyond discs with apps like BBC iPlayer
Multichannel out _____ Analogue outputs that feed high quality sound to a non-HDMI receiver
Twin HDMI outputs _____ These are used if you have two displays, say a projector and a TV

The shortlist



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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Re-Certified Model*



30-PIN MODEL

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 OR LESS

SAVE
£200



*Bowers & Wilkins Re-Certified products are "pre-owned" products that have undergone rigorous testing to ensure they meet Bowers & Wilkins strict quality standards for both sonic performance and mechanical integrity. On occasion Re-Certified products may contain minor cosmetic blemishes. Bowers & Wilkins back every Re-Certified product with a two-year warranty.

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B&O BEOLIT 12

WIRELESS SPEAKER SYSTEM

Bang & Olufsen have squeezed decades of audio expertise into the Beolit 12. Super-portable and hand assembled, it features the flourish of an aluminium grille with smooth lines that will look great sat on a shelf or at the heart of the party. Complete with Apple AirPlay support, it combines intuitive controls and easy streaming to set all your tunes free.



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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									
Pioneer BDP-450	225	01.12/FT	★★★★★	This budget deck is a real rival for the top performers	2	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	95	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	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
£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 DBP-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	★★★★★	A splendid 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 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	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
£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	14x42x37 6
InFocus Screen Play 8604	2500	10.11/FT	★★★★★	A fine projector in many regards	DLP	1.54-1.93:1	1920x1080	1700	3	0	1	18x43x34 8.6
Optoma HD83	2400	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Healthily priced, with a solid performance	DLP	1.45x2.28	1920x1080	1600	2	0	0	19x49x37 8.4
£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	16x47x40 8.5
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	18x46x47 15
Panasonic PT-AT6000E	3000	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best projector £2000+, Awards 2013	LCD	1.18-2.36	1920x1080	2400	3	0	1	15x47x36 8.7
Runco LightStyle LS-5	7500	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Glorious performance at a high price	DLP	1.85-2.40	1920x1080	754	2	0	1	20x45x53 10
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	46x21x46 11
Sony VPL-HW30ES	3000	02.12/GT	★★★★★	Very capable, but there's better for the money	SKRD	1.47-2.18	1920x1080	1300	2	0	1	18x41x46 10
Sony VPL-HW50ES	3000	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Shows why home cinema can't be beaten	SKRD	1.64-2.37	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	18x41x46 9.6
Sony VPL-VW95ES	5000	01.12/FT	★★★★★	By class standards, it's one of the best projectors around	SKRD	1.37-2.19:1	1920x1080	1000	2	0	1	18x47x48 11

"If you're serious about big-screen home cinema, then the Sony VPL-HW50ES is a very sweet performer indeed"

December 2012



AV receivers & amplifiers

Up to £500 Well-equipped and deliver convincing surround sound
£500-£1000 There are gains in features, build quality and sonic performance
£1000+ Real powerhouses that pack loads of features and cinema-style sound

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Yamaha RX-V375

"As an introductory step into home cinema sound, you're in extremely good hands with this budget Yamaha receiver"



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Sony STR-DN1040

"Insightful and dynamic, exciting and punchy, this talented AV receiver will charm its way into your home cinema room"



AWARD WINNER

Pioneer SC-LX57

"Outshining its predecessor in every way, the impressive SC-LX57 once again sets the bar for home cinema amplifiers at this price"

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Channels /power (w)	HDMI in	HDMI out	Networking	3D passthrough	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £300									
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	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier up to £350, Awards 2013	5x70	4	1	●	15x44x32
£300-£500									
Harman Kardon AVR-171	450	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Could be subtler but delivers a powerhouse performance	7x100	6	2	●	12x44x30
Onkyo TX-NR515	450	11.12/GT	★★★★★	The amplifier to beat in 2012, now beaten	7x130	8	2	●	17x44x33
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-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
£1000-£2000									
Denon AVR-4520	1970	03.13/ST	★★★★★	An enjoyable, easygoing sound, pipped only in terms of absolute excitement	9x150	7	2	●	20x43x42
Onkyo TX-NR818	1000	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Impressive AV amp with features aplenty	7x180	8	2	●	34x59x55
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
Yamaha RX-A3030	2000	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £1500+, Awards 2013	9x150	8	1	●	19x44x47
£2000 and above									
Anthem MRX 700	2100	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Fantastic-sounding and worthy of a serious audition	7x90	4	1	●	17x44x39
Arcam AVR750	4000	12.13/FT	★★★★★	It's not flawless, but this AV receiver is very good	7x100	7	2	●	17x43x43
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



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 sub's response to produce a more balanced sound

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
Bowers & Wilkins ASW610



Bowers & Wilkins ASW610XP



AWARD WINNER
Velodyne SPL-1000 Ultra

Also consider

Also consider					Power (w)	Driver (cm)	Passive radiator	Sealed	Ported	Drive unit orientation	Line inputs	Speaker ins	Line outputs	Speaker outs	Phase invert	Remote control	EQ	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict																
Up to £500																			
B&WASW610	450	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Best subwoofer up to £700, Awards 2011	200	25	●		Forward	1	1			●		●	4	31x31x38	
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&WASW610XP	700	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for big bass from a small box	500	25		●	Forward	2	1			●		●	4	32x32x37	
Monitor Audio Apex AW-12	950	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Beautiful to look at, and punchy too	500	30.5	●		Forward	1	0		●		●	●	2	34x34x41	
REL Acoustics T-7	650	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A compact sub with authority	200	20	●		Downward	2	1			●			2	30x35x33	
Sonos Sub	600	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Sounds great. Makes sense with Sonos Play speakers	n/a	n/a	●		Inward	0	0			●	●	●	1	40x38x16	
Tannoy TS2.12	549	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Attractively priced with decent sonics too	500	30.5	●		Forward	1	0		●		●		2	44x43x38	
Velodyne EQ-Max 12	825	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Powerful and agile and supremely enjoyable	225	30.5		●	Forward	1	2		●	●	●	●	1	45x42x46	
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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AM2DC wins the Editors choice in The Absolute Sound Magazine.

Other Subwoofers Also Available:-

Gemini 10" 150W RMS £214.95 to £259.95
 XXLS400 12" 400W RMS £424.95 to £479.95
 Monolith-DF 12" 300W RMS £454.95 to £544.95

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XLS200-DF
 (275W RMS - 550W Peak)
 From £314.95 to £379.95

I found it hard to grasp the lack of difference between the sound output of the mighty Monolith and that of my resident £2,500 REL.

Adam Rayner
 Home Cinema Choice

Outstanding Value

Much more subwoofer for your money, just compare the specifications of the Monolith against any similar priced subwoofers.



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 (500W RMS - 1000W Peak)
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We have expertise in building SONOS in to existing audio systems, getting the very best sound quality, and offer our own unique product bundles. The new SONOS PLAYBAR is the latest addition to the SONOS eco system.

Designed to work as a sound bar with a flat screen television, integrate with a SONOS SUB and PLAY 3's, and in addition as a room zone player. Take a look at our exclusive video at www.musicmatters.co.uk/sonos.



NAIM DAC V1 & NAP100

DAC-V1 is a small, compact asynchronous USB Digital to Analogue Converter with multiple S/PDIF inputs, precision volume control and headphone amplifier. When partnered with the NAP 100 power amplifier you create a compact two box system designed in such a way to provide true Naim audio sound quality from a Mac, PC or laptop via a USB connection. Audio file content at up to 24bit/384khz resolution can be accessed from a wide variety of audio playback applications.

DAC-V1 transforms a computer from an audio source to a genuine high quality music hub. Highly versatile, you can also integrate with a traditional hi-fi system or use with any two-channel digital audio source such as a games console or satellite receiver via one of the five S/PDIF digital inputs. Furthermore, simply add the Naim UnitiServe hard disk music server to create a compact, high quality music system.

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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	01.13/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
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

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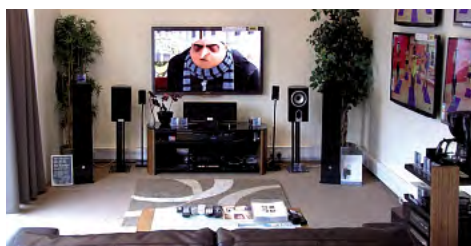
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"A truly polished sound" said What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision magazine of the A19 while they said of the 2050i's, "Surefooted, agile, and delivering an expansive soundstage, these floorstanding speakers are worth every penny." SYSTEM TSP £1757.95 | 5 Year Supercare £129.95

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MARANTZ PM6005 AMPLIFIER, CD6005 CD PLAYER & Q ACOUSTICS 2020i SPEAKERS (PAIR)

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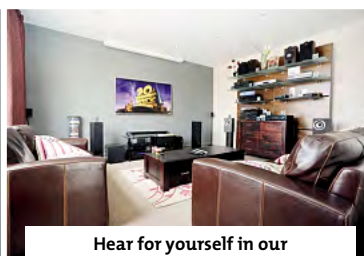
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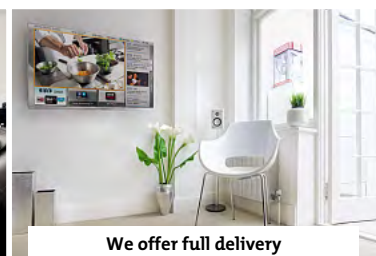
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"Throws out a clear, bright and vivid image." - What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision magazine.

TSP £1599.95

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PANASONIC PTAT6000 3D PROJECTOR

"Detailed, dynamic & confident." - What Hi-Fi? S&V magazine.

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3D READY **DEAL**

SONY STRDH540 AV RECEIVER

Ample connectivity and exciting sound quality, plus 4K pass-through make this an exciting piece of kit. 5 Year Supercare £14.95

£149.95

SAVE £50

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013 **3D READY** **SALE**

YAMAHA RXV375 AV RECEIVER

"As strong a case as ever for being the finest first step onto the AV ladder." - WHF? S&V magazine. WERE £249 5 Year Supercare £19.90

£199

SAVE £200

Bluetooth **3D READY** **DEAL**

HARMAN KARDON AVR171 AV RECEIVER

"This lovely-looking receiver delivers a powerhouse performance with music and movies." - WHF? S&V magazine. TSP £449.95 | 5 Year Supercare £24.95

£249.95

SAVE £50

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013 **3D READY** **SALE**

DENON AVR2000 AV RECEIVER

"Brings Denon back to the AV receiver top table" - WHF? S&V magazine. WERE £399 | 5 Year Supercare £34.95

£349.95

SAVE £100

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013 **3D READY** **SALE**

YAMAHA RXV675 AV RECEIVER

"You're encased in a bubble of accurately placed sound effects" - WHF? S&V magazine. WERE £499.95 | 5 Year Supercare £39.95

£399.95

SAVE £50

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013 **3D READY** **SALE**

SONY STRDN1040 AV RECEIVER

"Depth of detail, exciting and ample connectivity - this is a superstar in the making." - WHF? S&V magazine. WERE £499.95 | 5 Year Supercare £44.95

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WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013 **3D READY** **SALE**

MARANTZ UD7007 SMART 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

"A solidly made machine that performs to a very high standard." - WHF? S&V mag. WERE £629 | 5 Year Supercare £54.90

£549

SAVE £480

CALL FOR INDIVIDUAL UNIT PRICES **DEAL**

PIONEER SCLX57 AV RECEIVER & DALI ZENSOR 15.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE

What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision magazine praised the SCLX57's "stunning levels of subtlety" and the Zensor 15.1 speaker package saying "There's meticulous attention to detail, both with big crashes and quieter moments". SYSTEM TSP £2178 | 5 Year Supercare £169.95

£1699.95

SAVE £600

4K ULTRA HD UPSCALING **CALL FOR INDIVIDUAL UNIT PRICES** **DEAL**

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." SYSTEM TSP £3599.90 | 5 Year Supercare £299.95

£2999.95

SAVE £200

WiFi Built-in **4K ULTRA HD UPSCALING** **RICHER SOUNDS EXCLUSIVE** **SALE**

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO 752BD SMART 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

"The 752BD takes some beating." - Hi-Fi News magazine. WERE £799.95 | 5 Year Supercare £59.95

£599.95

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BLU-RAY PLAYER
BEST ALL-ROUND VALUE
SONY BDPS4100

DEAL

SONY BDPS4100
3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

"This budget player represents excellent value for money." - WHF? S&V mag.
5 Year Supercare just 10% of purchase price

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ALSO AVAILABLE WITH MULTI-REGION DVD PLAYBACK ONLY £159.95

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
BLU-RAY PLAYER
SONY BDPS790

SALE

SONY BDPS790
3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

"Superbly specified Sony is a very fine all-rounder." - WHF? S&V mag.
WERE £169.95 | 5 Year Supercare £14.95

£149.95

SAVE £30

ALSO AVAILABLE WITH MULTI-REGION DVD PLAYBACK ONLY £179.95

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013
★★★★★
July 2012

SALE

PANASONIC DMPBDT500
3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

"Delivers a truly captivating performance." - What Hi-Fi? Sound & Vision magazine.
WERE £199.95
5 Year Supercare £16.95

£169.95

SAVE £70

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013
SOUNDBARS
BEST SOUNDBAR
LG NB4530

DEAL

LG NB4530
SOUNDBAR

"Looks the part and sounds great." - What Hi-Fi? S&V mag.
TSP £349.95
5 Year Supercare £27.95

£279.95

LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED

NEW! Bluetooth

YAMAHA YSP1400
SOUNDBAR

Bluetooth plus Yamaha's trademark sound quality makes this a great choice for both music and movies.
5 Year Supercare £39.95

£399.95

LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED

MONITOR AUDIO ASB2
SOUNDBAR

"Sensational sound quality... good bass." - What Hi-Fi? S&V mag.
5 Year Supercare £99.95

£999.95

LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013
SPEAKER PACKAGES
BEST 5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE
TANNOY HTS101

DEAL

TANNOY HTS101
5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE

"Simply in terms of scale, it's deeply impressive." - What Hi-Fi? S&V mag.
5 Year Supercare just 10% of purchase price

CALL OR SEE WEB

LOWEST PRICE GUARANTEED

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013
SPEAKER PACKAGES
BEST 5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE
Q ACOUSTICS Q7000i

ALSO AVAILABLE IN WHITE

DEAL

Q ACOUSTICS Q7000i
5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE

"Organised and agile without ever sacrificing any bass punch." - What Hi-Fi? S&V mag.
5 Year Supercare £89.95

£899.95

SAVE £100

ALSO AVAILABLE IN WALNUT

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION AWARDS 2013
SPEAKER PACKAGES
BEST FLOORSTANDING SPEAKER
CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AERO 5.1

SALE

CAMBRIDGE AUDIO AERO
5.1 SPEAKER PACKAGE INC. FLOORSTANDING SPEAKERS

"Seriously clever and seriously good." - What Hi-Fi? S&V mag.
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5 Year Supercare £149.95

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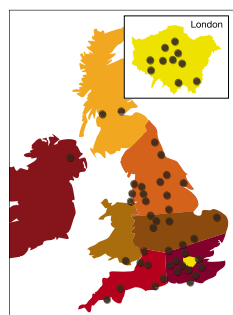
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CD players

Integrated _____ Has both a CD mechanism and digital-to-analogue conversion tech
Transport _____ Needs an outboard DAC but can deliver a higher standard of sound

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
Marantz CD6005

Awards 2013: Best CD Player up to £500
 “Marantz has played it a little safe but when you’ve nailed this corner of the market, you don’t need to do much else. The best has just been made better. Again.”



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Naim CD5si

Awards 2013: Best CD Player £500-£1500
 “In performance terms the CD5si can hold its own against tough competition from Audiolab and Cyrus. It’s been a long time since anything has managed that.”



AWARD WINNER
Roksan Caspian M2 CD

Awards 2013: Best CD Player £1500+
 “Factor in the Caspian M2’s brilliant timing, wonderfully layered and subtle midrange, and you have a top-class player capable of fronting some pretty exotic systems.”

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Integrated Transport	Co-axial out	Optical out	XLR 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	★★★★★	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	9x43x31
Cambridge Audio Azur 651C	450	03.12/FT	★★★★★	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x31
Marantz CD6004	300	01.12/ST	★★★★★	●	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	2	11x44x34
Marantz CD6005	350	10.13/FT	★★★★★	●	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	11x44x34
Sansui CDD-201V	200	10.12/FT	★★★★★	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	7x43x28
£500-£1000														
Arcam FMJ CD17	650	06.12/ST	★★★★★	●	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	9x43x29
Audiolab 8200CD	800	12.10/GT	★★★★★	●	1	1	1	0	2	2	0	1	1	8x44x30
Audiolab 8200CDQ	950	09.11/FT	★★★★★	●	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	0	1	8x44x30
NAD C 546BEE	500	10.12/FT	★★★★★	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	9x44x31
Cyrus CD Transport	750	01.12/ST	★★★★★	●	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36
Cyrus CD6 SE2	700	06.12/ST	★★★★★	●	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	8x22x36
Naim CD5si	1000	02.13/FT	★★★★★	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	7x43x30
Pioneer PD-50	500	09.13/FT	★★★★★	●	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	2	13x44x33
Rega Apollo-R	550	06.12/ST	★★★★★	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	9x22x32
Roksan Kandy K2	900	06.12/ST	★★★★★	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	10x43x38
Yamaha CD-S2000	979	03.09/GT	★★★★★	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	14x44x44
£1000 and above														
Audio Research CD5	5500	06.09/FT	★★★★★	●	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	13x48x31
Burmester 069	35840	11.13/FT	★★★★★	●	2	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	16x45x34
Cambridge Audio Azur 851C	1200	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	●	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	1	2	12x43x34
Copland CDA 825	4298	05.13/FT	★★★★★	●	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	10x43x39
Cyrus CD 8 SE2	1200	09.12/FT	★★★★★	●	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36
dCS Puccini	11300	02.11/FT	★★★★★	●	1	0	1	1	0	2	0	0	2	11x46x40
Leema Antila IIS Eco	2995	09.11/FT	★★★★★	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x44x31
Musical Fidelity M6CD	2100	08.13/FT	★★★★★	●	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	13x44x39
Naim CDS3/XPS2	9990	06.04/FT	★★★★★	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x31
Naim CD5 XS	1950	Aw.09/FT	★★★★★	●	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	7x43x30
Naim CD555/555PS	18345	10.09/FT	★★★★★	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	11x43x31
Naim CDX2	3640	02.10/FT	★★★★★	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x31
Parasound Halo CD1	5000	07.13/FT	★★★★★	●	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	11x44x35
Primare CD32	2200	04.11/FT	★★★★★	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x43x38
Rega Isis	5998	06.10/FT	★★★★★	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	11x43x35
Roksan Caspian M2 CD	1650	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	8x43x33
T+A MP 3000 HV	7900	12.13/FT	★★★★★	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	11x43x35
Wadia S7i	14000	10.11/FT	★★★★★	●	1	0	1	1	0	3	2	1	1	17x46x46



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

Our recommendations					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											
Up to £500														
Audioengine D1	150	05.12/FT	★★★★★	A DAC and headphone amp with a fine sound	1	1	0	0	1		1	1	0	3x9x10
Audioquest DragonFly	215	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC up to £300, Awards 2012	1	0	0	0	0		1	0	0	1x2x6
Arcam rDAC	300	10.10/FT	★★★★★	Best DAC £200-£400, Awards 2011	0	1	1	0	0		0	1	0	4x16x11
Arcam irDAC	400	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Best DAC £300-£500, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	0	2	2	0	0		0	1	0	4x12x19
Arcam irDAC Wireless	380	09.12/GT	★★★★★	No longer the default choice at the money, still very much a contender	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	4x16x11
Arcam rPAC	150	04.13/ST	★★★★★	More desirable alternatives, but the rPAC still has plenty of merit	1	0	0	0	0		1	1	0	3x10x6
Camb. Audio DacMagic 100	200	06.12/FT	★★★★★	An affordable, fine looking and listenable DAC	1	2	2	0	0		0	1	0	5x11x13
Camb. Audio DacMagic Plus	350	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Better sound and features than the original - but pricey	1	2	2	0	0		1	1	1	5x22x19
Camb. Audio DacMagic XS	100	12.13/FT	★★★★★	A superb buy for those on a tight budget	0	0	0	0	0		1	0	0	5x3x1
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
Firestone Spitfire	250	05.10/GT	★★★★★	If you don't need USB, then this is the pick of the DACs	0	1	1	0	0		0	1	0	5x8x11
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 DAC 1	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		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
Heed Audio Dactilus 3	515	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Excellent presentation let down by understated sound	1	1	1	0	0		0	1	0	7x10x25
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
£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
Burmester 113	2300	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Small and unassuming but packs a seriously exciting sound	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	1	6x20x17
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

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DACs continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	USB in	Optical in	Co-axial in	AES EBU in	HDMI in	Wireless	Headphone out	RCA out	Balanced XLR out	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
£1000 and above													
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
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



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

The shortlist



Pro-Ject Essential II

Awards 2012: Best Turntable up to £500



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Rega RP3/Elys2

Awards 2013: Best Turntable £400-£800



Rega RP6/Exact

Awards 2013: Best Turntable £800+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	33.33	45	78	RPM	Elec. speed change	Manual operation	Phono amp	Tonearm inc.	Cartridges inc.	USB port	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £1000															
Edwards Audio TT1	380	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Attempting alternative to the class-leaders at this price				●	●	●	●	●	●	1	12x45x36
Pro-Ject Essential II	200	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable up to £400, Awards 2013				●	●	●	●	●	●	3	14x46x36
Pro-Ject 2Xperience 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 P3-24/Elys 2	508	11.07/GT	★★★★★	Best turntable up to £300-£600, Awards 2010				●	●	●	●	●	●	8	12x45x36
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 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
Origin Live Calypso package	2440	12.11/FT	★★★★★	Impressive package, but lacks some attention to detail				●	●	●	●	●	●	1	14x45x38
Pro-Ject 2Xperience 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 over most of the UK
 Internet _____ Allows you to listen to thousands of radio stations from around the world

The shortlist



Pure Evoke D2

Awards 2013: Best Radio up to £100
 "A bargain of a radio at £85. It doesn't go especially loud, but for most requirements the Evoke D2 will certainly fit the bill."



Pure Evoke F4

Awards 2013: Best Radio £100-£200
 "For an all-in-one, one-stop, portable radio solution, we don't believe the Evoke F4 can be beaten at the price."



Geneva World Radio DAB+

Awards 2012: Best Radio £200+
 "A premium product that's an intriguing mix of ancient and modern, with an old-fashioned look married with digital features."

Also consider

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	★★★★★		●				7x2x8
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
Magicbox 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-15 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 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 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

The shortlist



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Q Acoustics Concept 20

Awards 2013: Best Stereo Speaker £200-£400
 “The Concept 20s really are an incredible achievement and a very bold move from the chaps at Q Acoustics.”



AWARD WINNER
KEF LS50

Awards 2013: Best Standmounter £400-£800
 “The first thing that strikes you is the depth and power of the bass, which is a surprise given the compact size of the speakers.”



AWARD WINNER
PMC Twenty 22

Awards 2013: Best Standmounter £1500+
 “These PMCs have the scale and power to deliver rousing classical renditions and the finesse to handle more intimate recordings.”

Also consider

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount	Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £200								
Acoustic Energy Compact 1	150	10.11/FT	★★★★★	Stylish looks meet grown-up performance	●	2	22x15x20	
Audioengine P4	183	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Small in size, huge in sound: a must-audition pair	●	3	23x14x17	
Cambridge Audio S30	120	07.07/FT	★★★★★	Has an air of quality that extends from its build to its sound	●	2	23x16x22	
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	165	10.13/GT	★★★★★	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	★★★★★	Superb Award-winning speakers from B&W	●	4	34x20x33	

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SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Standmount	Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
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	08.11/GT	★★★★★	These brilliant budget standmounters demand a listen	●			2	27x16x22
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
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
Q Acoustics Concept 20	350	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers £200-£400, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	●			2	26x17x28
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 V4	380	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £350-£700, Awards 2011			●	2	97x20x28
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
Arcaydis 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
AVIADM9.1	1125	07.12/GT	★★★★★	A simple way to make the most of your music			●	5	30x20x26



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SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
£500-£1500							
B&W 684	700	12.09/GT	★★★★★	Still a fine product after all these years	●	4	91x20x30
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 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 DM 3/7	1300	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Plenty of positives in this mid-range floorstander	●	2	96x20x27
Dynaudio Excite X12	695	09.08/FT	★★★★★	They get enough right to warrant the full five stars	●	4	29x17x26
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 TD 508 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
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
KEF LS50	800	12.13/ST	★★★★★	Best standmounter £400-£800, Awards 2013	●	1	30x20x28
KEF R100	600	08.12/FT	★★★★★	These are extremely talented stand-mounters	●	4	28x18x29
KEF X300A	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 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
Neat Motive 2	945	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Cohesive, authoritative and downright exciting	●	4	77x16x20
Neat Petite SX	1250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Small and perfectly formed standmounters	●	6	31x20x18
PMC DB1i	1050	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Superbly detailed and rewarding small speakers	●	4	29x16x23
Opera Mezza	850	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Suave-looking and good-sounding, but these don't possess the sonic assertiveness of some	●	3	32x20x33
Quad 12L Classic	500	11.11/FT	★★★★★	There's plenty to admire here	●	4	34x21x28
Rega RS3	780	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Floorstanders that are effortless with dynamics	●	3	80x22x25
Revolver Music 3	650	06.10/FT	★★★★★	Big, bold looks disguise an easy-going character	●	4	39x21x28
Revolver Music 5	1300	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Fine all-rounders with the power to fill larger rooms	●	4	93x25x32
Ruark Acoustics Sabre III	899	06.09/GT	★★★★★	Communicate music so well they demand to be auditioned	●	2	34x20x27

SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
PMC Twenty 21	1485	10.13/GT	★★★★★	If you're looking for a top-class pair of standmounters, these are well worth a listen	●		4	33x15x28
Roksan Kandy K2 TR-5	750	06.09/GT	★★★★★	Stunning speakers that deserve to be labelled as contenders for class-leading status	●		1	37x19x28
Spendor S3/SR2	850	07.11/GT	★★★★★	A little less than the sum of their parts	●		4	31x17x18
Spendor SA1	1395	07.08/FT	★★★★★	Small, top-class standmounts	●		3	31x17x19
Tangent Evo E45	650	12.09/GT	★★★★★	For those who like an exciting and exuberant listen	●		2	100x15x26
Tannoy Precision 6.1	900	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Rhythmic, detailed speakers but a lack of solidity leaves them sounding unbalanced	●		2	33x22x26
Tannoy Revolution DC6 SE	700	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Responsive with a good sense of cohesion. Could do with a little more spark	●		1	37x20x24
Tannoy Revolution DC6T	799	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £700-£1500, Awards 2011	●		1	95x26x29
Tannoy Revolution DC6T SE	1000	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £800-£1500, Awards 2013	●		1	100x31x28
Tannoy Rev. Sig. DC4	600	07.12/GT	★★★★★	DC4s are still appealing across the board	●		2	27x17x18
Totem Rainmaker	1095	06.10/FT	★★★★★	Hugely musical, and a pleasure to listen to	●		4	36x17x23
Triangle Color 123	600	08.12/FT	★★★★★	A brilliant desktop speaker package	●		3	14x14x14
Triangle Comete Anniv.	950	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for injecting energy into your music	●		1	42x20x34
Vienna Ac. Haydn Grand	1000	10.10/FT	★★★★★	Beautifully built, they pack a sweet sonic punch that's focused and purposeful	●		5	36x17x27
Wharfedale Denton	500	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Relaxed yet engaging sound has a lot of appeal	●		1	32x20x31
Wharfedale Diamond 155	500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Class leaders when it comes to sound, but let down by average build quality	●		7	94x20x31
£1500 and above								
Acoustic Energy Reference 1	1500	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Terrific all-rounders for the money	●		1	31x19x28
ADAM Aud. Classic Compact 3	2800	06.10/GT	★★★★★	For those who like their music ear-poppingly loud	●		1	44x23x29
ADAM Audio Tensor Gamma	12500	05.09/FT	★★★★★	Quite possibly the best speakers we've seen in a decade	●		2	108x32x34
Audiovector S1 Avantgarde	2950	03.10/FT	★★★★★	At their best these are stunning, but not for all tastes	●		5	37x19x28
Aurosal VS	1650	04.11/FT	★★★★★	When they're good, these Aurosal's are great	●		3	108x22x27
Analysis Audio Omega	14500	08.11/FT	★★★★★	These planar floorstanders are a sonic treat	●		1	168x61x6

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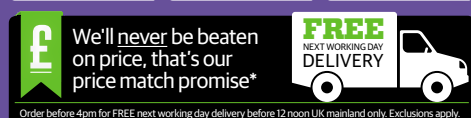
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SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
£1500 and above							
ATC SCM 100A	11615	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Massively talented and proportioned	●	4	107x40x56
Beauhorn Rhapsody B2	2750	10.07/FT	★★★★★	Outlandish shape but treat them right and you'll be deeply rewarded	●	98	120x34x75
B&O BeoLab 9	5060	05.07/FT	★★★★★	Work not just as style but in hi-fi terms too	●	4	78x40x430
B&O BeoLab 5	11000	10.08/FT	★★★★★	Active speakers with outlandish looks that sound fabulous	●	1	97x49x49
B&W 800 Diamond	18000	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Some of the best speakers money can buy	●	3	118x45x65
B&W 805 Diamond	3750	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Good, but easier to admire than really love	●	3	42x24x35
B&W 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 Easya	1800	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Convenient and easy to use, these Focals are compromised by a relaxed delivery	●	2	90x17x24
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
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
Opera Grande Mezzo	1500	06.09/FT	★★★★★	These Operas are tall, elegant and talented	●	3	95x27x32
PMC Fact 3	4100	08.11/FT	★★★★★	Hugely capable but a touch overcontrolled	●	4	54x16x30
PMC Fact 8	4700	04.10/FT	★★★★★	These PMC floorstanders are quite simply magical - even at this price	●	4	103x15x38
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	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £1500+, Awards 2013	●	4	92x15x33
PMC Wafer 2	2295	02.12/GT	★★★★★	A real achievement for those after proper hi-fi	●	2	57x35x10
ProAc Response D18	2145	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £1500+, Awards 2011	●	6	93x19x27



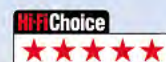
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D7 has an unmistakeable touch of magic. Easy to drive, genuinely efficient, undemanding of placement, fine stereo, extended powerful bass, upbeat and well-balanced, build and finish first rate. What more can one ask? *Hi-Fi Critic Sep 2013*



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SPENDOR

SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
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 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
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

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January 2013



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Onkyo TXNR626

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Also available from Onkyo:
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SAVE £100

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SAVE £174

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Portable
Headphones
**Goldring NS1000
Expedition**

RRP: £139.95
SAVE: £70.00

£69.95

SAVE £70



HiFi Systems

Multi-Purpose Mini System
Marantz Melody Media MCR610

- CD-audio, FM, DAB and HD music files
- Built-in WiFi

RRP: £499.00
SAVE: £50.00

£449.00

"System Product of the Year"
What HiFi? Awards 2013

**SAVE EVEN MORE WHEN
BOUGHT WITH SPEAKERS**

SAVE £50



Compact Network Receiver
Denon DRAN5

RRP: £269.00
SAVE: £40.00

£229.00

SAVE £40

**SAVE EVEN MORE WHEN
BOUGHT WITH SPEAKERS**



DAB/FM/CD/Receiver
Mini Separates System
Denon DF109DABC

RRP: £479.99
SAVE: £230.99

£249.00

SAVE £230

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CD/DAB/DAB+/
USB Micro System
Denon DM39DAB

- 2x 45W channels
- Available in Black or Silver

"Best Music System up to £400"
What HiFi? Awards 2013

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Stereo amplifiers

Integrated These amplifiers combine a preamp and power section in one box
Power output A higher number usually means louder, depending on speakers
Digital inputs Some amplifiers now have a DAC built in, which could be useful

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

NAD D 3020

"If the D 3020 represents the future of hi-fi, count us in."



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Arcam FMJ A19

"It won't break the bank but it will immediately improve a budget hi-fi set-up."



AWARD WINNER

Naim Nait 5i

"Nothing short of a gem for this end of the market."

Also consider

Also consider					Power (w)	DAC	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	USB in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Speaker outs	Tone controls	Headphone out	Remote control	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict															
Up to £1000																		
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
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	11.13/FT	★★★★★	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
Rotel RA-10	350	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best Stereo amp Up To £400, Awards 2012	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	14x44x33

AMPLIFIERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Power (w)	DAC	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	USB in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Speaker out	Tone controls	Headphone out	Remote control	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Bryston B60R	2600	07.09/FT	★★★★★	The Bryston B60R may be unassuming, but has quality	60	4	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	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	2	2	2	2	2	12x43x39
Chord Elec. Cyan Click HP	4215	07.10/FT	★★★★★	Stylish, and astonishingly well built too	100	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	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	0	2	2	2	2	2	1	9x43x34
Cyrus 6XPD	1250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A sturdy DAC-toting amp that's a cracker	40	6	0	0	0	1	2	2	2	2	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	2	2	2	2	2	7x22x36
Cyrus 8 DAC	1400	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Meticulous and engaging amp and DAC combo	70	6	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	7x22x36
Cyrus 8 XpD	1500	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Sets a sky-high standard at the price point	70	5	0	0	0	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	7x22x36
Cyrus 8XP	1250	11.09/GT	★★★★★	The Cyrus 8XP misses nothing out in sonic thrills	70	6	0	0	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	7x22x36
Cyrus DACXP Signature	2750	11.13/FT	★★★★★	With the Signature upgrade, the DACXP remains a fine product	70	2	0	0	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	7x22x36
Dartzeel CTH-8550	16858	05.10/FT	★★★★★	Well engineered - but with a colossal price tag	200	7	0	0	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	17x44x34
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	2	2	2	2	2	1	18x43x44
Devialet D-Premier	11450	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A fresh look at amp design	240	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	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	1	1	1	1	1	14x42x14
Heed Audio Obelisk si	1300	06.12/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £1000-£1500, Awards 2012	35	5	1	0	0	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	9x22x36
Karan Acoustics KA1180Mk2	5995	09.13/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest amps we've heard	180	4	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	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	1	1	1	1	1	8.5x43x35
Leema Tucana Mk II	3595	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier £2000+, Awards 2010.	148	7	0	0	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	10x43x36
Leema Elements	1395	12.12/GT	★★★★★	Solid choice, wide connection range and optional DAC	56	3	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	2	9x22x28
Myryad MXI2080	1000	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Assiduous, precise presentation	80	6	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	9x44x38
NAD C390DD	2250	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Novel thinking delivers an alternative to the favourites	150	1	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	2	2	1	13x43x39
Naim Nait 5XS	1500	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Still a top class premium amplifier	60	3	0	0	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	7x43x30

"The Arcam FMJ A19 is quietly confident of its ability to deliver a transparent and faithful sound"

January 2013



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AMPLIFIERS continued

AMPLIFIERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Power (w)	DAC	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	USB in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Speaker out	Tone controls	Headphone out	Remote control	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
£1000 and above																	
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	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			
Synthesis Shine	2449	07.10/FT	★★★★★	This valve design needs sensitive speakers to fly	40	5	0	0	1	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	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	●	●	●	1	14x48x31
Audionet Pre 1 G3	3525	01.10/FT	★★★★★	As revealing as amplifiers get for the money	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	1	7x43x31
ATC CA-2	1058	12.09/FT	★★★★★	A matchless preamp when paired with the P1 power amp	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	1	9x44x32
Cyrus DACXP+	2550	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Massive ability in a small box	2	0	0	1	●	●	●	1	7x22x36
Cyrus PreXP d	1300	02.10/GT	★★★★★	Works wonders when coupled with the matching 8 power amp	6	0	0	0	●	●	●	1	7x22x36
Heed Audio Obelisk pre/px	2230	04.13/FT	★★★★★	As superb-sounding preamp, but Heed needs to make it feel more luxurious	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	1	9x22x33
Lavardin C62	3471	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Belongs near the top of any shortlist	6	0	0	1	●	●	●	1	9x43x31
Leema Pyxis	3995	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A versatile, enjoyable preamp	5	1	1	1	●	●	●	1	11x44x31
Linn Akurate Kontrol	4200	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Part of the Linn Akurate system - and truly awesome	4	1	1	1	●	●	●	1	9x38x38
NAD C165BEE	650	08.10/FT	★★★★★	A brute of a preamp	4	1	1	0	●	●	●	1	8x44x29
Naim NAC 152 XS	975	02.10/GT	★★★★★	It's good, but could do better with dynamics	5	0	0	0	●	●	●	1	7x43x30
Quad Elite Pre	850	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Doesn't blow us away, but it's still worth consideration	6	1	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	●	●	●	1	9x30x22
Rotel RC-1580	995	03.10/FT	★★★★★	A likeable, fully featured performer that delivers much for the money	5	1	1	2	●	●	●	1	10x43x34
Townshend Allegri	1895	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Basic features, but terrific sound	6	0	0	0	●	●	●	1	5x13x31
£5000 and above													
Audio Research LS27	6500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	A fine preamp but struggles to shine in comparison to the Reference 75	6	0	0	1	●	●	●	1	13x48x34
Aesthetix Calypso Signature	6400	03.11/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest preamps on the market today	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	1	11x46x45
Bryston BP26DA	5050	08.06/FT	★★★★★	A must-hear preamp. Lacks style but built to last	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	1	6x49x28
Burmester 808 MK5	22242	02.13/FT	★★★★★	A beautifully constructed, highly versatile preamp for serious devotees	Opt	Opt	Opt	Opt	●	●	●	1	95x48x33
Chord Electronics CPA 8000	25500	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A magnificent preamp, but not quite the masterpiece its price demands	8	0	0	2	●	●	●	1	31x42x36
Chord Electronics Indigo	8670	11.09/FT	★★★★★	A far sighted design mixing useful features with great sound	6	0	0	0	●	●	●	1	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	●	●	●	1	10x44x46
Naim NAC252/Supercap	9070	11.08/FT	★★★★★	Makes a magical combination with the NAP250 power amp	6	0	0	0	●	●	●	1	9x43x31
Plinius Tautoro	6325	09.08/FT	★★★★★	A mighty amplifier in every sense of the word	4	1	1	1	●	●	●	1	16x45x48

"Yes, the Burmester 808 is massively expensive. But there's no denying the quality of its build or its exceptional sonic performance"

January 2013



Power amps

These are effectively the powerhouse of the system. They deliver the high currents necessary to make a loudspeaker work. They can be configured as a stereo unit, or monoblocs, where the circuitry for each channel is housed separately. Don't judge a power amp by its output level.

Our recommendations

Our recommendations					Type	Power (w)	Phono in	XLR in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Weight (kg)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict							
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

Inside your kit... what does a preamp do?



The Heed Obelisk pre/px/ps is a three-box combination merging a power amp, preamp and power supply



First things first, what is a preamp? It's an electrical device that takes an existing signal and prepares it for further amplification before passing it on to the main amplifier.

All one-box amps have preamplifier sections and they have two main jobs: to select the source, and to control the volume. Sounds easy, no?

It's so easy that it's perfectly possible to make a simple stereo preamp with an appropriate volume control and selector switch. It could work well too, because most stereo sources have an output that's too high to feed directly into a power amplifier, and needs to be turned down.

Such a device is usually called a passive preamp, and can produce excellent results if care is taken with system matching.

But that's not the only kind of preamp available. Most preamps we come across are of the active variety. That means they are powered (usually by the mains) and are actually capable of making a signal louder if needed.

Active versus passive

There are certain advantages with active designs. For one thing, they are far less system-fussy than their passive relatives, and are better able (in an electrical sense) to drive a power amplifier.

Also, if you play records, components such as phono stages – once an intricate part of all pre-amplifiers – need powered circuitry to increase the delicate signal from a cartridge hundreds of times to make it usable.



iPod docks

Docks with power _____ These are ready-made systems for your iPod; usually include speakers

Docks without power _____ These integrate an iPod into an existing system as a line level source

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	Dock type	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 S71 5i	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

Getting the most out of your dock

The most used wireless transmission methods tend to be the following: aptX Bluetooth, regular Bluetooth, Apple AirPlay and Kleeer (used by Arcam).

AirPlay is Apple's proprietary solution and only works with Apple devices. Bluetooth, and its higher-quality aptX variant, will work with any Bluetooth-compatible device, while Kleeer requires a dongle. If it were our money, we'd opt for one of the Bluetooth variants – it's versatile and the quality is fine, albeit lower than with a wired connection.

Whichever one you go for, and especially if you're physically connecting your device, it's important to supply the dock with a high enough quality file.

In our tests we found that 320kbps is as low as we'd go with MP3, with Apple Lossless, FLAC or uncompressed WAV far more preferable. If you use an Apple device, and use WAV files on your computer but don't have space for them on your portable, iTunes has a handy option to sync slightly lower-quality versions of your tracks to your device for streaming to the dock.



Epox Aktimate Micro



Wireless speakers

Bluetooth _____ Universal wireless system that's incorporated into most sources
AirPlay _____ Apple's proprietary wireless system; works over your home network

The shortlist



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Cambridge Audio Minx Go



AWARD WINNER
Denon Cocoon Stream DSD-501



AWARD WINNER
Audio Pro Allroom Air One

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	Aux	Charging	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500									
Audio Pro Allroom Air One	500	08.13/FT	★★★★★						20x31x19
B&W A5	400	08.13/GT	★★★★★						18x30x20
B&W A7	700	12.12/FT	★★★★★						22x36x16
Bose SoundLink Air	300	12.12/GT	★★★★★						17x31x10
Braven 625s	150	10.12/FT	★★★★★						6.5x5x16
Cambridge Audio Minx Air 100	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★						18x35x12
Cambridge Audio Minx Air 200	430	08.13/GT	★★★★★						45x22x17
Cambridge Audio Minx Go	100	08.13/FT	★★★★★						23x24x6
Denon Cocoon Stream DSD-501	250	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★						24x45x17
Geneva Model S Wireless DAB+	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★						15x14x18
Harman/Kardon Go+Play	280	05.13/FT	★★★★★						24x50x23
Jawbone Big Jambox	260	09.12/FT	★★★★★						9x26x8
iLuv MobiOut	70	05.13/GT	★★★★★						0x0x0
JBL Flip	100	05.13/GT	★★★★★						0x0x0
JBL OnBeat Rumble	260	10.13/ST	★★★★★						17x45x22
Libratone Zipp	370	10.13/ST	★★★★★						26x12x12
Libratone Loop	400	12.13/FT	★★★★★						33x33x8
Loewe AirSpeaker	500	03.13/GT	★★★★★						24x13x24
Logitech UE Boombox	200	12.12/GT	★★★★★						16x39x8
Logitech UE Mobile Boombox	75	05.13/GT	★★★★★						6x7x11
Monitor Audio Airstream WS100	250	09.13/GT	★★★★★						13x12x12
Philips Fidelio P9	240	03.13/FT	★★★★★						12x29x5
Pioneer XW-SMA4	350	12.12/GT	★★★★★						21x36x17
Pure Jongo S3	170	06.13/FT	★★★★★						13x13x14
Roth OLI POWA-5	250	04.13/FT	★★★★★						27x18x21
Sony RDP-XA700	285	03.13/GT	★★★★★						18x40x16
Sony SRS-BTM8	85	05.13/GT	★★★★★						19x25x9

Geneva Model S



However, this all depends on what you want your dock for.

If you fancy something to take to the park for picnics, then you'd want to consider a unit that has a good battery charge. If you're replacing a micro or mini system, then something like the Geneva Model S (left) will do a commendable job. As ever, try before you buy, especially if you're heading towards the premium range. A good tip is to take your library with you to the dealer/retailer and play some of the greatest hits straight from your portable...

And if you're looking to build a multiroom system, you're in luck.

Some docks won't be able to play music on more than one device at a time (unless you have more than one which can stream to each other), but it does mean you can simply select each device on your portable as you move between rooms and have your music instantly switch between docks. Alternatively, you could fork out for a Sonos system - but that isn't really the point. Wireless docks mean minimal set-up - always a bonus.



Headphones

Ear tips _____ Most in-ears come with these. Experiment with sizes to get the best fit
In-line remote _____ Mostly for Apple devices, but Android-friendly units are growing. Handy...

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
SoundMAGIC E10



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
AKG K451



AWARD WINNER
Sennheiser Momentum

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	★★★★★	Smooth and weighty with lashings of detail			●	Closed	8
Audio Technica ATH-CKS55i	45	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Big on bass, these cans are no shrinking violets			●	Closed	6
Audio Technica ATH-T400	50	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Nicely balanced pair that just lack the wow factor of the class leaders			●	Closed	260
Apple EarPods	25	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A big upgrade of Apple's original earbuds, but there are better rivals			●	Open	10
Beyerdynamic DTX101IE	65	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £40-£80, Awards 2013			●	Closed	11
Beyerdynamic DTX71IE	54	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Detailed and with supreme tone control			●	Closed	11
dBLogic EP-100	25	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A dramatic, enjoyable musical performance			●	Closed	117
Digital Silence DS-321D	60	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Admirable noise-cancelling buds			●	Closed	11
Etymotic Research MC5	57	01.12/GT	★★★★★	A likeable sound for the money			●	Closed	17
Grado iGrado	40	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Fabulous iPod upgrade: these are unbeatable at the price			●	Open	85
Jays a-Jays Four	50	12.11/FT	★★★★★	The Jays combine looks and performance to alluring effect			●	Closed	14
Jays t-Jays Two	67	09.11/ST	★★★★★	A sure-fire winner for those who like their bass			●	Closed	8
Ministry of Sound MOS003	30	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Tidy, well balanced and nicely made			●	Closed	15
Mix-Style inner headphones	30	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Punchy, controlled and balanced			●	Closed	13.5
Panasonic RP-HTX7	35	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears up to £50, Awards 2012			●	Closed	153
Philips CitiScape Downtown	55	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Fun, stylish and great to use on an everyday basis			●	Closed	174
RHA MA-350	30	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Nicely made from quality materials, with impressive sound to match			●	Closed	48
Sennheiser CX 300-II	30	09.10/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ear headphones up to £50, Awards 2010			●	Closed	4
Sennheiser CX281	35	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Enjoyable enough, but a touch quiet			●	Closed	16
Sennheiser CX495	35	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A brilliant upgrade bargain			●	Closed	4
Sennheiser HD 202	26	02.11/FT	★★★★★	Great sound for the money and a bargain buy			●	Closed	130
Sennheiser HD 218	40	11.09/FT	★★★★★	For closed-back cans, the Sennheisers are very good – but not the best			●	Closed	224
Sennheiser MM 70i	50	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Nice features for the money			●	Closed	12
Sennheiser PX100-II	40	11.10/FT	★★★★★	An improvement over the previous model, very good open-backed cans			●	Open	80

sound quality you can see



Stuff
 ★★★★★

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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

Audio Technica ATH-A500	140	02.10/GT	★★★★★	If you're after closed-back cans, give these a try	●		Closed			290
Audio Technica ATH-ANC1	80	06.10/FT	★★★★★	Their portability and noise-cancelling makes them a viable buy	●		Closed	●		100
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
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

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HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight (g)
£70 and above									
AKG K551	230	02.13/GT	★★★★★			● Closed			305
AKG Q701	340	09.11/ST	★★★★★			● Open			236
AKG Q460	140	02.11/GT	★★★★★			● Closed			120
Altec Lansing Backbeat 906	90	10.09/GT	★★★★★			● Closed		●	35
Beyerdynamic Custom One Pro	170	10.13/GT	★★★★★			● Closed			290
Beyerdynamic DT880	200	06.09/GT	★★★★★			● Open	●	●	340
Beyerdynamic DTX80	80	12.10/GT	★★★★★			● Closed			12
Beyerdynamic MMX 101iE	100	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★			● Closed	●	●	11
Beyerdynamic T1	880	11.10/FT	★★★★★			● Closed			350
Beyerdynamic T50P	230	02.12/ST	★★★★★			● Closed			174
Beyerdynamic T51P	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★			● Closed			174
Beyerdynamic T70	456	11.11/FT	★★★★★			● Closed			330
Blackbox M10	90	12.10/FT	★★★★★			● Open		●	180
Blackbox M10-RB	99	04.12/GT	★★★★★			● Closed		●	180
Blackbox i10	80	12.10/GT	★★★★★			● Closed		●	25
Bose MIE2i	120	09.11/ST	★★★★★			● Closed			19
Bose QuietComfort 15	280	04.12/GT	★★★★★			● Closed	●	●	227
B&W P3	170	08.12/GT	★★★★★			● Closed			130
B&W P5	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★			● Closed			195
B&W P7	330	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★			● Closed			290
Denon AH-D600	200	11.13/GT	★★★★★			● Closed			365
Etymotic Research HF2	180	08.09/FT	★★★★★			● Closed		●	26
Etymotic Research HF3	134	09.11/ST	★★★★★			● Closed		●	11
Focal Spirit One	200	04.12/FT	★★★★★			● Closed			225
German Maestro GMP 8.35 D	150	10.12/ST	★★★★★			● Closed			220
Goldring NS-1000	100	03.10/GT	★★★★★			● Closed		●	183
Grado GR10	355	09.11/ST	★★★★★			● Closed			9
Grado GR8	300	04.10/GT	★★★★★			● Open		●	9
Grado GS1000i	1000	10.09/GT	★★★★★			● Open			312
Grado PS1000	1795	09.11/ST	★★★★★			● Open			500
Grado SR325is	315	09.11/ST	★★★★★			● Open			330
Grado SR60i	100	02.10/GT	★★★★★			● Closed			125
Grado SR80i	135	09.11/ST	★★★★★			● 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

HEADPHONES continued

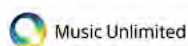
Product	£	Tested	Verdict		In-ear On-ear Type	Noise cancelling Wireless	Weight (g)
Philips Fidelio L1	230	05.12/FT	★★★★★	Easy going and comfortable	● Closed		272
Philips Fidelio M1	125	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears £100-£200, Awards 2013	● Closed	●	166
Philips Fidelio M1BT	250	Aw.13/GT	★★★★★	Best wireless headphones, Awards 2013	● Closed	●	500
Philips Fidelio X1	270	01.13/FT	★★★★★	Another great set of headphones from Philips	● Open		430
PSB M4U1	219	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Better than the M4U2? Close but no cigar	● Closed		340
PSB M4U2	300	10.12/ST	★★★★★	PSB's first headphones are truly brilliant. Hear them now!	● Closed	●	362
Sennheiser CX880i	90	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Great sounding in-ears, although there's a hard edge	● Closed		11
Sennheiser HD 380 Pro	110	02.10/GT	★★★★★	Still seriously good headphones, but rivals have caught up	● Closed		220
Sennheiser HD25-1 II Adidas	190	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Stylishly excellent all-rounders	● Closed		140
Sennheiser HD 598	190	02.12/ST	★★★★★	Too well-mannered for our tastes	● Open		270
Sennheiser HD 800	1000	10.09/GT	★★★★★	They offer much, but close rivals pip them to the post	● Open		350
Sennheiser IE 8i	260	03.11/GT	★★★★★	Enjoyable enough, but need a better tonal balance	● Closed		18
Sennheiser IE 80	270	02.11/FT	★★★★★	Expensive, but a truly quality option	● Closed		5
Sennheiser IE 800	600	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £300+, Awards 2013	● Closed		8
Sennheiser MM 200	99	10.09/GT	★★★★★	In terms of detail, clarity and musicality you could do a lot worse	● Closed	●	28
Sennheiser MM 400-X	150	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Best wireless headphones, Awards 2012	● Closed	●	105
Sennheiser Momentum	260	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears £200-300, Awards 2013	● Closed		190
Sennheiser Momentum On-ears	170	10.13/GT	★★★★★	A comfortable pair of cans, just lacking a little presence in the mid-range	● Closed		160
Sennheiser PXC 310 BT	190	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Best Bluetooth headphones, Awards 2011	● Closed	●	105
Sennheiser PXC 310	200	02.11/GT	★★★★★	Perfect for a walk on the mild side	● Closed	●	115
Sennheiser RS 160	115	05.10/GT	★★★★★	An exciting, affordable option but tiring over longer periods	● Closed	●	226
Sennheiser RS 180	185	05.10/GT	★★★★★	These comfortable, wireless headphones justify their premium price	● Open	●	204
Sennheiser RS 220	350	10.12/ST	★★★★★	A very neat wireless solution with great sound quality	● Open	●	329
Sennheiser X 320	70	10.12/ST	★★★★★	The best Xbox gaming headphones we've heard so far	● Closed		280
Shure SE215	100	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Affordably opulent buds	● Closed	●	30
Shure SE310	120	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Detail and clarity is first class	● Closed		7
Shure SE425	200	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £150-£300, Awards 2013	● Closed		32
Shure SE535	450	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Still good but no longer the best	● Closed	●	272
Shure SRH1840	500	06.12/FT	★★★★★	Not cheap, but worth every penny	● Open		268
Sony MDR-1R	210	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Detailed and airy, but need more kick	● Closed		240
Sony MDR-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
Ultrason HFI-580	125	11.10/GT	★★★★★	Not class-leading, but still worthy of consideration	● Closed		285
Ultrason HFI-780	160	02.12/ST	★★★★★	Big and bold, and offer excitement in spades	● Open		285
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

Which music streaming service?



Play Music All Access

Google's Play Music service is the company's version of Spotify. Available on every portable device under the sun including iOS, the service provides unfettered access to its library, with the possibility of storing 20,000 songs in your online locker. Offline functionality is possible just in case you've lost your connection.



Music Unlimited

Sony's offering doesn't stray far from the well-trodden path. Its premium tier is ad free, and offers unlimited skips and the ability to create personal libraries and playlists. It's ace in the hole? Access on Android and Apple devices, Mac and PC, Sony internet capable TVs, PS4, PS3 and PS Vita.



Soundcloud

Filling the void left by MySpace, Soundcloud is a distribution platform for music that anyone can use. Upload your own content or listen to everyone else's. Tracks from top producers, bands and DJs sit alongside undiscovered talent. Sound quality tends to be good - and clearly marked - and it's all free.



Spotify

Spotify is, again, much like its rivals in terms of the depth and breadth of its content. What makes it so popular? Its ubiquity among devices is probably its biggest selling point, with Spotify Connect enabling multi-room possibilities. A minor issue? Its library is being surpassed by newer rivals.



Xbox Music

Microsoft's attempt at developing a Spotify-killer. Ad-supported free streaming is available on Windows 8 and Windows RT devices, with the Xbox Music Pass lifting restrictions and bringing new features to the table. Its library - a catalogue of 33million tracks - is the largest of any of the streaming providers. Massive.

Peter Tyson

Audio Visual Experts

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Stereo systems

This category includes a wide range of products including all-in-one packages where the speakers are part of the system, through to micro systems where the electronics are housed separately from the speakers. A streaming option is available on many newer systems.

Our recommendations

Our recommendations					CD	Streaming	Internet Radio	DAB	FM	Analogue inputs	Digital inputs	Headphone out
Product	£	Tested	Verdict									
Up to £500												
Denon CEOL Piccolo	260	03.13/FT	★★★★★	No matter what the source, the CEOL Piccolo will play all your music in superb style		●	●			●	●	●
Denon 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	●			●	●	●		●
£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				●	●	5.1
Panasonic SC-BTT460	350	06.13/FT	★★★★★	No HDMI inputs but still a cracking system				●	●	5.1
Philips HTS5563	400	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A super budget solution				●	●	5.1
Pioneer BCS-SC626	400	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Great features, with tough competition				●	●	2.1
Q Acoustics Q-TV2	330	11.09/FT	★★★★★	A great way of boosting poor sound on your TV				●	●	2.1
Samsung HT-E5530	450	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Plenty of bang for your bucks				●	●	5.1
Sony BDV-E380	400	07.11/GT	★★★★★	A fine system for the money				●	●	5.1
Sony BDV-N590	400	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Best cinema system, Awards 2012				●	●	5.1

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SURROUND SYSTEMS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Blu-ray	3D Blu-ray	DVD	Streaming	Optical in	HDMI in	Channels
£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
£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
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	250	01.12/GT	★★★★★	A good single-bar solution to boost your TV sound		0	1	0			12x90x10
JBL Cinema SB400	450	06.13/GT	★★★★★	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 NB4530A	300	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Best soundbar up to £400, Awards 2013	●	1	1	0			8x104x4
Monitor Audio ASB-2	1000	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbar £800+, Awards 2013	●	3	1	1	●		101x19x17
Orbitsound M9	300	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Given its size, the M9 is an impressive performer	●	0	1	0			9x30x10
Philips HTL9100	600	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best soundbar £400-£800, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	●	2	1	1			7x103x16
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/GT	★★★★★	A very good soundbar but not worthy of being a class-leader	●	3	2	1			14x43x35
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

Soundbars...questions to consider



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 ten 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 the 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	●
Pinnacle ShowCenter 250	170	03.08/FT	★★★★★	Connects PC to system, wireless HD issues	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	16/48	●
Pure Jongo T2	130	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Cheaper than Sonos but comes with a few niggles	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
Roku 2 XS	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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THE SOUND GALLERY

01494 531682 www.soundgallery.co.uk
65 Castle Street, High Wycombe, Bucks.

STREAMERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		HDMI out	Optical out	Coaxial out	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/kHz)	Video
£500-£1000														
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	●	24/96z	
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 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	
NaimUniti	2670	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best streaming system £2000+, Awards 2011	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	●	24/192	
NaimUniti 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	
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	



Set-top boxes

Freeview Large choice of digital TV channels via a rooftop aerial
Freesat Much like Freeview, but takes signal from a satellite dish
Subscription Services from Sky and Virgin give a vast array of premium content

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Freeview	Freesat	Sky	Virgin	YouView	Tuners	Hard drive capacity (GB)	HDMI out	Smart
Up to £500													
EquinixTizi	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		
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		

"TVonics has made some impressive PVRs in the past and it's produced the goods again with the DTR-HD500"

December 2010



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 used in the gym. Higher-end machines will add video, internet browsing and apps as well.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Web browsing	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Up to £500								
Apple iPod Classic 160GB	229	09.09/FT	★★★★★	2.5	320x240	160		60x100x14
Apple iPod Nano 16GB (2012)	130	01.13/FT	★★★★★	2.5	240x240	16		77x40x5
Apple iPod Shuffle 2GB	40	12.11/GT	★★★★★	n/a	n/a	2		30x30x10
Apple iPod Touch 64GB (2012)	330	12.12/FT	★★★★★	4	1136x640	64	●	123x59x6
Archos 5 Internet Tablet	280	03.10/GT	★★★★★	4.8	800x480	32	●	80x130x13
Cowon X7	200	02.11/FT	★★★★★	4.3	480x272	120	●	127x79x15
Cowon Z2	200	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	3.7	800x480	16	●	116x63x12
Creative Zen Style M100 4GB	35	12.11/GT	★★★★★	1.45	128x128	4		55x44x13
Philips GoGear Muse	140	04.10/GT	★★★★★	3	400x240	16	●	55x110x9
SanDisk Sansa Clip+ 8GB	40	12.11/GT	★★★★★	1	96x96	8		60x40x20
Sony NWZ-F805 16GB	200	01.13/FT	★★★★★	3.5	800x400	16	●	115x57x9



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

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	OS	NFC	3G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Up to £600										
Amazon Kindle Fire HD 16GB	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Android	●		7	1280x800	16/32	193x137x10
Asus VivoTab ME400	400	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Windows	●		10.1	1366x768	32/64	263x171x10
Apple iPad 2 16GB Wi-Fi	400	09.11/GT	★★★★★	iOS	●		9.7	1024x768	16/32	241x186x9
Apple iPad Mini 64GB Wi-Fi	430	04.13/GT	★★★★★	iOS	●		7.9	1024x768	16/32/64	200x135x7
Apple iPad 4 16GB Wi-Fi	400	04.13/GT	★★★★★	iOS	●		9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x190x9
Asus Eee Pad Transformer	380	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Android	●		10.1	1280x800	16/32	271x177x13
Asus Eee Pad Transformer Prime	500	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Android	●		10.1	1280x800	16/32	181x263x8
Asus Transformer Pad Infinity	600	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Android	●		10.1	1900x1200	32/64	263x181x9
BlackBerry PlayBook 16GB	400	09.11/GT	★★★★★	QNX	●		7	1024x600	16/32/64	130x194x10
Dell XPS 10 32GB	340	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Windows RT	●		10.1	1366x768	32/64	270x180x10
Google Nexus 7	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Android	●	●	7	1280x800	16/32	199x120x11

Killer Apps



Xbox SmartGlass (£free)

SmartGlass is a companion app for the Xbox One and 360. You need a Xbox Live Gold subscription to make the most of it, with the app acting as a remote/second screen experience for your console.



TED (£free)

A host of videos on topics ranging from noise pollution and the effect it has on our brains to virtual choirs and architecture's influence on music. There's an audio-only option, too.



Audible (£free)

Want to rest your peepers? Amazon-owned Audible has tons of audiobooks, some free, from *World War Z* to Andrew Marr's *A History of the World*. Well worth a punt.



Twitter (free)

The social app is a perfect match for the iPad - the Retina Display makes the endless pictures of cats and parties look great. There are, however, other ways to spend your time.



IMDb (£free)

The iPad Mini (and the upcoming Mini with Retina Display) is pretty much made for mid-movie trivia searches - which, of course, requires the excellent Internet Movie Database app.

TABLETS continued

TABLETS continued											
Product	£	Tested	Verdict		OS	NFC	3G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Google Nexus 7 (2013)	200	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	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
Kobo Arc 16GB	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Not for music buffs but a great budget option nonetheless	Android			7	1280x800	16/32	190x120x10
Motorola Xoom	480	09.11/GT	★★★★★	A worthy adversary to the vaunted iPad	Android		●	10.1	1280x800	32	249x168x13
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



Smartphones

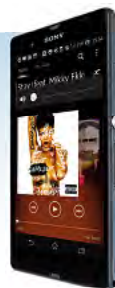
Android Offers great flexibility and innovation
Apple iOS Fantastic ease of use; massive choice of quality apps
Windows New kid on the block. Watch this space

Theshortlist



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
HTC One	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Sets the bar high for smartphones in 2013	Android	●	4.7	1080x1920	32	137x68x9
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/ST	★★★★★	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
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
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 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

Subscriptions 0844 848 8813 email: whathifi@servicehelpline.co.uk



Style OVER substance?

“Quite remarkably, many people today and probably a majority of teens and late teens, are listening to a considerably lower quality level of music than their peers back in the 1970’s”

Have advances in technology driven the desire for convenience and quantity at the expense of quality?

Listening to Music – the Benefits

There have been many studies carried out over the years that have shown remarkable benefits for mankind through listening to music. It is an activity that is intrinsic to all cultures and is one of the few that involves using the whole brain. Listening to music is now often used for various therapeutic purposes because it is believed to improve memory and intelligence, improve physical development and coordination, reduce stress and blood pressure, and even reduce levels of pain.

However, music can also be irritating if it's too loud or distorted, or if it distracts from other activities we are involved in. Most of the studies have been carried out using a reasonably good quality of musical reproduction. Quite remarkably, many people today and probably a majority of teens and late teens, are listening to a considerably lower quality level of music than their peers back in the 1970's. Back then a basic hi-fi system, often consisting of just a turntable, amplifier and a pair of speakers, was a 'must have'. Students going off to university would make it a priority to set themselves up with a decent hi-fi system – and the quality was, in retrospect, surprisingly good.



Quality vs Quantity

How different it is today where advances in technology have driven the desire for convenience and quantity at the considerable expense of quality. For many young people especially, the iPod, MP3 player or mobile telephone, connected to a pair of in-ear headphones, is their primary source of listening to music. The problem with this is that low-grade reproduced music is not going to deliver any significant beneficial outcomes for the listener. Probably the opposite will be true.

Low-grade music in this context is the result of two main factors, a) the delivery system (the hardware) and b) the source material (the 'music'). Although the amplification section of the mobile device is a technological wonder, it's not hi-fi! Nor are in-ear headphones. They can't hold a candle to the stereo-typical system from the 1970's. As far as the source material is concerned, it's being over-generous to call it music if it's a typical MP3 or AAC (the iTunes default format) download. These are both highly compressed formats with the most popular download speed of 128 kbps being about one-eleventh the size of a full resolution CD track (1411 kbps), so the quality is inevitably far inferior. Information is irretrievably lost and the full dynamic range is lacking. Using an iPod while jogging does not really raise a quality issue but playing low-resolution tracks through, for example, an iPod docking station that feeds into a decent hi-fi system, is a disaster area. It is very poor quality made louder and this even affects the type of music listened to. For example, most classical recordings downloaded as an MP3 or AAC file are a complete waste of time because there is so much information

missing, all the complexities of the music are lost, and the recordings are reduced to just the essence of a tune.

Future of Recorded Music

If convenience has trumped quality for many people, we must ask what the future prospects are of maintaining high quality music recordings. Fortunately audiophiles, or hi-fi connoisseurs, or perhaps most accurately described, music lovers, continue to drive the demand for quality because there are some wonderful hi-end systems available and being sold today. Another important reason for hope within the mass-market is that there is no longer any over-riding reason for MP3 and AAC to have such a following. These formats were designed to overcome very slow download speeds pre-broadband and expensive memory capacity. These are not significant factors for most people now. Even iPods, if loaded with full resolution tracks, can deliver acceptable results through a good system. The trade-off is a smaller selection of stored music. Full resolution audio streaming, as well as CD quality downloads, are already available and will become the norm as the wider public becomes aware of the tremendous quality benefit.



Audiophiles and Hi-Fi Connoisseurs

Hi-fi connoisseurs and audiophiles are very important to the music industry. By their nature, they are generally avid music lovers who enhance their enjoyment through listening to music at its very best quality level, which means playing great recordings through hi-end hi-fi to achieve the most outstanding results. Without them, the main driver for quality would probably be removed from the music industry.



Specialist Dealers

Specialist hi-fi retailers also come into this category because it's their interest that has driven them into their particular business. These specialist retailers also perform another very important function because, without them, hi-fi manufacturers would have to rely on the internet and hi-fi magazine reviewers to try and assess the relative merits of different brands for potential customers – a notoriously unreliable decision making process. Specialist hi-fi retailers are constantly being offered new products for assessment and potential stocking and, as it is also their hobby as well as their livelihood, they are greatly interested in achieving the best performance and seeking out the most outstanding combinations. More than that though is their relationship with audiophiles and hi-fi connoisseurs 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.

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.oandlhi-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

Birmingham
MUSIC MATTERS
363 Hagley Road,
Edgbaston.
t: 0121 429 2811
www.musicmatters.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

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t: 0115 9584404
www.castlesoundvision.com

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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

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www.ceritech-audio.co.uk

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SERVICE ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
FACILITIES ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
VERDICT ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



HDMI cables

Digital cables that carry both picture and sound. These carry control signals as well, so they can integrate the operation of components in your system.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Length as tested (m)	HDMI type
Up to £80					
Audioquest Pearl	23	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Best HDMI cable, Awards 2012	1 1.4
Cambridge Audio 500 (5m)	69	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A perfectly acceptable cable for the money	5 1.3a
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	★★★★★	Agutsy, 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 Prowire	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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AWARDS 2012
CABLES & ACCESSORIES
BEST HDMI CABLE
AUDIOQUEST PEARL



AudioQuest Pearl HDMI Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2013
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
ACCESSORIES
AUDIOQUEST FLX-SLiP 14/4



AudioQuest FLX-SLiP 14/4 Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
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AWARDS 2013
ACCESSORIES
BEST AUDIO CABLE
ATLAS ELEMENT INTEGRA



Atlas Element Integra Audio Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2012
CABLES & ACCESSORIES
BEST CABLE
SUPRA USB 2.0



Supra USB 2.0 Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
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AWARDS 2012
CABLES & ACCESSORIES
BEST OPTICAL DIGITAL CABLE
QED PERFORMANCE GRAPHITE



QED Performance Optical Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2010
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Merlin Tarantula MK6 Mains Cable

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HDMI CABLES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Length as tested (m)	HDMI type
£80 and above					
Wireworld Chroma (Miami)	60	10.09/GT	★★★★★	Highly competent, although lacking in low-frequency heft	1 1.3
Wireworld Chroma 6	60	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Best HDMI cable £50+, Awards 2010. Great upgrade cable for higher-end systems	1 1.4
Wireworld Island 6	46	10.10/GT	★★★★★	Packs a firm punch and strong dynamics	1.4 2.0
Audioquest Cinnamon	80	01.11/FT	★★★★★	A top-notch HDMI that's a credit to any system	2 1.4
Audioquest Forest	80	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A true and worthy rival to Chord's Supershield	5 1.4
Audioquest HDMI-1	180	09.08/GT	★★★★★	This stylish cable offers a solid, cohesive image with good sound	3 1.3
Audioquest HDMI-X	95	03.09/GT	★★★★★	A real entertainer – chunky bass and images are well defined	3 1.3
Atlas HDMI	160	07.07/GT	★★★★★	Upgraded version of the existing Atlas HDMI - delivers good detail and contrast	7 1.3
Black Rhodium Coral HDMI	100	10.06/FT	★★★★★	Worthy of serious consideration - pictures are highly detailed, colours convincing	4 1.3
Chord Company Active	115	10.09/GT	★★★★★	Muscular-sounding and excellent in every regard	1.5 1.3
Chord Co. Active Silver + HDMI	95	01.11/FT	★★★★★	An impressive successor to the old Active cable	1 1.4
Chord Co. Supershield (5m)	90	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A punchy award winner that defies its low price tag	5 1.3a
Ecosse Picture Perfect Ultra	110	09.08/GT	★★★★★	This Ecosse gives a punchy, powerful performance with great detail levels	5 1.3
Ecosse Picture Perfect Ultra +	169	09.08/GT	★★★★★	With its punchy, powerful and composed production, this cable oozes dynamics	5 1.3
QED Qunex HDMI-P (7m)	85	07.07/GT	★★★★★	Stunning value, offering a cracking picture, and great for budget set ups	7 1.0
QED Reference	125	06.10/GT	★★★★★	An assured, but expensive, performer	5 1.3a
QED Signature HDMI	150	10.09/GT	★★★★★	It's competent and classy, and looks good too	1 1.3
Supra HF100 HDMI (8m)	112	08.06/GT	★★★★★	Not just pretty but it delivers impressive performance over eight metres	8 1.0
van den Hul Flat 180	90	10.09/GT	★★★★★	Typical van den Hul quality from a hinged cable that doesn't fall out of its socket	2 1.3b
van den Hul Flat HDMI (3m)	105	03.09/GT	★★★★★	One of the best HDMI cables we've ever heard	3 1.3
van den Hul Ultimate	300	10.08/FT	★★★★★	It's pricey, but has good performance	1 1.3
Vivanco SHQ Ultra	80	06.10/FT	★★★★★	It's an enjoyable watch, although there's some reservation	1.2 1.4
Wireworld Chroma 5 HDMI (7m)	109	07.07/GT	★★★★★	Flexible cable that delivers pictures as good as any HDMI cable at this price	7 1.0

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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 PROI2102	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
Vivanco SHQ1112D	40	09.09/GT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1.2
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
Imp Audio Silver Knight Exec	120	03.08/FT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
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

“Overall the Wireworld Nova 6 is like an up-and-coming band: the performance is not quite refined enough, but its energy is refreshing”

November 2012

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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.

Our recommendations

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
Belkin Mini-Stereo Cable	13	12.08/GT	★★★★★	Cheap MP3 cable with reasonably exciting sound
Chord Company Crimson	38	02.09/GT	★★★★★	A superb all-rounder that'll work wonders in a sub-£1000 system
Chord Company CrimsonPlus	45	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Fantastic control, expression and detail resolution
Chord Company CrimsonPlus	40	06.11/GT	★★★★★	Best analogue interconnect, Awards 2011
Clear. Aud. C-line Alpha One	30	12.11/FT	★★★★★	A bargain interconnect that should be on your shortlist
Ecosse Conductor CA1.2	49	06.11/GT	★★★★★	Excellent with detail - a good all-rounder
Ecosse The Composer	37	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Lacks excitement, but a lovely design with warm and punchy sounds
Griffin Aux Audio Cable 3011	15	12.08/GT	★★★★★	Last-generation iPhone compatible 3.5 plugs
Ixos XHA516-100 (1m)	40	09.07/FT	★★★★★	Refined - if you're after a gentle, mature sound they are fine
Merlin Mozart	40	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Open and exuberant, if lacking in warmth
Profigold PROI3301	17	12.08/GT	★★★★★	Excellent 3.5mm - 3.5mm cable
QED Audio 1	25	09.07/GT	★★★★★	Good value, but struggles with challenging tracks
QED Performance Audio 2	40	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Agile, fun and nuanced: would do well in pretty much any system
QED Profile	18	06.11/GT	★★★★★	At the top of the first upgrade tree
Wireworld Luna	37	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Excellent with subtlety and dynamics: should be on any interconnect shortlist
Wireworld Luna 6	36	12.09/GT	★★★★★	Looks strange, but delivers a great refined sound
£50 and above				
Atlas Equator Integra	75	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A recommended second-upgrade cable
Black Rhodium Harmony	60	08.08/GT	★★★★★	It offers power and detail, but we found the top-end just a bit too harsh
Black Rhodium Prelude	80	09.07/FT	★★★★★	Very good cable - sound is crisp and detailed, but still with lovely, chunky bass
Brilliance Synergy	83	10.06/FT	★★★★★	Best stereo interconnect, Awards 2006. Sensible price
Chord Company CobraPlus	66	10.10/FT	★★★★★	The perfect tonic for a dull system
Chord Company iChord	50	12.08/GT	★★★★★	Expensive, but definitely worth it
Chord Crimson Vee3	50	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A nice, easy-going cable that's a little too restrained
Clear. Aud.C-line Alpha	85	09.08/FT	★★★★★	Entry-level - solid construction and a smooth sound. Not for sonic thrill seekers
DNM Reson TBB100	85	09.07/GT	★★★★★	'Bullet' plugs and solid-core conductors really work. Ideal for pricier systems
Furutech Alpha Line-1	80	03.11/FT	★★★★★	A cable for owners of midrange systems to get very excited by - very good indeed
Ixos Xen HXA-716	80	08.08/GT	★★★★★	It's pedestrian to a point, but does a good job with unearthing detail
Merlin Bach Mk.IV	70	06.11/GT	★★★★★	This new version needs a touch of flair
QED J2P	50	12.09/FT	★★★★★	Fast and agile 3.5mm-RCA cable
QED Reference Audio J2P	50	12.09/FT	★★★★★	Clean sounding and packed with detail
Russ Andrews GQ-24 UltPlate	73	12.08/GT	★★★★★	Best iPod cable, Awards 2010. Punchy cable for iPod or iPhone owners
van den Hul The Name	60	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Energy and fun trump ultimate precision
Atlas Mavros	750	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Provided you have an appropriate system you'll find these cables work a treat
Chord Co. Chameleon Plus	125	11.11/FT	★★★★★	New plugs make these even more essential
Chord Company Indigo Plus	995	05.09/FT	★★★★★	It's genius in an interconnect - but you need the right system
Clearer Audio Copperline	135	05.07/FT	★★★★★	Produces a fast, well separated sound, with plenty of detail and dynamics
DNM Interconnect-HTFN	300	06.11/GT	★★★★★	A hugely capable - but expensive - cable
Ecosse Maestro MA2	177	05.08/FT	★★★★★	The Maestro MA2 may be getting on years, but it remains appealing
Ecosse Nu Diva	140	09.05/FT	★★★★★	Not cheap, but they will take your listening experience to a new level
Ecosse The Baton Mk II	104	08.08/GT	★★★★★	Although there's much to admire, the Baton Mk II can struggle to gel sounds
Ecosse The Symphony	225	03.05/FT	★★★★★	Authoritative and detailed, a real all-rounder, but it is 10 percent too pricey
QED Signature Audio S	190	09.09/FT	★★★★★	QED's new flagship interconnect offers great dynamics and punch
QED Signature Audio XT	150	03.09/FT	★★★★★	Another fine interconnect from QED, but it remains a few short steps off class-leading status
Russ Andrews Crystal CU	184	08.08/GT	★★★★★	This is a first-rate cable that can handle any sounds
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
van den Hul The Well	100	06.11/GT	★★★★★	An ideal booster for thin sounding kit
Wireworld Oasis 6	130	06.11/GT	★★★★★	A truly splendid cable for kit worth £800-£1000



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									
Chord Company SuperScreen	65	05.09/GT	★★★★★	●				●	n/a
Clear. Aud. C-Line Alpha One	25	11.10/FT	★★★★★	●				●	n/a
Clear. Aud. C-Line Alpha P/HUB	90	04.11/FT	★★★★★		●	●		●	6
Ecosse Big Orange MK2+	60	04.10/FT	★★★★★	●				●	n/a
Ecosse The Big Orange GR8	60	01.11/GT	★★★★★	●				●	n/a
Lindy 6-way	40	12.08/FT	★★★★★		●	●		●	6
Merlin Tarantula Figure '8'	40	01.11/GT	★★★★★	●				●	n/a
Merlin Tarantula MK6	40	11.10/FT	★★★★★	●				●	n/a
Russ Andrews Powerkord-8	75	01.11/GT	★★★★★	●				●	n/a
Tacima CS929	40	08.06/FT	★★★★★		●	●		●	6
£100 and above									
Audioquest NRG 1.5	100	01.11/GT	★★★★★	●				●	n/a
Atlas Eos	147	05.09/GT	★★★★★	●				●	n/a
Clearer Audio Silver-line	150	07.06/FT	★★★★★	●				●	n/a
Furutech G-320AG	165	02.11/GT	★★★★★	●				●	n/a
Russ Andrews Powerlink	112	02.09/FT	★★★★★		●				4
R Andrews Ref P/Kord W350i	232	05.09/GT	★★★★★	●				●	n/a
R Andrews Sig P/Kord W350i	275	11.06/GT	★★★★★	●				●	n/a
Russ Andrews X2	200	11.11/FT	★★★★★		●	●		●	2
Supra MD-06	150	07.08/FT	★★★★★		●			●	6
van den Hul M/Server Hybrid	150	05.09/GT	★★★★★	●				●	n/a
Wireworld Stratus 52	100	08.10/FT	★★★★★	●				●	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



Audioquest FLX/SLIP 14/4

Awards 2012: Best Speaker Cable

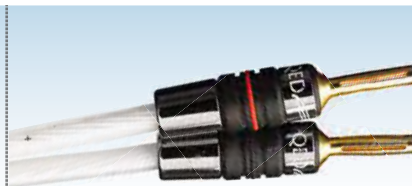
It all knits together perfectly. Nothing is stifled: it's open, clear and effortless, with tremendous dynamic ability for the money."



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 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	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Natural, even-handed and with good dynamic ability. A must-hear
Atlas Equator Mk II	8	04.10/GT	★★★★★	It's smooth and refined - it just needs a touch of verve

SPEAKER CABLES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Biwire
Chord Co. Carnival Silv. Screen	6	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Slightly overtaken by newer rivals, but still a mighty fine choice	
Chord Company Leyline	2	07.11/GT	★★★★★	A cracker of a budget cable	
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 2.4	8	07.11/GT	★★★★★	Detailed, but could be too bright for some	
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	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Rich, detailed, energetic and clean. A great cable	
QED Silver AnniversaryXT	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	
Russ Andrews Kimber 4PR	7	07.08/GT	★★★★★	A powerful sounding cable - although lacking in refinement	
Talk Electronics Talk 3	4	07.11/GT	★★★★★	An essential first cable upgrade	
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	
Ecosse Reference MS-2.3	25	10.06/GT	★★★★★	This is a supremely well-balanced cable that does most things very well	
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	

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SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
July 2008



QED Silver Anniversary XT

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
October 2012



Atlas Equator 2.0 Speaker Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
July 2008



Atlas Hyper 2.0 Speaker Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
WHATIFI.COM
AWARDS 2013
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
RETIRED
AUDIOQUEST FLX-SLiP 14/4



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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



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
Atacama Nexus 6	70	12.00/FT	★★★★★	Still performing well after eight years	60x25x30	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
Kudos S50	200	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Highly recommended and agile stands	62x18x20	1
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
Partington Trophy	130	07.06/GT	★★★★★	Hefty, glossy and suitable for all speakers	61x17x17	2
Quadrapire QV60	250	07.10/GT	★★★★★	Unusual to look at, but brilliant to hear	58x30x30	4
Russ Andrews Torlyte	336	03.07/GT	★★★★★	Good-looking wood stands that are a real find	50x16x18	1
Soundstyle XS122	105	07.06/GT	★★★★★	Beautifully finished and reveal a spacious sound	57x25x30	2
Soundstyle Z2	70	11.08/FT	★★★★★	Best sub-£100 speaker stand in Awards 2007	57x17x23	2

What do (and don't) they do?

Speaker stands

Custom Design FS104 Signature ★★★★★ £190

There's probably a joke here about 'standing' out, but we'll spare you that hilarity. If you're after stylish, reasonably priced stands that make the most of your speakers, you need look no further.



Stands do more than just keep your speakers at ear level. They hold the speaker cabinet rigidly, so more of the unit's movement is translated into sound, rather than wasted in cabinet movement.

AV & hi-fi racks

Atacama Eris Eco 5.0 ★★★★★ £460

Testing bamboo, Atacama preferred the results to traditional wood alternatives. Whatever we placed on the Eris sounded more agile, more detailed and more dynamic than on the similarly-priced alternatives we tried.



Racks don't actively add anything to your sound. They can only allow your system to perform better by controlling resonance and reducing excess vibrations that feed into the electronics.



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

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
Atacama Equinox AVI	380	05.07/FT	★★★★★	Neat solution to mount a TV above AV electronics	2	110x106x60	3
Atac Equinox Hi-Fi Celeb LE	499	11.09/GT	★★★★★	Its stylish and more than capable, but lacks some grip	● 4	Variable 60x55	1
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
Blok Stax 300	180	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A solidly constructed rack with a matching sound	3	51x58x40	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	Variable 55x40	1
Icon Audio Aero	299	05.09/GT	★★★★★	An ideal rack for those who like a lighter listen	4	76x68x50	1
Off the Wall Profile	329	06.10/GT	★★★★★	Retro styling that's great for the money	● 3	48x90x57	4
Quadraspire Q4evo	380	11.09/GT	★★★★★	A solid, cohesive and supremely affordable rack	4	Variable 59x39.5	8
Sonorous PL2200	280	09.08/FT	★★★★★	Classy looks and features	2	82x95x44	6
Stands Unique Sound Support	330	08.11/GT	★★★★★	An agile sounding rack with a good feel for subtlety	4	57x72x42	1
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



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RACKS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Modular Shelves	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Finishes
£500-£1000						
Atacama Elite Eco 12.0	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	● 5	Variablex115x32	1
BDI Valera 9724	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	3	54x112x52	3
Blok Pro Stax 500	500	08.11/GT	★★★★★	5	108x67.5x53	5
Hi Fi Racks Akomer XL	930	09.12/FT	★★★★★	● 3	45x110x40	6
Optimum Avion 8925	999	06.10/GT	★★★★★	3	57x127x56	3
Quadraspire Q4 Bamboo	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	● 4	Variablex59x40	1
Quadraspire QAVM (Oak)	540	04.07/GT	★★★★★	● 3	50x109x50	8
Quadraspire QAVX	560	12.07/FT	★★★★★	● 2	Variablex163x52	8
Quadraspire Sunoko Vent T	800	11.09/GT	★★★★★	● 4	Variablex59x47	6
Stands Unique Soundtower 10	533	05.09/GT	★★★★★	5	81x72x42	5
£1000 and more						
Alphason Mode	1699	06.10/GT	★★★★★	3	60x150x57	4
Audiophile Base StarBase	1180	12.06/GT	★★★★★	● 3	65x59x52	3
Hi Fi Racks Podium XL	1050	06.10/GT	★★★★★	● 3	53x140x40	1
Spectral Closed CL1050	1100	07.07/FT	★★★★★	2	31x101x53	17
Spectral Closed CL1552	1800	07.07/GT	★★★★★	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 £1000				
Beyerdynamic A1	975	11.10/FT	★★★★★	2 1
Chord Electronics Toucan	800	10.10/FT	★★★★★	2 2
Creek OBH-21SE	280	04.09/GT	★★★★★	2 2
Edwards Audio HA1	280	09.12/FT	★★★★★	2 1
FiiO E7	65	03.11/FT	★★★★★	1 2
Graham Slee Voyager	180	02.09/FT	★★★★★	1 2
Lehmann Black Cube Linear	750	07.09/FT	★★★★★	1 1
Lehmann Rhineland	400	04.09/GT	★★★★★	2 2
Musical Fidelity V-CAN II	120	10.12/FT	★★★★★	1 3
Pathos Aurium	850	08.13/FT	★★★★★	4 2

"We like the Pathos Aurium a lot. The sound is a wonderfully seductive combination of transparency and grip. From the midrange upwards the Aurium is as detailed as you like"

August 2013

Why buy a headphone amplifier



The headphone amplification circuitry included in a typical source of amplifier is rather basic, and so rarely offers the kind of sonic transparency the same product manages through its other outputs. Dedicated headphone amps are designed with greater care, and have the electrical characteristics required to get the best sound from your headphones.



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	★★★★★	A phono stage that belies its budget price	● ●	1	2.5x8x11
Creek Audio OBH-15	240	02.09/GT	★★★★★	Decent phono amplifier for a relaxed listen	● ●	1	6x10x15
Graham Slee Gr-Amp 2 Comm.	160	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Low on frills, high on quality	●	1	7x10x25
Leema Elements	495	03.10/FT	★★★★★	Best phono stage, Awards 2011	● ●	2	5x11x10
Lehmann Black Cube	325	02.09/GT	★★★★★	Clarity and punchiness make this a great amp	● ●	1	5x11x11
Plinius Koru	2325	04.09/FT	★★★★★	If you have a top-class system, the Koru will sound stunning	● ●	2	9x45x40
Pro-Ject Phono Box S	120	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Just needs a little more excitement to trouble its rivals	● ●	2	7x10x14
Pro-Ject Tubebox SE	350	02.09/GT	★★★★★	You'll get great detail from this good phono amp	● ●	2	7x10x14
Musical Fidelity V-LPS II	160	06.13/GT	★★★★★	For an affordable phono stage, the V-LPS II produces admirable results	● ●	1	5x11x11
Rega Fono Mini A2D	85	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Best phono stage, Awards 2012	●	1	6x18x25
Rega Fono MM MK2	200	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Best phono stage, Awards 2013	● ●	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	★★★★★	Accomplished and blessed with pin-sharp accuracy	MM 2.2
Goldring 2100	92	05.10/GT	★★★★★	It punches well above its weight - with great results	MM 1.7
Goldring 2500	224	03.09/GT	★★★★★	A Group Test winner with its full bodied and detailed sound	MM 1.7
Grado Prestige Silver	115	05.10/GT	★★★★★	Smooth and balanced, but can be awkward to fit	MM 1.5
Nagaoka MP110	89	05.10/GT	★★★★★	A great first upgrade cartridge that does much right	MM 1.8
Nagaoka MP300	500	04.11/GT	★★★★★	A cartridge that stands out at this price-point	MM 1.5
Ortofon 2M Black	460	04.11/GT	★★★★★	Power and dynamics are on tap from this Ortofon	MM 1.5
Ortofon 2M Bronze	275	03.09/GT	★★★★★	If you want a neutral and analytical cartridge this fits the bill	MM 1.5
Ortofon 2M Red	80	05.10/GT	★★★★★	An easy to fit and fine sounding cartridge	MM 1.8
Rega Exact	195	03.09/GT	★★★★★	This Rega is a fun listen that does much right	MM 1.75
Roksan Corus Silver	400	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Better than ever - but heftily priced to match	MM 1.9

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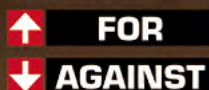
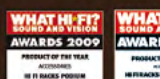
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HI-FI Choice, October 2013



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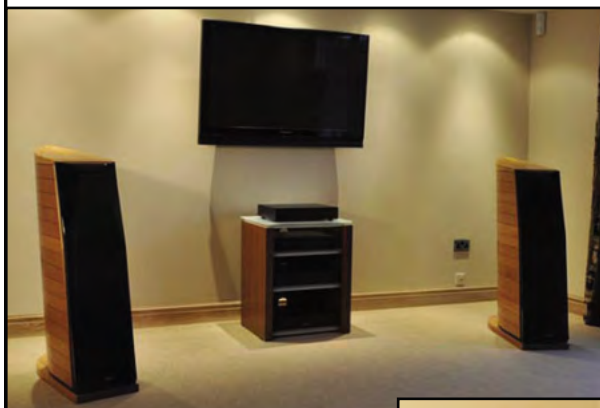
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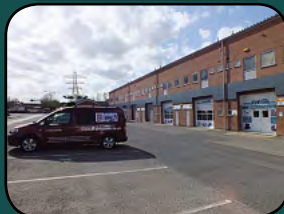
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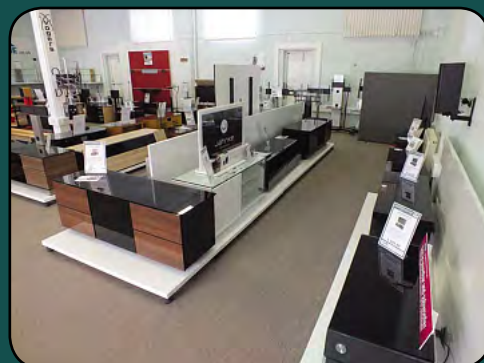
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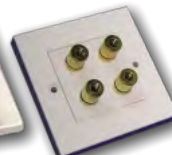
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