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SEPTEMBER 2014

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4K TV: £450

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June 2014



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What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision,
May 2014



www.Qacoustics.com

They understand what you need. But they don't agree

Daniel Defoe's list of things that "can be more firmly believ'd" consisted of Death and Taxes. To that list I propose adding "exciting new home-entertainment formats upon which no one can agree a standard." Not as pithy as Defoe, I'll grant you - but only slightly less easy to firmly believe.

4K TV is the latest innovation to follow the well-trodden path: brilliant new innovation/abstract, undignified to-ing and fro-ing about technical standards/consumer confusion and annoyance.

Luckily 4K TV is such an obviously brilliant and desirable technology, as made explicit in our test of **five of the most affordable 4K TVs currently available (p62)**, the incentive for manufacturers of 4K hard-, firm- and software to come to some kind of understanding, pronto, is obvious. Or, at least, I firmly believe it is.



Simon
Simon Lucas, Editor

My products of the month



Samsung UE55HU7500

Group test p67

Big screen, real-world price, stunning 4K performance. There's little not to like.



Revo SuperConnect

Group test p16

What I want from a table-top radio is wi-fi modernity and G-Plan looks. Bingo.

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION

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NEXT MONTH

SUPERTEST 32in TELEVISIONS

Not every home suits a massive great telly

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How to build your perfect set-up



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"Standing out in such a competitive market is never easy"

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Verity Burns Multimedia editor



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"If we had our way, every TV would work like this"

Ced Yuen Staff writer



Yamaha A-S3000
Temptation p78

"Rarely do we come across a product as well built and finished as this"

Ketan Bharadia Technical editor



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"Punchy and rhythmic, these colourful on-ears are as fun as they look"

Becky Roberts Staff writer



Epoz Aktimate Blue
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Stands and racks

"We're impressed with how weighty and dynamic these stands make our system sound"

First test

"We like the creative design, but don't mistake it for a low-quality gimmick. These are exceptionally well-made headphones"

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Group test 4K televisions
"From super-slick system interfaces to internet-based streaming, the battle for UHD supremacy is just beginning"



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Temptation
"We love the way the switches and controls feel: there's a crispness and precision to their operation that makes them a joy to use"

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

Revamped hi-fi guide!
1500 products rated p91
With new categories and key tech specs, we've made it even easier for you to pick the best kit for your cash.

Find out...

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Our ratings explained

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

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

★★★★★
★★★★☆
★★★☆☆
★★☆☆☆
★☆☆☆☆

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
TEST WINNER

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



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Exclusive reviews of the latest kit

FIRST TESTS

**MORE
FIRST TESTS**



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Garish-looking cans
sound the business



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range Blu-ray player

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**You'll find three HDMI
inputs at the back,
but no sign of any
Smart capability**

EXCLUSIVE

Sorry '4K' Bush fails to deliver on any level

Bush LE-39GBP-A | 4K TV | £450

A **4K TV** for less than £500! That's quite something, considering the exorbitant prices bandied about just six months ago. Too good to be true, you say? Well quite.

What seemed so appealing on paper turns out to be a massive disappointment. For this, dear reader, is the cautionary tale of the Bush LE-39GBP-A.

Anonymous design

Considering it's a budget TV, we're not surprised to see it has a very ordinary design. A glossy black rectangle sits atop a glossy black pedestal. It's the same look favoured by hundreds of the more cheerful sets to pass through our doors.

It's inoffensive, and the build is strong enough to give the impression of sturdiness. We've seen prettier sets for a similar price, but then again none of them aspired to handle Ultra High Definition.

Take a tour around the back and it's a stripped-down offering. There are three HDMI 1.4 sockets, a USB port, Scart (with adaptors for component and composite input), VGA for use as a monitor, and a Freeview antenna. Digital audio is handled by an optical output, and analogue by 3.5mm headphone jack.

There is no internet. You don't get wi-fi, and there's no ethernet socket either. That means there is no smart content of any kind, and certainly no Netflix 4K. Your only source of 4K, then, is through HDMI,

although the 1.4 certification means it will come at a maximum 30Hz. According to the latest guidelines set forth by the CEA (Consumer Electronics Association), that means this isn't Ultra HD.

As always, we begin by calibrating the picture, starting with a THX Optimizer disc. The experience could be better. The interface looks dated and utterly workmanlike. Given the lack of smart features, we hope what remains will be vaguely polished. Not so.

It doesn't help that the settings are rather limited. There's no way to adjust backlight levels, for instance, and there are no processing options except noise reduction. To make things worse, it's not particularly responsive. Button inputs are usually accompanied by noticeable lag. Occasionally we have to wait several seconds between command and reaction.

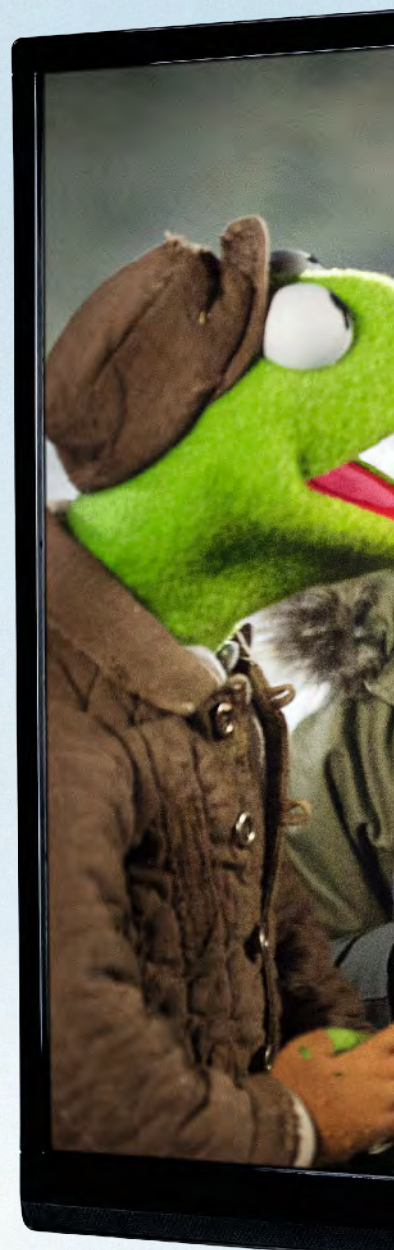
Sources suggest a problem

Time for video, and our feature presentation is a selection of Ultra HD film clips and stock footage. It seems the Bush is fussy about inputs, because it refuses to yield a single pixel when confronted with our server - which we've used successfully on many other 4K TVs.

It doesn't help to have our source rejected when content is already so rare. And it's not as if we can use Netflix 4K either - because there's no web connectivity. As a last resort, we hook up a laptop via HDMI. It works: the screen fills up and we are told it is showing a 3840 x 2160 picture running at 30Hz.

We aren't expecting the lovely picture of pricier sets (see p62), but the performance could be better. Pixel chasers will be satisfied, as it's appropriately sharp and detailed. But we note some motion instability, and colours are not subtle.

There is little nuance in the shading and gradation is poor, especially around contours. This is more apparent when we're closer to the screen. On better sets, it can be almost like looking out of a window. Here, the image gets patchy if you get too close.



Not many radios we see
manage to impress on
so many fronts

Revo SuperConnect, p16

Double identity

Although it says 'Bush LE-39GBP-A' on the box, that moniker is invisible online, and Argos (which owns Bush) lists this TV as the 'Bush 39 Inch 4K2K Ultra HD Freeview LED TV'



We aren't expecting the lovely picture of pricier sets, but the performance could be better. There is little nuance in the shading, and gradation is poor, especially around contours



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

BUSH



Blacks are fine for an LCD panel, but there's little differentiation between the shades of dark. White-level distinction is even less clear.

Workaday with Blu-ray

While we wait for 4K to take off properly, most people will be viewing 'just' 1080p – so we spin a few Blu-rays. It's a serviceable picture, but hardly satisfying. Without the benefit of the full eight million pixels, the lack of subtlety becomes even more apparent.

Motion is still unstable, colours look unnatural and whites are even harder to distinguish. You don't have to move too close to the screen before you start noticing the rather clumsy patches of colour.

Alternatives to Blu-ray? There's no 3D, nor is there Freeview HD. We're less fussed about the 3D, but it seems rather limited for a TV of this price not to have HD TV channels these days. We re-tune the TV several times and scroll all the way through just to make sure. No luck – the EPG skips straight from BBC Parliament to porn.

We take the plunge down to standard definition, and the picture is shockingly bad. It's hugely unsubtle. Colours are downright garish, and detail is poor. Those patches of unsubtle shading return with a

In detail...

Seiki U Vision Cable

Bundled with the TV is the Seiki U-Vision cable. It seems like an ordinary HDMI cable, until you see that one end has a USB cable sticking out. It's supposed to draw power from your TV.

Why would an HDMI cable need power? To upscale what goes through it: 480p to 1080p, 1080p to 2160p (says the box). It also claims to enhance details, restore edges and cut noise.

Does it work well? Not really. The picture does get sharper, but everything looks awfully processed and artificial. Edges look unnaturally hard, and people sometimes look almost green-screened. And there's more picture noise.

vengeance. And that's just on DVD. Given a Freeview feed to chew on, the Bush introduces all manner of noise and fuzz. You can set noise reduction on high, but that's like bringing a dinghy to the Titanic.

Processed, and not in a good way

From standard definition all the way up to 4K, there is some kind of motion-processing that makes everything look over-etched. The effect isn't overblown, but



The powered HDMI cable barely delivers on its job of enhancing the picture

Most people will be viewing 'just' 1080p – so we play a few Blu-rays. It's a serviceable picture, but hardly satisfying... We take the plunge down to standard definition, and the picture is shockingly bad



The Bush breaks no slimming records by today's standards, but it's neat enough

it is distractingly artificial. And it looks like there's no option to turn it off either.

We never expect much from the sound of flatscreen TVs, but still we find ourselves disappointed. The Bush is sharp and brittle, with little weight anywhere on the frequency scale. More than once we find ourselves wincing.

We cannot recommend this TV in any way. It barely fulfils its promise of 4K, and it lacks upscaling skills to fall back on. The picture is poor in Full HD, and we're frankly aghast at the SD performance.

And that's before we consider the technical limitations. We're disappointed with the lack of web connection, smart connectivity and Freeview HD, which were seen on similarly priced TVs even two years ago. This is a most futile investment of time and money. Avoid it.



Also consider Sony KD-55X8505B

★★★★★

It costs four times as much but this is what a real 4K TV looks like.

TECH SPECS

Screen type LED/LCD • Screen size 39in • Resolution 3840 x 2160 • Integrated Freesat tuner No • Inputs HDMI x3, Component, RGB Scart • 1080p/24fps Yes • Remote control Yes • Dimensions 54 x 89 x 7cm • Weight 24.2kg

Rating ★☆☆☆☆

FOR It has a resolution of 3840 x 2160

AGAINST Motion instability; unsubtle colours; poor white levels; bad upscaling, especially in SD; lack of Freeview HD; no web connectivity

VERDICT Low price, lower quality: this budget 4K TV is to be avoided

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1 We take the Bush out of its packaging. The stand is easily attached. It doesn't look very special but it's not ugly. We don't expect pretty cheap TVs anyway.

2 Time to optimise the picture. It's not a great experience. The interface is basic and dated, and there are very few options. You do get noise reduction though.

3 4K! Only our standard source doesn't work. It's only a server outputting via HDMI, but the TV seems fussy. Thankfully a laptop's 4K works just fine.

4 The picture isn't great, and it gets a lot worse the lower the resolution. And there's nothing else to do either, because there's no web or smart content.

5 Oh, a cable that upscales content? There's a noticeable difference between HD and SD pictures, but 'different' doesn't mean 'watchable'.

Bowers & Wilkins



The new 600 Series.
19 years in the making.

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

www.bowers-wilkins.co.uk

AKG Y50 | Headphones | £80

AKG shouts loud - and clear

It only takes a passing glance to see these are AKG's handiwork. The 'AKG' lettering boldly brandished across the Y50s' colourful red, yellow, teal or (less colourful) black ear cups is certainly a talking point of these on-ears - a top-end model in AKG's new lifestyle headphone range, the Y-Series.

Sitting just below the flagship K55 over-ears (£100), the Y50s are part of a three in-ears and three on-ears range.

Their bold look is perhaps a little out of character for the Austrian company, but it's a clear step towards refreshing its entire headphone collection (which until now has largely consisted of the famous K Series) and attracting a younger market.

Quality build

We like the creative design, but don't mistake it for a low-quality gimmick - these are exceptionally well made headphones. Their aluminium ear cups - which house 40mm drivers - have a smooth, glossy feel and feature fine cosmetic detail. They may be considerably larger than the Award-winning AKG K451s' dinky cups, but portability isn't an issue thanks to a neatly designed mechanism that lets them fold flat and collapse inwards for easy storage. That could be in the supplied material case or, perhaps, a large coat pocket.

The Y50s convey the immense sense of scale and power behind the orchestration in *Evacuation* (from the *I Am Legend* soundtrack). Trombones soar and violins erupt

Despite the stainless-steel headband being wafer-thin, it's durable - surviving a few yanks during our test - and ample cushioning underneath is good enough protection for your head.

The protene leather earpads sit firmly on the ears - physically blocking out external hubbub - though make them a little heated after an hour or so. Still, they should keep cool enough for a tube journey. The 3.5mm-ended cable also has an in-line remote for hands-free smartphone calling.

Their design might not be so typical for AKG headphones, but their sound certainly is. The Y50s don't fall into the self-destructive trap of style over substance, sounding as cheery as they look with Pharrell Williams' *Happy*. Revelling in the song's cheerful beat and quick tempo, top timing and rhythmic, punchy expression are their forte.

Unlike the K451s' direct, forthright approach, these 'phones have an open and spacious soundstage. And they fill it well. Balanced and insightful, there's equilibrium

between the song's clap beats, chirpy vocals and ever-present cymbals - though, if anything, bass throbs a little over-enthusiastically with the drumbeat.

A throng of detail is revealed, the cymbals clearly present even when they're just a whisper among the rest of the dense track's noise.

Scale - but delicacy too

The Y50s convey the immense sense of scale and power behind the orchestration in James Newton Howard's *Evacuation* (from the *I Am Legend* soundtrack). Trombones soar and violins erupt as the orchestration comes to a head. Dynamically sound, the Y50s effortlessly wind down during the more delicate moments too.

Again, finer detail prevails through the dense sections of the track, subtle xylophones passing through clearly, and the wordless choir prominent among the foreground instrumentals.

Is there a downside? They're a touch on the quiet side so if you like things loud,

The look-at-me finish is new to AKG; the quality build and refined sound are not

USE IT WITH Sony Xperia Z2

Its first-rate sonic performance is one of many highlights of Sony's flagship smartphone



The earcups twist and fold inwards into the headband so they can be easily carried

turning up your device's volume will drain its battery quicker than usual.

Otherwise the Y50s don't put a foot wrong as a pair of portable cans. Though the funky design had us thinking they might be style-over-substance Beat wannabes, it's just a smokescreen for what's another great-sounding pair of AKG headphones.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Rhythmic, clear and detailed; time well; dynamic and punchy; well-built; portable

AGAINST Source's might need to be turned up; ears get warm after a while

VERDICT Excelling in sound and style, the Y50s are a promising start for AKG's latest range

Also consider

AKG K451
£50 ★★★★★

A cheaper, great-sounding compact alternative that really nails portability



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Photographer: Andrew Rowat. Images not to scale.

LG G3 | Smartphone | £Free on contract

LG goes one better

When the G2 launched, it was one of the most promising smartphones we'd seen from LG in years. With a clever design and some exciting world-first features, including high-res music capabilities, it was a worthy rival to all the big names in the market and, in many cases, capable of beating them too.

Less than nine months later, the launch of the G3 has been surrounded by all the leaks, hype and excitement of a bona fide flagship smartphone. Expectations are high, and with five-star efforts from the HTC One (M8) and Sony Xperia Z2 to challenge the G3, can LG do it again?

The LG G3's display is one of its headline features and is something to put on your to-see list. The 5.5in screen (5.2in on its predecessor) that dominates the front of the G3 is called a Quad HD screen. It offers four-times higher resolution than standard HD and 1.8 times more than Full HD.

That means a resolution of 2560 x 1440 and a whopping 538ppi. We're aware of Steve Jobs's argument that the human eye

The real win here, though, is the fine detail the G3 musters: moss on rocks and buildings are textured, grass is individually etched. Switching from HD to standard def on BBC iPlayer, the G3 occasionally looks washed out in comparison with the HTC One (M8), but pictures are crisper and skin-tones much more realistic. Viewing angles are good, not losing any colour vibrancy or deep blacks when viewed a little off-axis, but our one niggle is its brightness level.

When viewed next to the HTC One (M8) or the Sony Xperia Z2, the LG's screen is noticeably dimmer, and we find ourselves turning up the brightness (and draining the battery). And even with it turned up, it's still tricky viewing in bright sunlight.

The LG G3 features a minimalist design, a brushed metallic-look back panel, and no buttons to blemish its front or sides. It's also almost bezel-free on the left and right, with the screen stretching to the very edge of the handset. But let's be clear - this is still a big phone. Still, at 74.6mm across, it's only around 4mm wider than the G2, giving you

The G3's display is one of the headline features and is something to put on your to-see list. It offers four-times higher resolution than standard def and 1.8 times more than Full HD

can't see any difference in screens over 300ppi. After seeing the G3, we disagree.

You might not see a lot of extra detail when flicking through the OS or browsing the internet, but load up a Full HD movie clip or graphics-heavy game and that changes. The LG's neutral, well-balanced colour palette makes the HTC One (M8)'s display look artificially vibrant. Colour gradients look much smoother too. Motion is spot on and, while blacks don't quite reach the murky depths of the HTC, whites do better at punching through in darker scenes to create impressive contrast.

the benefits of a larger screen without the need for much more pocket real-estate.

We still find it difficult to use purely one-handed, though. There are enough software tweaks to help make a lot of things easier, such as adjustable keyboards and menus, but those taking the jump from an iPhone 5s, for example, will certainly need time to adapt.

Unlike with the G2, the back panel of the G3 is removable to reveal a 3000mAh battery and microSD card slot, offering expandable storage up to 128GB (though it is futureproofed up to 2TB once it becomes

In detail



The speaker on the G3 is an improvement on its predecessor's version, but we still wouldn't depend on it to fill a room



The 13-megapixel camera is very good, while the buttons on the back of the phone are larger and textured, so they are easier to find



The 5.5in-screen dominates the button-free front

available). Its limited nature was one of our biggest complaints with the G2, so we're glad LG has addressed it.

LG's user interface has had an overhaul too: it does away with fancy transitions and icon drop-shadowing in favour of a no-fuss design. It's a huge step forward from the G2, which we often felt was cluttered and overdone. We particularly like the new stripped-back notification bar, which looks and works better than ever; the experience feels more intuitive and well thought-out.

Unhappy return

While the 2K display takes the limelight this year, last year's headline feature of high-resolution music support returns in the LG G3. Unfortunately, a lacklustre performance comes along with it.

Listen to a regular WAV file, and while the tone and balance of the music is enjoyable and listenable, that slight lack of excitement we noted in the G2 is present again. We switch to high-res FLAC files and the G3 picks out stacks of fine detail that you just won't hear on a WAV file. It offers insight into a track we're not used to hearing on smartphones. Vocals are really



A metallic-looking back panel is part of LG's minimalist design

The front is almost bezel-free, with the screen stretching right to the edges

focused and sound clarity is superb.

You get a pair of bundled earbuds too (the QuadBeat 2) but, while they look good, we'd give them a wide berth.

Back to the good stuff, and the 13MP camera on the LG G3 is impressive. The headline here is its laser autofocus technology that LG has borrowed from its robot vac division and the same system the police use in their speed guns. The crux of it is, it needs just 0.276 seconds to focus on an object, which, when you think the human eye blinks at 0.3 seconds, is fast.

Even better, the G3 allows you tap on the focus area to both focus and take the photo in one. And all is kept steady and crisp thanks to enhanced optical image stabilisation. The automatic multi-point focus jumps into action as soon as we point the camera at a target, and if the target moves out of frame the G3 refocuses on the next object with barely a delay.

The G2's numerous modes and filters have been stripped back. LG has left just the four main modes that it believes people

use most: auto mode, panorama mode, dual-screen mode and its new "Magic Focus" mode that allows you to change the focus of the shot after the fact. Manual tweekers will find themselves left wanting, with only an HDR mode to toggle, and no ISO or exposure settings in sight.

So how does it perform? Compared with images taken on the G2, pictures are cleaner and sharper, with higher levels of detail and a better handling of contrast. Colours are nicely balanced and largely true to life, with crisp edges and little noticeable noise.

LG hasn't forgotten video either, and has included the ability for 4K filming, as seen on the G Pro 2 (though its decision to leave out a native 2K option is a headscratcher). LG has also focused its efforts on improving video sound. We tested the video sound out on the G3 versus the Xperia Z2 and found the LG to be much better.

Keeping it simple

LG has done well not to overcomplicate its smart features and we find them useful. Smart Notice is a recommendation feature built into the phone, which doesn't aim to replace current services such as Google Now, but complement them. This means offering tips and suggestions based on user information. And the best bit? The suggestions were actually correct.

Finally, LG has thought a lot about security. Alongside Content Lock (which allows you to lock down personal information with a separate password) and Kill Switch, which allows you to remote lock and remote wipe your phone should you lose it, Knock Code offers a new way to unlock your phone, while protecting it too.

Our test handset is the 16GB, 2GB RAM version and it is smooth and lag-free throughout our test, handling HD video clips and graphic-heavy gaming without a stutter. With a bigger, better screen we expected the battery life to take a hit from the G2, but it's not hugely noticeable.

LG has produced a bigger, better version of its already excellent predecessor. Its size won't be for everyone, and we do wish LG would take a closer look at audio. But there's no denying its high-res capabilities, stunning video performance, great design and superb user experience make it a very tempting choice. Five stars.

USE IT WITH

AKG Y50

Portable, affordable and with superb sound, it's hard not to love the AKG Y50s.



Rating ★★★★★

FOR Stunning screen and video performance; intuitive user interface; smart features; strong camera; well designed; high-res music support

AGAINST Audio could be better; large size

VERDICT Everything we loved about its predecessor, and then some

Needs to beat

Sony Xperia Z2 £FOC

★★★★★

Fantastic all-rounder with a beautifully sharp screen and Apple-bothering audio.



Sony BDP-S7200 | Blu-ray player | £220

Sony's top player justifies its billing



Scarily consistent. That's how we'd describe Sony's recent track record when it comes to Blu-ray players. Its budget decks have been showered with Awards and five-star ratings over the past few years, and the BDP-S7200 is the latest of a long line to come under *What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision* scrutiny.

Old-style boxing

The BDP-S7200 sits at the top of Sony's range of Blu-ray players (there's a choice of five machines, from £60). The other four have the Sense Of Quartz design, but the 'S7200 gets a more traditional boxy look. The player doesn't look any worse for it: we're quite taken with the minimalist look.

Entertainment Network, alongside the usual suspects such as BBC iPlayer. There are a couple of gaps, however, notably ITV player and 4oD which weren't available at the time of writing.

Another plus point is in the Sony supporting high-res audio - file compatibility includes 24-bit/192kHz WAV files, FLAC and DSD. The drawback is that not all formats are supported over a home network. FLAC and WAV are, but DSD will need to be played via an SACD disc or portable USB drive hooked up to the player. Not the end of the world.

The Sony's star shines brightest when it comes to sound quality: it's entertaining,

Sony has given the S7200 a traditional design and it doesn't look any worse for it

stunningly realistic picture. There's a great sense of depth and realism to the image too. The player shows skill with the subtle and bold hues of the main characters, while lines are sharply drawn and stable.

Moving on to *The Great Gatsby* in 3D, the S7200 continues its excellent showing. The New York skyline is drawn superbly, and pops out of the screen with an impressive amount of detail. The Sony can handle explosive soundtracks too: play *Man Of Steel* and the player hits you hard with solid, weighty and well-defined lows, with subtleties following once the action settles.

Switch to the DVD of *Lincoln* and the Sony does a great job upscaling to 1080p resolution. Lincoln rides through the Petersburg battlefield, enjoying solid blacks, and excellent insight in the shadows.

There's no shortage of Blu-ray players out there, but the BDP-S7200 stands out. It will be a tough one to beat.

Sony's star shines brightest when it comes to sound quality: the BDP-S7200 is entertaining, exciting and musical, impressing us when it comes to playing Blu-ray discs, DVDs and CDs

The player has also been styled this way to match nicely with Sony's latest home cinema amplifiers (including the excellent the STR-DN1050 on p58).

The S7200 has picture processing technologies you won't find on any of Sony's other machines, as well as a number of audio components specific to this model. Sony even claims that the player's wi-fi has been improved to give greater range. Where it does fall in line with Sony's current models is in offering 4K upscaling, intuitiveness and smart functionality.

The bulk of music and video on-demand comes under the umbrella of the Sony

exciting and musical, impressing us when it comes to Blu-ray discs, DVDs and CDs.

Magnificent Muppets

Watching *Muppets Most Wanted*, the Sony handles the musical numbers with finesse - unusual at this level. During the opening song, *We're Doing A Sequel*, the S7200 displays great timing and enthusiasm. When the film moves on to dialogue-heavy scenes, Kermit and Piggy sound good, with their voices textured and natural.

The Sony also excels visually. Whether it's the fine detail on Kermit or the fuzzy fur on Fozzie Bear, the Sony produces a

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Excellent 2D and 3D picture quality; detailed, dynamic and entertaining sound; minimalist design; works with high-res audio

AGAINST Limited on catch-up TV services

VERDICT Serves up a classy picture and stunning sound - an impressive all-rounder

Needs to beat

Panasonic DMP-BDT460
£180 ★★★★★

Up to now, our go-to choice for a sensibly-priced Blu-ray player. The Panasonic now has reason to be concerned

System builder total build £2400

AV receiver

Sony STR-DN1050
★★★★★ £500

This matching Sony amp wins our Group Test (on p52). And you can operate both player and amp with just one remote



Speaker package

Dali Zensor 15.1
★★★★★ £980

These Award-winning Dalis should be the icing on your home cinema system. They sound superb - a refined and exciting listen



Television

Samsung UE48H6400
★★★★★ £700

This 48in model produces a breathtaking image for the price tag



Simple is the New Smart

LG G3

**SIMPLE IS
THE NEW SMART**

Now It's All Possible



The LG G3 'superphone' is quite simply stunning. Featuring a beautiful 5.5" Quad HD screen (2560x1440 pixels) built within a stylish, metallic design that's both lightweight and comfortable to hold. Plus with a powerful, long lasting 3,000 mAh removable battery, a super fast 2.46 Quad Core Qualcomm Snapdragon 801™ processor and a simplified yet intelligent user interface, this is the device that you've been waiting for.

www.lg.com/uk/g3



Revo SuperConnect | Internet radio | £250

Get connected with this refined Revo

A walnut veneer wraps right around the Revo for a solid, sturdy build

In the same way TVs have evolved into smarter, more complex machines, the same could be said for the ol' transistor radio.

The Revo SuperConnect is a great example. Not content with providing you with standard issue FM and DAB, the Revo has lots of extra features and functionality.

Wacky world awaits you

Hook the Revo up to your home network (via wi-fi) and you can access the varied, and sometimes wacky, world of internet radio. It's done through the built-in vTuner portal, and you can store up to eight presets using the numerical keys on the front.

DLNA certification means the radio can also access music stored on a Mac, PC or NAS (Network Attached Storage) device over your network. Tunes stored on a smartphone or tablet can be played over Bluetooth (aptX Bluetooth is supported).

Significantly, the Revo is one of the first radios we've seen to offer Spotify Connect, so if you have a Premium subscription can control and play tracks from your account. To get started, you just need to download the relevant Spotify app for Android or iOS.

Contrasting styles

We're big fans of the Revo's aesthetics: modern with a dash of retro. The 2.7in OLED display and aluminium front panel contrast nicely with the cabinet's walnut veneer. It wraps right around the unit, in a solid, sturdy build, while there's a large volume dial on the right-hand side of the radio, which is easy to get to grips with.

Menus and track information are shown in the display and it's easy to read, although we did see some tearing with scrolling text. The Revo makes good use of screen space, showing relevant info for radio stations and songs (including bitrate and music format).

The control system for the Revo uses a small joystick, just to the right of the display. It takes a couple of attempts to master, but the radio is quick to respond and it makes light work of the set-up menus. Supplementing the joystick controller is the supplied remote. We were expecting the usual credit card-sized handset but the Revo's is pretty big. It's great to use. You can use it to navigate



menus, access preset stations and control playback when using Spotify Connect.

Through the grille in the aluminium panel, you can just about make out the Revo's single 3.5in BMR (Balanced Mode Radiator) driver, powered by a 15W amp.

A recipe for power

On paper, this doesn't seem like a recipe for power, but the Revo kicks out an impressively weighty sound. It won't appreciate being cranked all the way up to 11, but there's scale and authority here. There's no trace of harshness or brightness, and you will find the Revo sounds good no matter the source.

Play Kings of Leon's *Don't Matter* through Spotify Connect and the Revo leaps to life, doing a great job with the high-octane tempo. The way the radio handles voices lends itself well to dialogue-heavy radio and podcasts: football commentary on BBC 5 Live is entertaining.

Bass sounds richer and fuller than we've heard on rival radios, although if it's too rich

for your taste, you can turn it down easily using the tone settings.

Not many radios we review manage to impress on so many fronts. Design, ease of use, and sound quality - the Revo has it all. SuperConnect by name, super by nature.



The remote is great to use: buttons are large, well-spaced and very user-friendly

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Attractive retro/modern look; packed with features such as Spotify Connect and aptX Bluetooth; nice to use

AGAINST Bass needs toning down a touch

VERDICT A feature-packed, attractive radio and a serious contender for best-in-class

Also consider

Pure Evoke F4
£170 ★★★★★

The Pure doesn't have the sonic scale or weight of the Revo, but it's still a versatile and talented DAB radio.



System builder total build £710

Headphones

AKG K451 ★★★★★ £50

There's a headphone output on the front of the Revo, so for late-night listening attach on-ear headphones, like these Award-winning AKGs



Streaming service

Spotify Premium ★★★★★
£9.99/per month

Spotify Connect requires a Premium account. Once you're signed up, you'll have millions of tracks to stream



Tablet

iPad Air ★★★★★ £400

To access Spotify Connect, you'll need to download the relevant app for your smartphone or tablet. Our current top-ranking tablet is the iPad Air



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Samsung M7 | Wireless speaker | £330

Go play with this feature-packed Samsung

The Samsung M7 isn't your standard wireless speaker. The triangular unit has a myriad features to make it stand out: Bluetooth, near-field communication, internet radio, built-in wi-fi and the promise of a multi-room system.

At £330 the M7 looks like one of the most versatile speakers on the market, but it isn't without its ups and downs. We enjoy the rich, large-scale sound, but setting up the speaker is frustrating.

There are two main ways of streaming music wirelessly: Bluetooth and wi-fi. Pairing our smartphone via Bluetooth is swift and easy, but setting up the network connection leaves us exasperated.

You need the Samsung Multiroom app to start - it's crucial for setting up the

to connect in our test rooms. Even taking into account our crowded testing network, it simply will not connect to our network using ethernet or wi-fi. Instructions on the online user guide and on the app are conflicting, too. We're sure the combination of LEDs and sound cues (none of which are explained) are there to encourage us, but we would like a more straightforward process. We end up using the Hub, and after two resets and lots of patience, we finally managed to get at least two speakers connected to our network.

Tubby low end

Once you get past the confounded set-up and get your tunes playing, it's a comfortable ride. The M7 bursts into life



The Samsung M7 can be placed horizontally or propped on its stand

The M7's delivery isn't the most precise either, but there's a warmth to the sound that's comfortable. A rolled-off top end curbs any hardness from low-res or bright recordings

speakers, as well as letting you stream music from your smartphone, streaming services and internet radio.

Finding a connection

There are a number of ways to connect the M7 to your home network - you can plug it directly to your router using a wired ethernet connection; you can press the WPS button on the speaker and your router; you can use the wi-fi set-up and connect with your smartphone, or you can invest in a separate Hub (the WAM250, £50) that directly connects to your router and allows you to add speakers as you build a multi-room system. It should be a simple process, but we have trouble getting the M7

with power - the sound is big and loud, and easily fills up our large listening room.

The M7 does have a slightly tubby low end. It delivers rich bass, but it isn't very deep, subtle or taut. It works with La Caution's hip hop tune *Thé à la Menthe*, but not Tom Waits's *Swordfishtrombone* - the haunting melody and beautifully textured basslines become a little messy.

The M7's delivery isn't the most precise, either, but there's a warmth to the sound that's comfortable to listen to. A rolled-off top end curbs hardness, which helps with low-resolution music or bright recordings. The midrange is clear and open, delivering a good degree of emotion when it comes to the vocal delivery.

When it comes to build, the M7 is solid, even if it is on the large and chunky side. The curved edges and glossy-top finish look nice, and the rear-panel connections are neatly hidden under a plastic cover with holes to let the power cable through. The triangular design is meant to look like a 'play' button, and can be placed either horizontally or propped up (a stand is included). We prefer to keep the M7 flat, even if it takes up more space. Whichever position you choose, make sure you leave plenty of space in front of it so that the large spread of sound isn't obstructed.

Take control

Controls are at a minimum with small, touch-sensitive icons on the top panel, a touch-capacitive volume dial and a single LED peeking through the front grille. Touch the icons to enable internet radio (you can toggle between three presets), Bluetooth pairing and TV SoundConnect (to link with compatible Samsung TVs). They're responsive, and the glowing icons are elegant. An icon for selecting inputs would be nice. The M7 has no physical power button, but it does go into sleep mode after around 25 minutes of inactivity.

The M7's long list of features is its main selling point. Bluetooth is the simplest way to stream music from your smartphone or tablet. Pairing is unfussy, while playing tunes from the likes of Spotify is hassle-free, too. A big advantage is you don't need Samsung's Multiroom app - you can simply use your smartphone's own intuitive music app to play music (and retain playlists).

Android and Windows users can tap a phone against the NFC tag for an even swifter connection. Just make sure Bluetooth is also turned on for streaming.

Going down the wi-fi route gives you a longer range than you get with Bluetooth, and DLNA compatibility allows you stream

Control app



Samsung Multiroom

Free for Android/iOS

The Multiroom app is paramount to setting up your

M7 with a network, as well as giving you playback and control options. You can switch between inputs, select a streaming service, browse through internet radio stations or stream music from a different device. It's not the slickest design, but it's functional. One drawback is that it doesn't pull up the playlists from your smartphone's music app; you have to create your own. With multi-room, you can send a different song to each speaker, or group them to play the same song, at the same time.





from laptops and NAS devices, too. As long as your device is connected to the same network as the M7, you can change songs or volume even if you're in a different room.

Internet radio is one of the bonuses of the M7. The TuneIn radio service gives you a huge selection of stations, and you can mark out your favourites. Picking the three presets is easily done via the app, too.

Have a music player that doesn't do Bluetooth or wi-fi? Go old-school and plug your device into the M7's 3.5mm input. While you can select the source or method of connection via the Multiroom app, we wish there was a way to do so on the M7 itself. Its file compatibility is extensive, too: MP3, WAV, WMA, AAC, AIFF, ALAC and FLAC music files. The Multiroom app also

Connections are neatly hidden away behind a removable flap

Multi-room Hub

Wireless Audio Multi-room Hub £50

If you plan on going multi-room, then you'll need this Hub that directly connects to your router. The hub has two ethernet ports at the back, along with an 'Add Speaker' button that should, theoretically, make adding more speakers quick and simple. You can link additional hubs together for a better multi-room coverage



gives you Spotify, Deezer and Napster, with Amazon Cloud Player to come.

It would be easy to allow our frustrations with the M7's set-up processes to cloud our enjoyment, but all this is forgiven once we start playing music. It's not the most skilful, cohesive or detailed wireless speaker we've ever tested, but there's no denying that we had a very pleasant time just listening to our various Spotify playlists.

At this price, the Samsung M7 has fierce competition from a wide range of wireless speakers - from the Award-winning Geneva Model S Wireless DAB+ (which is smaller in scale, but is subtler and more musical) to the Cambridge Audio Minx Air 200 (which has similar dynamic reach, but tighter control of bass and rhythms).

It's not without fault, but the Samsung M7's huge sense of scale, comfortable performance and excellent list of features makes it well worth an audition.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Huge spread of sound; goes very loud; features and connectivity

AGAINST Set-up is frustrating; overzealous bass is unwieldy and unsubtle; lacks insight

VERDICT Get past the set-up and it's a comfortable listen with plenty of features

Also consider

Geneva Model S Wireless DAB+ £330 ★★★★★

A stunning Award-winning Bluetooth speaker that delivers hi-fi grade listening



LG NB5540 | Soundbar | £480

Attractive strip is not the full monty

LG has been responsible for some rather good soundbars, one of which even won an Award in 2013, so it was happy news when we heard there was going to be a new one.

A thing of beauty

If you want a soundbar for aesthetic and space-saving reasons, this is just the ticket. The NB5540 is very pretty. Elegant and understated, it's one of the sleekest, most visually appealing soundbars we've tested.

The body is mostly plastic, but it's high-quality plastic with a brushed-metal effect on top. Four drivers (driven by 40 watts of amplification) peek out from behind the grille. It's all beautifully finished and solidly put together. As far as perceived value is concerned, this one goes far.

One of the attractions is the soundbar's ability to sit in front of your TV and not obstruct anything. Some chunkier rivals practically demand a dedicated shelf, but not this LG, which is a mere 40mm tall.

The accompanying wireless subwoofer isn't quite so spectacular or space-saving, but then again subwoofers don't tend to be. It's essentially a cloth-covered cube. Its wireless connection to the soundbar gives you some flexibility over placement.

The set of connections is fairly generous. You get one each of HDMI in and out,

So far so good. Unfortunately the sound isn't so impressive. We connect the bar to the TV (via optical) and tune in to a bit of tennis from Wimbledon. The LG succeeds in making the TV sound wider, more spacious and more full-bodied. There's also a good deal of detail, with voices and handclaps sounding convincingly textured.

The bass is quite overbearing straight out of the box, but this can be managed with the remote control. Once toned down, it's fairly weighty yet nicely defined.

What's not manageable, however, is the thin sound at the top end, which can edge into sharp and harsh territory. This is accentuated by a poorly integrated midrange, which lacks weight and dynamics.

The missing midrange

The effect is that there appears to be a gap between the top and bottom of the frequency range, which is rather distracting. This is more apparent when we play music through USB or Bluetooth: despite a good deal of detail, the top and bottom end hog the spotlight while the midrange is obscured.

There are various sound modes, but like most we've heard these are not particularly effective. The only one we'd use is 'Music', which rounds off the top end, but this makes the performance less punchy and dynamic.

USE IT WITH

Sony BDP-S7200

Yet another outstanding Blu-ray player from Sony, this one complementing an excellent picture with detailed, dynamic sound and a minimalist design.



In detail



Ample connections Two HDMI's - one in, one out - sit alongside USB and 3.5mm inputs. File-format support is good too



Fingertip control The remote handset operates a wide range of functions, including sub levels, lip sync and inputs

There appears to be a gap between the top and bottom, which is rather distracting: despite a good deal of detail, the top and bottom end hog the spotlight while the midrange is obscured

optical, 3.5mm and USB. Supported formats include MP3, WMA, WAV, OGG (up to 48kHz) and FLAC (to 24-bit/192kHz).

There's Bluetooth for music streaming, even if it doesn't support the higher-quality aptX variety. The connection is stable, although LG recommends avoiding metal furniture or operating microwave/medical equipment nearby.

You may be tempted to try the LG Bluetooth Remote app, but we found it buggy and uncooperative. Thankfully the proper remote is very good. It's nicer than the typical 'credit card' alternative, and controls subwoofer levels, sound effects and USB folders, as well as the usual volume and channel control options. Operation is slick and responsive.



We find ourselves disappointed with the LG NB5540. It's hard to get past the flaws in the sound, even if we do love the design and features. Ultimately, similar money can get you similar features with much better sound.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Deep bass; good scale; gorgeous - and practical - design

AGAINST Poor integration; midrange is short on weight and dynamics

VERDICT It looks good and saves space, but the sound should be better

Also consider

Philips HTL9100 £600 ★★★★★

A little more money gets you an excellent, rounded performance with actual surround sound.



QED Reference Audio 40

Cables Matter No.6

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To find out more about why cables matter, please visit our website.



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For more details on EPICON please visit www.dali-speakers.com / www.dali-epicon.com

Sony MDR-EX650 | In-ear headphones | £60

Super in-ear Sonys with (brass) knobs on

Considering brass has been used to make musical instruments for centuries, it's a little surprising that it rarely features in the construction of hi-fi components. Perhaps that's about to change, because the Sony MDR-EX650 in-ears are all about the brass.

Built with top brass

Both the internal sound path, which carries sound from the 12mm driver directly to your ears, and the enclosure itself are constructed using trombone material. It's certainly striking. To us, it's a bit too gold and bling, but there is a silver-grey finish available if your sensibilities are similarly unsettled.

By current in-ear standards, there's quite a lot of earphone here, but these are very comfortable to wear. The rounded end of the driver enclosure nestles snugly at the bottom of the ear and pushes the bud into a position that's far enough in to create a sound isolating seal, but not so far in as to be intrusive and uncomfortable. These are snug, secure and among the more comfortable earphones we've had on test.

The internal sound path and enclosure are made from trombone brass

hand to just about anything, effortlessly finding the balance between the details and the overall flow.

It's worth pointing out that there's a mic and remote unit at around chin height on the left cable of these 'phones. The remote is one-button, so while it lacks volume buttons, it means the earphones are happy with Android, iOS and BlackBerry devices.

These Sony MDR-EX650s will happily turn their hand to just about anything, effortlessly finding the balance between the details and the overall flow of your music

The sound is just as pleasant - we start with *Taro* by Alt-J and the vocals are immediately engaging: focused, but given space for that ethereal element to breathe. The soundstage is open and expansive, and as instruments and other vocals come in they're placed expertly throughout, creating an overall presentation that's fabulously immersive. The physical noise isolation helps here, too.

We switch to the infectious rhythm of Bombay Bicycle Club's *Luna* and the EX650's prove to be punchy purveyors of pop beats too. Drums are precise and snappy, the skittering synthesiser sparkles at the top, and towards the bottom end you've got a bassline with weight and balance - it underpins everything, but never drowns out the range.

Attack with caution

The tonal balance here is beautifully judged. There are some in-ear headphones around this price that will offer just a touch more detail and marginally fiercer attack, but those also expose any recording flaws and can become tiring to listen to over time. That's not the case here - these Sonys will happily turn their

It's also worth noting that there are four different-sized pairs of buds in the box, along with a soft carry-pouch that should afford your new earphones a bit of protection in your bag or pocket when you are out and about.

Are there any flaws with these headphones? There really aren't any. For fit, function and sonic form the Sony MDR-EX650's are virtually flawless for the money. We wholeheartedly recommend them.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Comfortable and secure fit; solid, weighty and punchy delivery; expansive soundstage

AGAINST Apple-addicts will prefer a three-button remote

VERDICT From sound to fit, the EX650s are everything a pair of in-ears should be

Also consider Sound Magic E10 £35 ★★★★★

Cheaper alternatives to the Sony, but a great buy if on a limited budget



The remote is one button so the earphones are happy with Android, iOS and BlackBerry devices

USE IT WITH

Sony Xperia Z1 Compact

Sony makes the best-sounding Android smartphones around. The Z1 Compact is a great example

LH Labs Geek Out | Digital-to-analogue converter | £200

New DAC is a crowd-funded pleaser

Crowd-funding for hi-fi kit is becoming a bit of a trend. When Light Harmonic started a Kickstarter campaign for the Geek Out, the initial target was set at \$28,000. The final amount raised was well over a staggering \$300,000. Time, then, to see if this portable DAC was worth the wait and the investment...

Thinner and not much bigger than a box of matches, the Geek Out comes in four different colours: white, silver, red and black. The colours are for more than personal preference, though. Each denotes a different power output: of 100mW (UK price still tbc), 450mW (£200), 720mW (£250) and 1000mW (£300) respectively.

Function over form

Here, then, we are reviewing the silver, 450mW version. The design is functional rather than flamboyant, but there's only so much you can do with a device so small. It feels solid in hand, although we're a little concerned that the USB connector doesn't have a cap for protection (at least a carry pouch is included in the box). To prevent you placing too much strain on the connector, LH Labs provides a six-inch USB extension cable.

Concave and convex buttons on the DAC's edge shift volume up and down, but the Geek Out doesn't respond very promptly to a press. It's easier and quicker to change volume on your computer. The buttons on our review sample also rattle a bit, which cheapens our impression of the device.

The row of indicators running along the middle of the unit shows sample rates being played. A sticker on the back of the unit tells you what the various combination of lights mean, but having to flip your whole laptop over to check isn't ideal. This set-up is overcomplicated and unintuitive.

The Geek Out DAC can handle a multitude of sample rates natively, including 24-bit/192kHz and even DSD files should you own any. You'll need to download dedicated drivers if you're a Windows user, but for Mac and Linux operators the Geek Out is compatible out of the box.

Twin headphone outputs are an unusual feature on any DAC, but the Geek Out



Strip lighting

The indicators in the middle of the DAC light up in various combinations to reveal the sample rate being played. The menu card translating all this, however, is on the back of the unit - not too convenient in use.

The bassline sounds particularly purposeful and poised, and there's also a general feeling of solidity and drive to the track. There's plenty of detail and texture to the sparkly highs



The (slightly rattly) buttons on the side alter volume - but it's easier to use your PC

comes equipped with them. One is for use with home hi-fi headphones, the other more suited to portable in- and on-ear designs. The former delivers greater refinement and finesse; the latter sacrifices some of this and just seems to increase the volume a bit.

Detail, texture and realism

Play a CD-quality rip of Daft Punk's *Get Lucky* and the Geek Out paints an insightful picture. The bass-line sounds particularly purposeful and poised, and there's also a general feeling of solidity and drive to the track. There's plenty of detail and texture to be had in the hand claps and sparkly highs. Pharrell's vocal sounds rich, natural and realistic.

Pressing the two volume buttons simultaneously engages the DAC's 3D "spacialisation" mode which, LH Labs claims, will move the sound from between your ears to outside your head. To be fair, we feel you get a greater sense of spaciousness and height, but the trade-

off is a slight loss of cohesion and solidity. As ever with such tweekery, it pays to experiment...

Timing is perhaps a touch off

The DAC isn't quite as convincing when it comes to communicating the track's funky rhythms - we'd like a greater sense of drive and rhythmic precision. Play a DSD file of Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On?* and, although it sounds rich, warm and packed with resolution, the Geek Out doesn't quite have the feel and soulful flow of the track nailed down.

The Geek Out is undoubtedly a clever little device with an interesting background story. It's also a very competent sounding device even if it doesn't quite display class-leading credentials.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Extensive sample-rate support; smooth, robust and solid sound; flexible design

AGAINST Doesn't follow rhythms or highlight dynamic shifts as clearly as some cheaper rivals

VERDICT A good ad for crowd-funded hi-fi; solid but not quite as talented as some rivals

Now add these

On-ear headphones

AKG Y50 ★★★★★ £80

The Y50s, from AKG's brand new Y series, are quite the star, boasting a striking design and fantastically clear and detailed sound.



In-ear headphones

Sony MDR-EX650 ★★★★★ £60

These talented in-ears use brass in their construction. A comfortable fit, they produce an engaging sound at a reasonable price. Lovely.



Also consider

Audioquest Dragonfly v1.2 £130 ★★★★★

Doesn't have the flexibility or features, but sounds rhythmic and boasts great dynamics



Epoz AktiMate Blue | Stereospeakers | £600

Listen to the Blues and smile

We've long been fans of Epoz's AktiMate range, and these powered speakers simply reinforce that opinion. Not that they're perfect, mind.

The Blues are big, standing 32cm high. They also need to be placed on quality stands positioned at least 20cm from a rear wall to prevent their weighty bass becoming too dominant.

These things push them from consideration as a desktop speaker in our view. We think the Blues make most sense for someone who wants a high-quality alternative to traditional budget hi-fi.

Proper hi-fi

Connections are plentiful. Alongside the usual analogue stereo inputs there's a trio of digital connections - USB (24-bit/96kHz-capable), optical and coax (both accept 24-bit/192kHz data streams) - and the increasingly common Bluetooth (4.0) option. You also get a relatively smart and easy-to-use remote.

These speakers are well made. The white gloss finish on our samples is hard to fault and the enclosures feel nice and solid. The drive unit complement is a 25mm soft-dome tweeter and a 16.5cm polypropylene mid/bass driver per cabinet. The left-hand speaker - which is marked as such - is the brain. It houses a 60W-per-channel amplifier and all connections.

Member of the rotary club

There's a rotary volume control and a simple LED display on the front panel. Perhaps too simple, given there's no clear indication of the input chosen. The only sure way of telling as far as we can see is by pressing the appropriate button on the remote and waiting for sound to come out.

Start listening and any issues are forgotten quickly. We start with Bluetooth, pairing the speakers to a Sony Xperia S phone and are pleased with what we hear. Properly set up, these standmounters deliver a wide, nicely layered soundstage. It's certainly a world away in terms of spaciousness from the small-scale sounds most single-box alternatives offer.

Tonally, things are well balanced. There's a healthy dose of refinement, which helps the speakers cope well with less-than-perfect source material. But, it's all done without sacrificing bite and attack.

In their element

When we move to higher-quality sources - such as our reference streamer, Naim's NDS/555PS, or the vastly more price-compatible Marantz CD6005 - the AktiMates really start to shine. We're impressed by the way these speakers

We're impressed by the way these speakers highlight the music's dynamic subtleties and deal with its seismic bassline



In detail



Quality remote The remote handset reflects the speakers' high build quality. It's also well laid-out and easy to operate



The business end It's the left-hand speaker that houses the 60W-per-channel amplifier and all those connections

They're forgiving with indifferent material and shine when used with a quality source

highlight the subtleties of a piece like *Time* by Hans Zimmer, and their muscularity when dealing with the seismic bassline.

Detail levels are good, as is made clear by the insight these speakers deliver with Michael Jackson's *Slave To The Rhythm*. They have no trouble tracking the multitude of instrumental strands or delivering the track's propulsive rhythmic drive with considerable enthusiasm. We're pleased with the AktiMates' way with dynamics too - these are rendered with determination when the music demands and subtlety when things change down a gear.

Provided you can accommodate the Blues' size and positioning demands, there's little else to complain about here. Fine connectivity, terrific build and a lovely, engaging sound make these AktiMates a superb buy. Highly recommended.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Excellent sound; well judged balance; powerful bass; good connectivity

AGAINST They're large and need a decent amount of space to shine

VERDICT Positioned well, these AktiMates are a great-sounding alternative to traditional hi-fi

Needs to beat

Triangle Color 123 £600 ★★★★★



A neat desktop sub/sat package that sounds as integrated and adept as we've heard at this price. Lacks the Blues' connectivity, though

Surround sound

Dolby Atmos: home cinema sound for the HD era

With more firms signing up to deliver Dolby Atmos into the home, we ask: just what is it?



Onkyo, Pioneer, Denon: three key manufacturers to have unveiled new AV receivers, speakers and other home cinema products capable of bringing Dolby Atmos sound into your living room. But what exactly is this surround-sound technology? What will you need to transform your home set-up? And when are these new products going to hit the shelves?

Dolby Atmos: a definition

Dolby Atmos is surround-sound technology that expands on more familiar 5.1 and 7.1

set-ups. You place speakers at points around the room - literally *around* - rather than at traditional, pre-determined places.

That means you'll find yourself placing a speaker behind the screen, along walls, even in the ceiling if you're feeling adventurous.

Once you've installed the speakers, there is a complete calibration to let sound mixers 'place' sounds and voices at specific points - at least that's how it works in the cinema.

Home is where the surround sound is

Of course, your living room doesn't exactly have the same make-up of a cinema. And it's unlikely you'll fit 64 speakers in your home - especially in the ceiling. That's where the likes of Onkyo, Pioneer and Denon come in.

Onkyo is releasing two Atmos AV receivers, a network AV controller and two speaker packages this year. A firmware update will also be released for selected current models. Meanwhile, **Pioneer** says it is soon to release a new firmware update for its Elite speakers and AV receivers, while **Denon**, **Marantz** and **Yamaha** are set to

launch new compatible AV receivers. For a taster of what's to come, see panel right.

Dolby Atmos will also work with existing home cinema systems, with Atmos-enabled speaker modules to be made available that will sit on top of your speakers to deliver Atmos sound from compatible AV receivers.

Configuring your speakers

There will be several new configurations taking into account the speakers you have. And it is hoped all that will be matched by content with Atmos surround-sound mixes.

For example, 5.1.2 will be a traditional 5.1 set-up with either a pair of ceiling speakers or a pair of Atmos-enabled speakers (the '2' in 5.1.2). Meanwhile, 7.1.4 will be a 7.1 setup with either two pairs of ceiling speakers or a pair of Atmos-enabled front speakers and Atmos-enabled surrounds.

It's also claimed that Atmos AV amps will do their best to get more from traditional surround sound set-ups and 5.1 soundtracks.

And about that content?

Once you have the kit, all you'll need is content. Dolby says you shouldn't need a new Blu-ray player, as long as it meets the current specifications, because compatible discs are due to launch later this year - both in a physical and streaming formats.

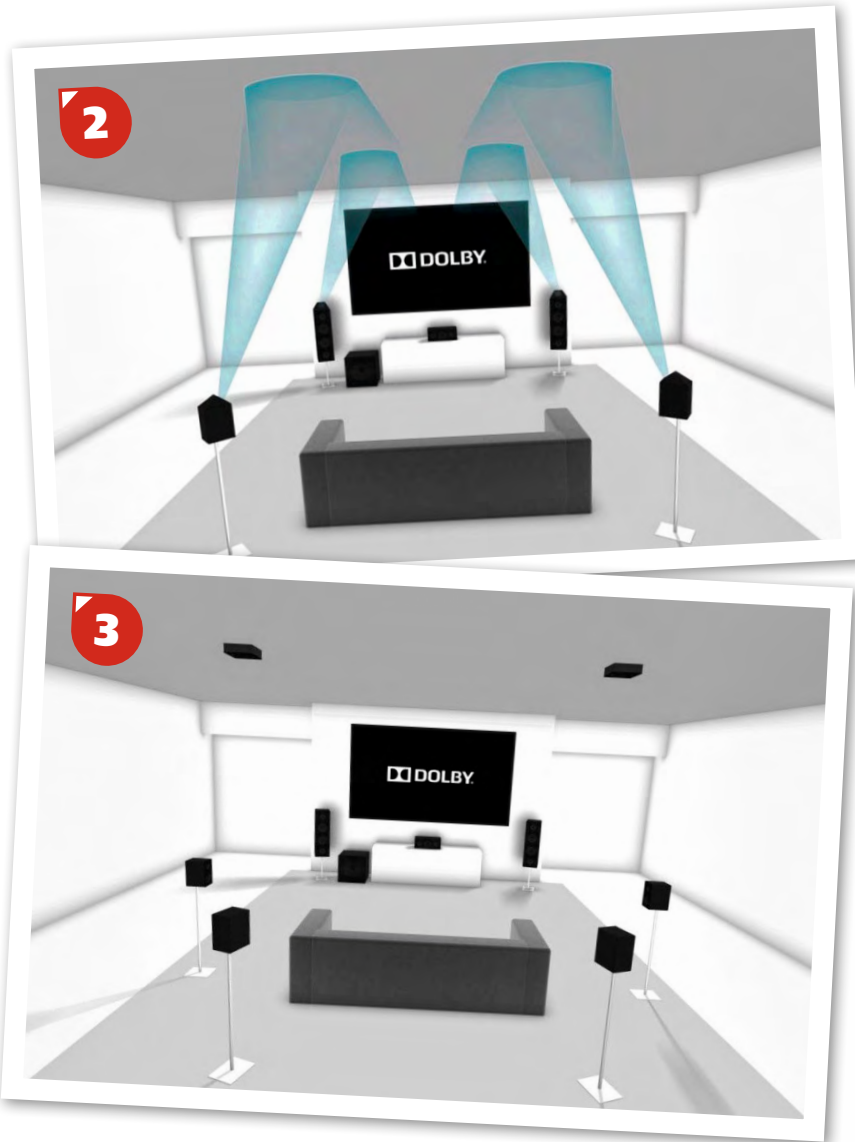
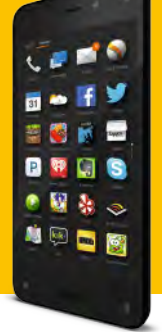
Meanwhile, many of the new Atmos AV products are expected to hit the shelves in September so you won't have to wait long before you can start transforming your home with a fully immersive cinema experience.



*** Vayta Dekk**
A platform designed to prevent vibration from your hi-fi equipment
<http://whfcm/VaytaDekk>



*** Amazon Fire Phone**
The new smartphone features 3D visuals and is available from just £117
<http://whfcm/FireSmartphone>



1 Dolby Atmos 5.1.2 With this speaker configuration, a traditional 5.1 setup is enhanced with two Atmos-enabled speakers – and it's this that provides the '2' in 5.1.2

2 Dolby Atmos 5.1.4 Here's a somewhat similar configuration to before, but with

four Atmos-enabled front and surround speakers providing the audio experience.

3 Dolby Atmos 7.1.2 And if you feel a bit more adventurous, this nine-channel setup comes with two in-ceiling speakers to add to a more familiar 7.1 audio setup.



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

You place speakers at points around the room rather than traditional, pre-determined places. You'll find yourself placing a speaker behind the screen, along walls, even in the ceiling

Surround your senses Atmos-enabled receivers



Denon

We already knew the new Denon X-Series of AV receivers would be coming our way later this year, and now we know that two flagship models will support Dolby Atmos.

The AVR-X4100W (£1300) and AVR-X5200W (£1700) are due for release in September and will both incorporate the surround sound technology from the off.



Onkyo

In addition to the TX-NR1030 receiver seen above, Onkyo will also launch the TX-NR303 receiver; the HT-S7705 and HT-S9705THX home cinema in a box; the SKS-HT678 and SKH-410 speaker packages; and the flagship PR-SC5530 network AV controller – all of which will offer Dolby Atmos surround sound when they start appearing in August.



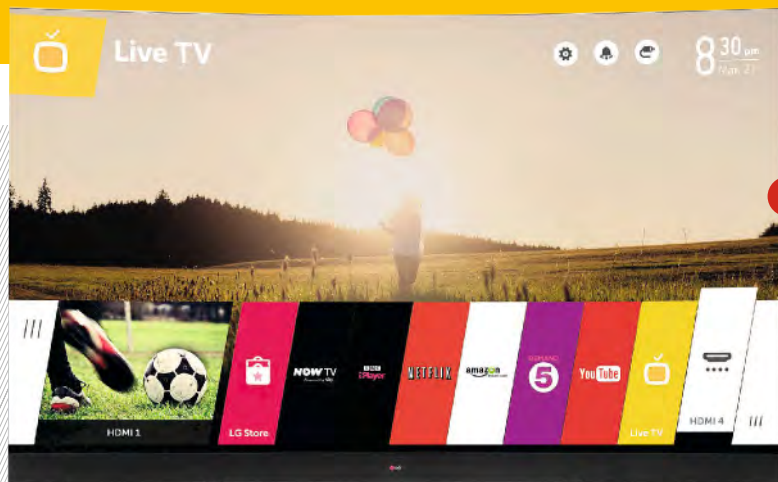
Pioneer

The top-of-the-range SC-LX88 (above, £2200) heads the new five-strong range of AV receivers from Pioneer, and is one of three that'll support Dolby Atmos after a firmware update scheduled for the summer.

The SC-LX78 (£1700) and SC-LX58 (£1400) complete the Atmos trio, and will start becoming available in August.

* NOCS NS2 Wireless Update

The NOCS NS2 Air Monitors now support wireless streaming through AirPlay, Bluetooth and Spotify Connect. <http://whfcm/NOCSNS2>



1

1 LG Curved Ultra HD 4K OLED TVs from £6000

LG has unveiled the "world's first curved Ultra HD 4K OLED TVs" in 65in and 77in variants. LG has combined its WRGB OLED screen technologies with 4K to create a TV which aims to deliver "superior consistency and balance". Both models come with LG's webOS smart TV platform offering access to streaming services such as Netflix. Both are due out in October. The 65EC970V is set to retail for £6000 while the 77EC980V will cost £25,000. <http://whfcm/LG4KOLED>

TOP 5 New launches

2 Grado e Series Headphones from £80

Grado has unveiled its third generation of headphones as a complete overhaul to the previous "i" series. Every component has been revisited to achieve "unparalleled dynamics and sonic fidelity". Other improvements include modifying the magnetic motor structure and making adjustments within the headphone housing to prevent resonance. The range starts at £80 for the SR-60es and stretches up to £1700 for the PS1000es. For full details on the entire range, head to <http://whfcm/GradoESeries>



3 Primare Reference 60 Amplifiers £6500 each

The PRE60 preamplifier and A60 power amplifier mark the return to the high-end market for Primare. The PRE60 supports high-resolution audio streaming from online sources while the A60 is a "reference audiophile, fully balanced two x 250W" stereo power amplifier. <http://whfcm/Reference60>



4 Dali Rubicon Speakers from £875

The new Rubicon range of Dali speakers features innovation from the flagship Epicon series. 16.5cm wood-fibre cones are used throughout the range, with bass ports for each woofer. Cabinets are made from solid MDF and are available in four different finishes. Prices start from £875 for a single LCR and go up to £4000 for a pair of Rubicon 8s. Head to <http://whfcm/DaliRubicon> for more information.



5 Yamaha SRT-1000 Soundbase £500

Yamaha's first soundbase, due out in the summer, features a refined version of its Intellibeam technology found in its Award-winning soundbars. The soundbase has two optical, one coaxial and one stereo RCA input as well as a subwoofer output. It can be used with Yamaha's HT Controller app for Android and iOS. <http://whfcm/SRT1000>



Our SuperUniti all-in-one system will unleash your digital music with high-resolution UPnP™ streaming, internet and DAB/FM radio, USB/iPod playback, digital and analogue inputs and iOS app control. Yet behind its digital sophistication lies a startlingly simple idea: that music should be a central part of life. Its analogue heart is an integrated amplifier backed by 40 years of engineering knowledge and passion to breathe new life into your music.



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HEADPHONES £250-£390

SUPERTEST



Forget about Dre

Looking for a serious set of headphones to beat the competition? We put seven to the test, to find out which one is simply music to your ears...

When you start spending serious money on headphones, it's to get the most from your music. Be it an upgrade for your portable device or to soften your hi-fi system when the kids go to bed, £250 can get you a really decent pair of cans these days.

Headphones are beyond just two-ear cups and a headband at this price, so a few things need be considered. With higher-end systems, they should be plugged into a decent headphone amp - the Audiolab M-DAC (£600) or Graham Slee Novo (£280), say - otherwise you may never know how good they can sound.

And if you don't listen in isolation, or if you're even *thinking* of using them in public, be aware that open-backed

(as opposed to closed-back) headphones leak sound through their permeable ear cups to give their characteristically more-spacious presentation.

Here we have a mixture of headphones between £250-£390: closed-back and open-backed; on-ears and over-ears; big builds and small ones; black finishes and bright green. Last year's Award-winning on-ears, the Bowers & Wilkins P7s, are the ones to beat, but can they fend off newbies from Focal, Grado (a new model for the first time in ages), Audio Technica and Pioneer, as well as some of our favourite five-star veterans?

WHAT'S ON TEST

AKG Q 701
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Audio Technica
ATH-A900X LTD
£390 page 33

Bowers & Wilkins P7
£330 page 34

Beyerdynamic DT990
Premium
£290 page 36

Focal Spirit Classic
£300 page 38

Grado SR325e
£300 page 39

Pioneer SE-MX9-T
£250 page 40



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



Listen to our favourite tracks every month!

AKG

Q 701

£250

★★★★★

1

1 The '3D form' velour earpads are a great fit - snug and airy 2 Beware: they leak a fair amount of sound through the protruding circular grille of the cups 3 The AKG Q 701s are available in green, white or black

2

3

The **AKG Q 701s** may be ludicrously big and green, but design isn't their real talking point (honest). The flagship in AKG's Quincy Jones-endorsed product range, and closely based on the company's K701 model, these over-ears have been residents of the five-star club for some time now. And as they're £100 cheaper than when we first tested them in 2011, we're interested to see how these old-timers fare in new company.

Just as we remember them

The 701s sound just as we remember them: big, open, analytically detailed and superbly balanced. But enough to compete in today's market? Absolutely. Any inklings there might have been that they would lose a star or two to newcomers vanished the moment we became reacquainted with their sound.

We start things off with Goldheart Assembly's *The Idiot* - a track that can

easily sound messy due to its dense combination of heavy electric and acoustic guitars - and the AKGs bask in its energy. Organised and insightful, even subtle instruments are detectable in their roomy sonic presentation.

Despite multiple guitars often playing the same notes as one another, each has presence and texture. The AKGs hardly put a foot wrong, producing a complete sound - and a balanced one, too.

Play Radiohead's *Creep* and bass is rooted to give guitars authority, while cymbals stay composed. Thom Yorke's vocals are clear and focused too, thanks to the convincing midrange.

If we're being picky, the headphones could do with more pep - sometimes we just want them to let their hair down... especially when our playlist reaches The Bangles. Another negative is the fair amount of sound they leak through the protruding circular grille of the cups

- using them at home might be wisest. As well as a 6.3mm adapter and 6m cable, the 701s come supplied with a 3.5mm jack and smaller 3m lead if you do decide to use them on-the-go.

Well put together

The 701s' likeable big sound isn't all that surprising considering their design (in white or black, as well as garish green). They are huge. The large ear cups and real-leather headband feel like premium items, and they are comfortable due to the headphone's light 235g weight.

The real home comfort here, though, is the cushioned velour of the ear pads, which AKG says has '3D form' for better fit. It does the trick, fitting snugly over your ears so: you can enjoy these cans for hours on end. And considering their sound, 'enjoy' is the right word.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Among the most detailed for their price; big, open sound; very comfortable

AGAINST Large to wear out and about; rivals have more pep

VERDICT The competitively-priced Q701s keep their five stars for a third year running

Play Radiohead's *Creep* and bass is rooted to give guitars authority, while cymbals stay composed at the top end. Thom Yorke's vocals are clear in the convincing midrange

Audio Technica

ATH-A900X LTD

£390



1 The earpads are nice - very large and comfortable 2 Audio Technica uses 53mm drivers for deeper bass 3 The headband consists of two small pads that rest on either side of your head

What that elongated model name tells you is that these are the limited edition version of Audio Technica's ATH-A900X.

At first glance it appears the upgrade has been limited to a splash of colour - this version ditches the original's black earcups for a shiny-matte scarlet finish with gold accents - but a new voice coil has been installed, too. It's not a huge revamp, then, but the jump in price (£50) is relatively modest too.

Monster drivers

What carries over from the originals is the Double Air Damping System (designed for deeper bass) and the monster 53mm drivers. Over the top, the circular aluminium earcups are a closed-back design. They're (still) huge, so we'd keep the ATH-A900Xs strictly for home use. The soft-leather earpads nicely enclose and cushion your ears, but we have a problem with grip. The

'headband' consists of just two small pads - Audio Technica calls it the '3D Wing Support' - that rest on either side of your head. It's designed to minimise vibration and increase comfort by reducing pressure, but we find it a bit clumsy, especially on smaller heads. The earpads slip down too easily as we sway our heads to *Happy Together* by The Turtles, and don't feel as secure as rival models. Sit still and it's not an issue.

The A900X LTDs' big build has a big sound to match. Sound fills the Audio Technica's remarkably open and vast soundfield, and they're not afraid to hit the dynamic highs in Hans Zimmer's *Radical Notion* from the *Inception* soundtrack. As the music culminates in a rapture of percussion and wind instruments, the powerful presence of the orchestra is clear. The sense of scale here is astonishing, and the bass drum rumbles. The brawn on show isn't at the

expense of finer details, though. We're hard pushed to find rivals as clear and forthright as the 900X LTDs. It's easy to identify layers in Michael Jackson's *Slave to the Rhythm*: every part of its complex production is dissected and presented.

Could do with a dose of warmth

So what's the problem? A hint of excess brightness and thinness appears in harder recordings; at times the Audio Technicas can be too easily pushed into sounding trebly. Ultimately, they miss a dose of natural warmth and refinement that rivals AKG Q701 and B&W P7 have.

If you can sacrifice some comfort, these are decent cans: big, open and hugely detailed. And with a 3.5mm-ended cable and a 6.3mm adapter supplied, they will work well with both portable and hi-fi sources.

We're hard pushed to find rivals as clear and forthright as the 900X LTDs. It's easy to identify layers in Michael Jackson's *Slave to the Rhythm*. We hear every part of its complex production

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Big, open sound; clear and direct; loads of detail; soft, cushioned ear pads; look nice

AGAINST Lack some natural warmth; concerns over fit/grip; can sound topky

VERDICT These remarkably clear and spacious headphones are worth serious consideration

Beyerdynamic

DT990 Premium

£290

★★★★☆

1

3

2

1 The comfortable grey velour earpads are replaceable 2 Be aware that the ribbed body of the earcups leaks a lot of sound 3 A nicely padded steel headband means the DT990s will fit most head sizes

This is the 'Premium' version of the DT990s (which we awarded three stars many moons ago) and comes in three different impedance levels: 32, 250 and 600ohms. While the 32ohm model is more suited for smartphones and portable players, the other, higher-impedance versions are better suited to hi-fi use with a headphone amp/DAC such as Audiolab's M-DAC.

Give them a good running in

We use this pairing with our 250ohm reference kit and are impressed with the results - after they've been run in extensively, mind. Give them anything less than 72 hours to run in and music is tainted by an uncomfortable trebly edge. When the edge is taken off, though, the Beyerdynamics have a likeable, even temperament. The mid-range is clear, and comes between a rich bass and well-judged treble. The Beyers fill their

spacious and airy stage with detail and display balance too, having no trouble uncovering the quips in Eminem's *The Marshall Mathers LP2* album. As well as capturing the buoyancy of Preservation Hall Jazz Band's *Come With Me*, they have no problem painting the band's stage arrangement, with trumpets, clarinets, and pianos well placed.

Put them through their paces with Jack White's *Lazaretto* and the Beyers tear through the track's high tempo, with a good sense of texture too. A slight lack of dynamic punch compared to class-leading rivals - like the slightly pricier B&W P7s - is their only real snag; the P7s bring a bite that makes them truly top performers. One other thing to consider is that the ribbed outer body of the ear cups allows sound to seep through its gaps - the open design will share your playlist publicly if you choose

to take these on your travels. However, if you regularly have lengthy listening sessions, you will appreciate the work Beyerdynamic has put into the DT990 Premium's build: (replaceable) grey velour ear pads epitomise comfort, fitting snugly around your ears while gently clasping your head.

Band feels inconspicuous

The flexible steel headband means the earcups can stretch out almost horizontal, too, so they will accommodate all head sizes. What's more, the thick leather cushioning makes the band feel inconspicuous.

Offering a detailed, open sound and unquestionable comfort, the Premiums have a lot going for them. If you can live with a loss of dynamics, these headphones will give plenty of pleasure.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Big, open sound; overflow with detail; very comfortable and accommodating; sturdy

AGAINST Some rivals offer more punch and excitement

VERDICT The 'Premium' upgrade brings improvements, delivering across the board

Put the Beyerdynamic DT990 Premiums through their paces with Jack White's *Lazaretto* and they tear through the track's high tempo while giving a good sense of texture too

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Bowers & Wilkins

P7

£330

★★★★★

1

3

2

1 The sheepskin leather ear pads are ultra-soft **2** The earpads are attached with magnets so you can replace them **3** The ear cups fold inward, thanks to engineered hinges

If you're after superb sounding on-ears and portability is a priority, these P7s could be your best buy of the year. That's right: after scooping the 2013 Award for Best Headphones in their price category, the Bowers & Wilkins remain a top performer among a host of new arrivals.

We start with rapper Macklemore and Ryan Lewis's *Thrift Shop* and it's hard to ignore the P7s' enthusiasm. Full of panache, they capture the fun of the track with impeccable timing. Playful lyrics are clear and focused, and the sporadic instrumental quirks in the song pass in and out with purpose.

Overflow with detail

A bold bassline is punchy and dynamic, too - it's full-bodied while carefully avoiding veering into boomy. When it comes to balance, the P7s are nicely judged. Skip to the track *Wing\$* and the P7s overflow with detail; even when the

song crashes into its uplifting beat, the P7s stay level-headed. Grado's brand new SR325es win out on absolute clarity and detail, though.

If the sound doesn't sell these 'phones to you, then the design certainly ought to. The P7s are elegant, brandishing a simple - yet classic - black and metal partnering. They really feel the part too.

The earcups fold inward (thanks to well-engineered hinges connecting them to the headband) and make the P7s easy to stick in a bag or the supplied quilted carry-case. Although the connecting metal frame looks slim, it's stiff enough to reinforce the B&W's robust, impressive build.

The P7s' sheepskin-leather earpads envelop your ears - they're ultra-soft and comfortable - although our ears did become a little warm after a while.

If you pop off the magnetic pads, you will see the 40mm driver through the

metal grilles. The headband is nicely padded, with ample cushioning underneath to support your head, and it's only after two hours of continuous listening with the P7s that we begin to feel in any way uncomfortable.

Close to your source

Two cables - both with a 3.5mm jack to plug into a source and a 2.5mm end to connect to the left ear cup - come supplied in the box. One of these has an in-line remote for controlling Apple devices. Neither cable is particularly long (1.2m) though, so you'll need to make sure your sofa sits close enough to your source if you are using the P7s in the home.

The P7s might be Bowers & Wilkins' most expensive headphones to date, but they're worth every penny.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Thoroughly detailed; balanced, clear and direct sound; compact and portable

AGAINST Cable could be longer for more practical use at home

VERDICT Great headphones - the P7s still set the standard at this price

If the sound doesn't sell these headphones to you, the design ought to. The P7s are elegant, brandishing a simple - yet classic - black and metal partnering. They feel the part too

Flat Screen. Big Sound



Is your flat TV sounding a little flat? Put big sound back into your big screen entertainment with the Tannoy BaseStation™ One. Whether you are watching sports, movies or documentaries the BaseStation One is a single box, active loudspeaker that lets you enjoy clearer, crisper dialogue, detailed effects and rich bass. Switch to its NFC™ enabled aptX® Bluetooth® connection to stream high quality music from any Bluetooth device. No trailing cables across the room and no drilling holes to wall mount, just place, plug and play simplicity. Want even more bass thunder? The BaseStation One is ready to connect to the optional 300 Watt Tannoy TS2.10 subwoofer. With Tannoy's renowned sound quality and up to 5x the power of your TV's built-in speakers, the BaseStation One is the ultimate TV accessory.



tannoy.com

Focal

Spirit Classic

£250

★★★★☆



1 Memory foam earpads are super-snug but tend to heat your ears when worn for long periods 2 1.4m (with mic) and 4m cables are both supplied 3 Earcups have a swivel mechanism although it's not the smoothest

Want headphones you can use at home but that can also take the challenge of the daily commute? Focal's new over-ears could be the multi-taskers for you.

The Spirit Classics are quite compact, and their closed-back design means you won't leak your cheesier tunes all over your neighbours on the Tube.

A 1.4m cable with in-line one-button mic for use with smartphones also makes them good for everyday use, though the supplied, chunkier 4m cable and 6.3mm jack connector makes them ideal for use with higher-end systems too.

Conventional elegance

The Focals have a relatively smart - if fairly straightforward - design; the whole package has a hot chocolate, maybe more like bronze, metallic finish.

Memory foam earpads clasp tightly around the ears and - despite making ours a little toasty after a while - are

generally comfortable. A well-padded headband is a saving grace after a few albums, too. Give it a yank and it feels solid, yet it's flexible, so it should fit all head sizes. The earcups - partly made out of anodized aluminium - can swivel for greater flexibility, too, although the mechanism sounds a bit clunky.

Inside the cups are 40mm drivers. Focal claims to have used a lighter cone than the market average for faster, more dynamic reproduction - and it seems to have paid off. When John Williams's *Born On The Fourth Of July* theme gets going, the Focals run with the fast melodies and fluctuating dynamics. Violins soar and the gentle strumming of harps emerges through the dense recording.

Trumpets, cellos and violins are well mapped across the stage, making for an orderly delivery - although they don't have as much room to breathe as from more spacious, open-sounding cans.

Shift up to Eminem's *Guilty Conscience* and you don't have to prick your ears to hear the tonal variations of piano keys in that prominent bassline. Taut and controlled, it times well from beginning to end, and projects a nice mix of all the elements.

Convincing midrange, sweet highs

There's expression and transparency to Dr Dre and Eminem lyrics, too: the midrange is convincing, and highs are sweet. The bass, however, is low on grunt and we find the Focals lack just a bit of the pep of class-leading rivals.

The Grado SR325e (£300) and our Award-winning B&W P7s (£330) offer greater attack, and more muscle, but if you like a more laid-back, refined delivery, the Focal Spirit Classics are a fine example at this price level.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Detailed, organised sound; fast, agile; dynamically good; compact and portable

AGAINST Not the most open sound around; they lack zest of rivals

VERDICT Dynamically good cans that require a touch more 'oomph' for a full star set

When the *Born On The Fourth Of July* theme gets going, the Focals run with the score's fast melodies and fluctuating dynamics. Violins soar and the strumming of harps emerges

Grado

SR325e

£300



1 Rather than enclosing your ears the spongy pads rest on them, helping to keep them cool 2 An open-backed design means the music leaks out 3 Slim headband is comfortable enough, but hardly luxurious

The SR325es are our first look at Grado's new third-generation headphones - the e Series - replacing one of our long-time, favourites, the SR325ises. They bring improvements to the motor system and housing, and a wider, more cushioned headband, but otherwise they're a spitting image of their predecessor. The industrial-looking earcups' metal alloy housings (coated with a grey power finish) remain, as do the stubby, extra-terrestrial-like metal antennas that link the cups and band.

Solidly built and creak-free

They're not the head-turners you might expect for £300, but they do bring a sturdy, solid build. Giving the Grados a friendly yank does nothing but emphasise their flexibility and hardness - and as the earcups rotate 360 degrees, the construction remains creak-free. Foam ear pads hang over, rather than

hug, your ears, keeping them airy and cool. While some will prefer a tighter grip, the Grados never feel loose-fitting. The headband can easily be adjusted with a sliding mechanism and, although without cushioning, it feels surprisingly lightweight on the head.

The real upgrade is in their sound: clearer and weightier than the SR325ises, they are as musical as they come.

We start with Michael Jackson's *The Way You Make Me Feel* and the Grados burst into life, lapping up the song's rhythmic energy. Each of the track's layers is distinct and well-organised in a way that ensures a naturally cohesive presentation.

John Williams's *Somewhere In My Memory* (*Home Alone*'s signature score) is a delicate composition - a flurry of sprightly, dainty instrumentals - and the Grados treat it with a suitably light hand: agile and fluent, they breeze through the

varied orchestration without a hitch. Seasonal bells and chimes never sound bright or hard-edged, just beautifully sharp and well imaged.

A light touch

Balanced, detailed and dynamically sound, the tuneful, mellifluous manner of the SR325es makes longer listens a true delight - and with every music genre, too. But beware: these open-backed 'phones leak sound like a damaged boat leaks water, so the unfortunate person beside you will get almost as much of an earful as you. We'd wait until you're home alone to crack out your *Mamma Mia!* soundtrack.

The SR325es might not be the prettiest pair of headphones on the market, but they're top quality soundwise. And that's what counts.

Agile and fluent, the Grados breeze through the varied orchestration without a hitch. Seasonal bells and chimes never sound bright or hard-edged, just beautifully sharp and well imaged

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Wonderfully musical; detailed, orderly presentation; fluid dynamics; sturdy build

AGAINST Open-back design is not well suited to portable use

VERDICT The musical, detailed sound of the Grados makes them a truly top buy

Pioneer

SE-MX9-T

£250

★★★★☆



1 Leather-style pads sit nicely on the ears, even if they make ours a little warm **2** The ear cups are moveable within the outer frame for flexibility **3** A thin, rubber headband lining doesn't help long listening

These SE-MX9-T on-ears "will take you straight to Ibiza", says Pioneer's website. If you don't take the statement too literally, of course, it's not far wrong.

With a summer anthem like Avicii's *Wake Me Up*, the Pioneers have enough fire in their belly to make it exhilarating. Driven and bulging with bass, their 50mm drivers go to town with the thumping dance beats, while vocals are reasonably clear and focused. Their closed-back design means tunes are nicely isolated for your ears only, no matter how loud you go.

The sound is not quite balanced

The Pioneer's bass-heavy manner is at the expense of balance, however, toppling the upper frequencies at almost every opportunity; it's a trait that doesn't bode well. Spin through our playlist and the headphones are off-balance for most music: detail falls short and dynamics

are fairly drab. John Williams's *Theme from Schindler's List* is an orchestration with fluctuating violin sequences, although you'd hardly know with the Pioneer's stagnant dynamics.

They underplay the composition's stop-starts and soaring violins too, and you have to strain to hear the (albeit faint) plucking of harps. Ultimately, they fail to muster any real insight.

The Pioneers do have a neat trick: 3.5mm sockets in each ear cup mean you can choose which side the coiled cable hangs. The 2m, 3.5mm-ended cable has an in-line remote mic - compatible with Android and iPhone - for hands-free calls, while a 6.3mm adapter to plug into your hi-fi system is supplied, along with a material carry case, in-flight adapter and extra cable completing a generous accessory bundle.

You could easily think these are Beats from looking at them, but with a

bright-silver, indigo-black or bright-copper body and 'Pioneer' badge instead. We have a copper pair and (although they clash somewhat with the supplied red cable) they look smart in metallic coating. Solidly built, these are made to last.

Bum note from the rubber band

However, with just a thin rubber lining underneath the headband, a straight two-hour listen feels like punishment. The band itself can be easily adjusted thanks to a sliding mechanism, though.

These SE-MX9-Ts are targeted at dance-music lovers and that's where they will find their audience, probably. Enthusiastic and bass heavy, they are best suited to beat-heavy music - but simply don't have the balance, dynamics or detail to gain our recommendation.

Rating ★★☆☆☆

FOR Enthusiastic sound; attractive design; solid build; cable connects to either earcup

AGAINST Sound outclassed in most areas; make ears warm after a while; poor headband

VERDICT It's well having a bold, bassy sound, but that's not enough in a crowded market

The Pioneer's bass-heavy manner is at the expense of balance, however, toppling the upper frequencies at almost every opportunity - a trait that doesn't bode well



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TEST VERDICT

THE WINNER

Grado SR325e

£300 ★★★★★



The **Grado SR325e** adds another illustrious chapter to the Prestige Series. They might not look easy on the eye, but their true beauty can be found in the ears of the listener

As Lynyrd Skynyrd's dogged lyrics "I keep comin', comin' back for more" blare through the SR325es, it's hard to ignore their pertinence to Grado's Prestige Series. The evolving Series has garnered a wealth of five stars over the last decade or so, and the latest flagship shows it's not finished yet. A significant improvement on their predecessor's sound, the SR325e's clarity, detail and musical fidelity is peerless at this price. Give these an audition before judging them on aesthetics alone.

It's not an easy task to push aside the Bowers & Wilkins P7s. These headphones still have it all: great sound, supreme comfort and classy design - plus a compact build that makes them ideal to use on the go. If portability is key, these are the obvious choice.

The old-timer AKGs hang on to the full set of stars, too, for the third year running. Get past the garish green (other colours are available), and they are very sensible headphones: big, open and beautifully balanced, they pick their way through music to reveal plenty of detail. Their colossal size and open-back design make

them a less-than-ideal travel buddy, but a price reduction to £250 makes them a very attractive proposition for home use.

Audio Technica's limited-edition ATH-A900s are on the large side too, but get past the bulk that restricts them to indoor use and they provide a decent sound - with detail and clarity their closed-back design keeps nicely isolated. With a little more refinement and more comfort, they'd be joining the five-star club.

Beyerdynamic also adds a 'new' edition to an original pair, with the DT990 Premiums - and they earn a commendable four stars. They don't pack as big a punch as the B&Ws or Grados but, if you can live with big, open-back design, their balance, spaciousness and detail is more than enough to win you over.

It's four stars for Focal, too. Designed for mobility, these practically sized over-ears are sophisticated lookers - and have a mature, detailed, and clear, if not entirely energetic, sound to go with it.

Bottom of the class

Pioneer is the only real letdown of the competitors. We expected a bottom-heavy sound due to the 'Superior Club Sound' marketing, so we're not surprised by the poorly balanced sound. Audio is clear and build is rigid, but they just don't deliver the 'superior' goods to warrant their £250 price tag.

There are six headphones that you easily could invest in, though, and, for outright sound, the Grados are the pick of the bunch.

A significant improvement on their predecessor's sound, the SR325e's clarity, detail and music fidelity is peerless at this price. Give these an audition, before judging them on aesthetics alone

**AKG Q 701****£250 ★★★★★**

Type Over-ear • Design Open-back •
Weight 235g • 3.5mm connector Yes •
6.3mm connector Yes • Cable length
3m/6m • Finishes 3 •

Sound	■	■	■	■	■
Comfort	■	■	■	■	■
Build	■	■	■	■	■

**Audio Technica ATH-A900X LTD****£390 ★★★★★☆**

Type Over-ear • Design Closed-back •
Weight 340g • 3.5mm connector Yes •
6.3mm connector Yes • Cable length
3m • Finishes 1 •

Sound	■	■	■	■	■
Comfort	■	■	■	■	■
Build	■	■	■	■	■

**Beyerdynamic DT990 Premium****£290 ★★★★★☆**

Type Over-ear • Design Semi
Open-back • Weight 290g • 3.5mm
connector Yes • 6.3mm connector Yes •
Cable length 3m • Finishes 1 •

Sound	■	■	■	■	■
Comfort	■	■	■	■	■
Build	■	■	■	■	■

**Bowers & Wilkins****£330 ★★★★★**

Type On-ear • Design Closed-back •
Weight 290g • 3.5mm connector Yes •
6.3mm connector No • Cable length
1.2m • Finishes 1 •

Sound	■	■	■	■	■
Comfort	■	■	■	■	■
Build	■	■	■	■	■

**Focal Spirit Classic****£250 ★★★★★☆**

Type Over-ear • Design Closed-back •
Weight 310g • 3.5mm connector Yes •
6.3mm connector Yes • Cable
length 1.4m/4m • Finishes 1 •

Sound	■	■	■	■	■
Comfort	■	■	■	■	■
Build	■	■	■	■	■

**Grado SR325e****£300 ★★★★★**

Type Over-ear • Design Open-back •
Weight 330g • 3.5mm connector No •
6.3mm connector Yes • Cable length
1.5m • Finishes 1 •

Sound	■	■	■	■	■
Comfort	■	■	■	■	■
Build	■	■	■	■	■

**Pioneer SE-MX9-T****£250 ★★★★★☆**

Type On-ear • Design Closed-back •
Weight 305g • 3.5mm connector Yes •
6.3mm connector Yes • Cable length
2m • Finishes 3 •

Sound	■	■	■	■	■
Comfort	■	■	■	■	■
Build	■	■	■	■	■

OPEN CANS OR CLOSED PHONES: WHICH IS BEST?**Open-backed:**

Get rid of the enclosure around the headphone drive unit and you side-step all the inherent distortions associated with the structure vibrating – and the inevitable internal reflections that go with it. It gives an insightful, spacious soundstage. The downside is that they leak sound, so everyone around you will know what you're listening to.

Closed-back:

Closed-back headphones have an enclosure around the drive unit to stop external noise from interfering with your music. It also means your tunes won't disturb others. Absolute transparency tends to suffer, though.

SYSTEM BUILDER**Laptop**

Apple MacBook Pro
£1000

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Audiolab M-DAC
£600 ★★★★★

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**Streaming service**

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★★★★★

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UNDER TONES

A soundbase could be the perfect cousin to boost your TV's sound, so we've put four of these black boxes to the entertainment test for you

Imagine a simple black box, one that sits neatly under your TV and transforms that tinny sound into a powerful, lavishly detailed soundtrack full of punchy bass and exquisite highs. If that sounds like sonic heaven to you, then you're in need of a soundbase.

We've gathered four promising soundbases to upgrade your TV's sound, with prices ranging from £300 to £500 with a variety of features. It's Sony and Tannoy's first step into the soundbase market, while LG's sophomore effort brings something new. But Canton's impressive five-star performance in a test in February this year makes it the one to beat. Which wins? Keep reading.

1

CANTON DM 50
£400 p47

2

LG LAB540
£500 p47

3

SONY HT-XT1
£300 p49

4

**TANNOY
BASESTATION ONE**
£350 p49



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



1 CANTON DM 50 £400 ★★★★★

We loved the Canton DM 50 when we first reviewed it, and the months since haven't reduced our affection in the slightest. It sounds gorgeous, it looks great, and we reckon £400 is a small price to pay for the huge boost in TV sound quality it delivers.

Draws you in

The DM 50 is exactly how we want a soundbase to sound. The velvety rich detail, rumbling bass performance and clear, open highs draw you in immediately. Whether you're watching the nail-biting Wimbledon final or wearing down your Blu-ray of *The Lego Movie* (it's awesome), the Canton immerses you in the action with a superb amount of insight and punch. The presentation is full of soaring dynamics and there are layers of detail.

It's a powerful sound. The deep bass rumbles with warmth and aggression, lending satisfying weight to punches and explosions while also being agile, taut and spirited when streaming heavy blues tunes from Spotify.

Voices sound natural, with emotions and inflections easily conveyed thanks to the Canton's subtle touch and smooth integration across the frequencies. The top

end never hardens even as sound effects take on an attacking mode, and the muscular bass never gets out of shape. It's a well balanced, cohesive and exciting performance that lends itself well to music as well as movies.

You can twiddle with bass and treble levels, but we felt no need to upset the Canton's naturally well-behaved balance. The two sound modes are worth a play, though. Stereo mode keeps everything in sharp focus, with a close-knit presentation. Surround mode opens up the soundfield, but it doesn't compromise the midrange or vocal clarity too much. Try it when watching Blu-rays for a more cinematic experience.

Elegant and impeccably finished, the Canton DM 50 is a minimal yet luxuriously built box. The Sony HT-XT1 may catch the eye with its sleek glass top, but the Canton's semi-gloss finish (in black, white or silver) is classy. It's a fairly compact unit, but the DM 50 will easily bear any TV of up to 40kg.

Minimal but practical

Connectivity on the DM 50 is limited, but practical. Single optical and coaxial inputs and a pair of phono connectors are found on the back panel. Bluetooth is on board,

the aptX codec allowing higher-quality streams from your smartphone, tablet or computer. There's also a subwoofer output if you want to add extra rumble.

While the optical input serves as the main connection to the TV, we wouldn't say no to an HDMI connection or two. A 3.5mm input would also increase the Canton's versatility by bringing non-Bluetooth music players into the fold.

Next to the flimsy wafers that pass as remotes with other soundbases, Canton's handset is reassuringly solid. Buttons are big, responsive and easy to press.

It'll take one hell of a soundbase to better the Canton DM 50. The power, detail and sheer enthusiasm in its performance keeps us permanently glued to whatever we're watching, and it sets a high standard for the competition.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Gorgeous, powerful sound; rich detail and subtle dynamics; deep, agile bass; fine build

AGAINST Rivals offer a better variety of connections

VERDICT Hugely thrilling sound and a beautiful design. Still our favourite soundbase

2 LG LAB540 SOUNDPLATE £500 ★★★★★

LG may have just reinvented the home-cinema-in-a-box. The LG LAB540 SoundPlate isn't just a soundbase - it's got speakers, a Blu-ray player, smart features (including BBC iPlayer, Netflix, Now TV, Spotify etc), wi-fi connectivity, Bluetooth and 4K upscaling, all crammed inside one slim and neatly packaged frame. Add in the wireless active subwoofer and you've got yourself a comprehensive yet tidy home cinema system for £500.

Great idea this, but we'd be a lot more excited if the SoundPlate delivered a more convincing sonic performance. Good points first: the LAB540 sounds big, and there's plenty of power behind that strong, large-scale sound. It fills a room - ideal for being immersed in the latest superhero Blu-ray film - and packs a weighty punch compared with your average flatscreen telly.

Lost in the depths

Detail level is decent, although it couldn't hurt to dig even deeper to flesh out nuances in voices or to bring out the finer subtleties of *Pacific Rim*'s epic score. To help reinforce those earth-shattering sound effects when the giant monsters and giant robots clash, LG's

active subwoofer delivers lashes of deep, hefty bass. It's just a shame that it's a bit boomy, and sounds completely disconnected from the rest of the sound.

The top end has a bright edge that is at odds with the big, booming bass, and in between their struggle for dominance the midrange is ignored and left to its own devices. Actor's voices all sound the same - flat and nasal - with little emotion or inflection coming through.

Even with the subwoofer-level optimised, the impact of things hitting metal (or, indeed, metal hitting things) in *Pacific Rim* or *RoboCop* doesn't have the same wallop as it does through the Canton DM 50 or Tannoy BaseStation One. We are left wanting a more cohesive and natural sound.

On the plus side, we've got no complaints about the LG's Blu-ray picture. *RoboCop*'s futuristic cityscape looks crisply detailed, with a natural palette, smooth motion and a strong sense of contrast.

The SoundPlate's slim design will appeal to the house-proud. It's neat, the LCD display next to the disc drive makes it easy to use, and there are no trailing cables to deal with since the subwoofer

connects wirelessly. The remote, too, is well conceived - a substantial affair that's responsive and instinctive to use.

The right connections

You've got two options for connecting to your TV: HDMI or optical. There's a USB port for playing stored media from a flash drive, and an HDMI output too. You also get wired ethernet, Bluetooth and wi-fi connecting options.

The home-cinema-in-a-soundbase idea is a brilliant one, but LG needs to focus more on getting the sound quality right rather than adding all those extra features to tantalise us. While it's a neat solution and a big improvement over LG's first attempt, £500 is a steep price to pay for a soundbase whose sound isn't wholly convincing.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Big, powerful sound; Blu-ray player built in; plenty of smart features; wi-fi and DLNA

AGAINST Sound is unconvincing; needs better integration across frequency range

VERDICT Plenty of exciting features here, but the sound quality isn't up to standard



3 SONY HT-XT1 £300 ★★★★★☆

As Sony's first soundbase, the HT-XT1 certainly makes an impact. The sleek black box, the abundance of features and the crisp, attacking sound grab our attention, especially at such an attractive price. Oh, and there's a nifty remote.

Crisp, detailed, exciting

With the training scene from the new *RoboCop* Blu-ray on screen, the Sony delights us with a crisp and clear sound that's full of excitement. The zing of gunshots, the punch and thunk of every metallic impact, and the rousing dynamics all keep us at the edge of our seats as Alex Murphy takes down all the android cops. It's richly detailed. The Sony storms through the movie's sound effects with aplomb, the treble just teetering on the wrong side of hardness. We had the soundbase running in for a couple of nights to soften that hard edge, but there's still enough left to make us wince ever so slightly when there's an impact.

There's a good spread of sound from the HT-XT1, and the sense of space and movement comes across nicely. The bottom end is taut and textured, although we could've done with a bit more warmth to the rumble.

There seems to be a slight discrepancy with integration across the frequencies, though. It's not as disconnected as the LG LAB540 SoundPlate, but nor is it the smooth and seamless performance that the Canton DM 50 delivers. The bass and treble stick out just slightly, leaving the midrange feeling intimidated and lost.

Sony's ClearAudio+ technology automatically selects the best EQ setting for film, TV, games or music, and it's worth playing around with the different sound modes. We toned down the subwoofer a bit and selected Voice 2 (which pushes the midrange forward) to hear dialogue a bit better. (Portable Audio was our favourite sound mode.)

Style and innovation

It may be a black rectangular box like most other soundbases, but the HT-XT1 does look good. The build quality is excellent, and the sleek glass top adds a touch of style. The long, slim remote, too, has its own appeal, complete with sloped buttons and a slide-down bottom half that reveals hidden controls underneath.

If you want to prop a TV on top of the HT-XT1 (don't worry, that glass is scratch-proof), the soundbase has a 30kg

weight limit. Sony has designed the soundbase with its 2014 TV range in mind, and recommends 32in to 50in TVs.

Sony has been generous with its set of connections. The HT-XT1 is kitted out with three HDMI inputs, and single optical and 3.5mm inputs. There's an HDMI output, too. And for those that want to play music from phones and tablets, there's Bluetooth streaming and NFC connectivity.

Sony's hit the ground running with the HT-XT1. We really like this soundbase: the wealth of connections, features and the smart design make it an attractive buy, and the punchy, energetic sound is bound to have its fans. It's not as smooth and balanced as rivals such as the Canton DM 50, but the £300 price tag (cheaper online) makes it a decent deal among its pricier peers. It's worth an audition.

Rating ★★★★★☆

FOR Plenty of detail; punchy, attacking sound; expansive soundfield; good build and features

AGAINST Hard edge to treble; voices could be more expressive; rivals have better integration

VERDICT The Sony packs a punch and offers a lot, but it's bested by more insightful rivals

4 TANNOY BASESTATION ONE £350 ★★★★★☆

What do flatscreen TVs give us? Thin, reedy sound with little or no bass weight. What does the Tannoy BaseStation One give us? A big, chunky sound with oodles of bass and a smooth treble.

If that sounds like Tannoy has hit the jackpot with its first ever soundbase, then you're right - almost. The BaseStation One certainly has the essentials: sturdy build, easy set-up, and fine TV-sound-boosting performance. It's even got aptX Bluetooth for streaming music, too.

Heft in plenty

But let's focus on that big, hearty character first. It's rich, expansive and easily fills up a room with dynamic sound. We love how much weight there is. Play *Rush* on Blu-ray and the changing of gears has a satisfying clunk to it, while the roar of engines sounds meaty and powerful.

It's a fun and energetic sound. We just wish it were a touch clearer. While the warmth of that bass is a joy (there's lashings of it), it's a little soft-edged and that has a knock-on effect in other areas. Voices in particular sound a touch muffled, a trait that can occasionally mask the finer nuances in dialogue. Turn the bass down a little and the midrange becomes more focused.

The treble is also rolled off in favour of a smooth presentation. On the plus side, this means we're in no danger of hearing any bright or hard edges to the top end, but it also leaves us feeling there's a dab of sparkle and attack missing.

When precision really matters

The BaseStation's endearing way with movies is replicated when we stream Spotify tunes from a smartphone. The deep, dirty bassline in Sbtrkt's *Wildfire* sounds lush and inviting, even if we can't help feeling the precise rhythms should sound a little more agile.

Activating the '3D surround' mode spreads the sound around a little bit more, but it also weakens the midrange and so compromises the Tannoy's naturally solid and entertaining sound.

The BaseStation One is a solidly built block that's well finished, and is sturdy enough to hold a TV weighing up to 45kg. Tannoy recommends the TV's stand size shouldn't exceed 64 x 33cm. Of course, you can always place the soundbase on your AV rack - just make sure it's on the shelf directly under the TV so that the dialogue is closely connected to the on-screen action.

Connectivity is limited but practical, with a single digital optical input and a pair of RCA plugs for connecting analogue sources. It would be useful to have a couple of HDMI inputs, but as things stand you'll have to connect using optical. A 3.5mm input would be nice too.

We're not sure the BaseStation needs it, but Tannoy is working on a matching subwoofer (at around £200), which is why you'll find a sub output in the back panel.

We're more used to seeing Tannoy populate the loudspeaker category, but its first foray into the soundbase realm has started out on the right foot. It might not quite deliver the all-round brilliance of the Canton DM 50, but the BaseStation One's balance is an easier listen than the sharp and hard-edged Sony HT-XT1 or LG LAB540 SoundPlate. We like it.

Rating ★★★★★☆

FOR Big, loud and dynamic; easy-going and weighty sound; decent build; easy to use

AGAINST Rivals sound more subtle and more precise; could do with more bite

VERDICT It's not a class leader, but its big, hearty sound is alluring and easy to live with

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TEST VERDICT**THE WINNER****Canton DM 50****£400 ★★★★★**

Job description: to be the most affordable way of making TVs sound great. Successful applicant: the **Canton DM 50**

When we first reviewed the Canton DM 50, we said it was "a lesson in what a soundbase should sound and look like."

A few months down the line and that plaudit still holds true, even with the Canton facing brand new competition. This unit sounds just right. No other soundbase - at any price - has come close to the powerful, full-bodied and lavishly detailed sound that emanates from the Canton.

The other three soundbases in this test have their merits, but issues with integration and balance across the frequencies cost them a star or two.

Tannoy's BaseStation One makes up for a slightly muted top end by offering bucketloads of bass. It's not the most agile or taut low end, but we liked the warm, hearty performance. It's certainly easy to listen to over long sessions.

After the Canton, it's the sleek Sony HT-XT1 that digs up the most detail. Its crisp edges, punchy impact and expansive soundfield are exciting to hear, but that hard glint to the treble means we're constantly on edge. If we had to choose, we'd pick the Tannoy's relaxed rhythm and soft edges over the Sony's sometimes wince-inducing sound. Cool remote, though.

LG's home-cinema-in-a-soundbase design is one that we hope will be copied soon, and with better results. Yes, the LAB540 has a Blu-ray player, BBCiPlayer, Netflix and wi-fi built in, but it's easily the weakest of the lot in sonic terms. The frequencies are all out of sync, voices are flat and hollow, and there isn't enough detail to hold our attention. If LG needs to sacrifice a couple of features to achieve better sound quality, we won't complain.

SYSTEM BUILDER

Perfect partners for the Canton DM 50

**Television****Sony KDL-40W605B****£450 ★★★★★**

Brilliant picture quality, sleek design and a wealth of smart features packed into a 40in wonder. It's a great TV

**Blu-ray player****Panasonic DMP-BDT460****£190 ★★★★★**

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**Smartphone****Sony Xperia Z2****★★★★★**

Its dazzling screen, powerful performance and superb sound quality make this flagship Sony our favourite smartphone for playing music

Total build £1040

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

Facts & figures

Canton DM 50
£400 ★★★★★

Inputs optical, coaxial, 3.5mm, RCA • **Outputs** subwoofer • **Bluetooth** Yes • **Rated power** 200W • **Dimensions (hwd)** 7 x 55 x 30cm • **Weight** 5kg



LG LAB540 SoundPlate
£500 ★★★★★

Inputs HDMI, optical, USB • **Outputs** HDMI • **Bluetooth** Yes • **Rated power** 320W • **Dimensions (hwd)** 4 x 70 x 32cm • **Weight** 5kg



Sony HT-XT1
£300 ★★★★★

Inputs 3 x HDMI, optical, 3.5mm • **Outputs** HDMI • **Bluetooth** Yes • **Rated power** 170W • **Dimensions (hwd)** 12 x 64 x 36cm • **Weight** 8kg



Tannoy BaseStation One
£350 ★★★★★

Inputs optical, RCA • **Outputs** subwoofer • **Bluetooth** Yes • **Rated power** 80W • **Dimensions (hwd)** 7 x 61 x 36cm • **Weight** 9kg

4K, Dolby Atmos, 3D, Spotify, 7.2 surround sound, internet radio, wi-fi... **...and all for £500**

Manufacturers are packing even more features into their AV receivers at this sort of price. Competition is fierce - so which one stands out from the herd?





TESTED

Denon AVR X2100W p54
Onkyo TX-NR636 p55
Pioneer VSX-924 p56
Sony STR-DN1050 p58
Yamaha RX-V677 p59



The £500 mark has long been a sweet spot for AV receivers. Not quite entry level, not quite enthusiast, it's the price at which the majority of manufacturers will sell the most units.

Standing out in such a competitive market is never easy, though, and every year we are seeing manufacturers pushing boundaries and budgets to include as many features as possible in order to get one over their rivals. Of course, this is done in the hope of not upsetting the audio apple-cart in the process - performance is still king here and we need a receiver to shine in use, as well as on paper, to get our seal of approval.

We've pulled together five of 2014's biggest AV receivers from Denon, Onkyo, Pioneer, Sony and Yamaha - all around the £500 mark - to see how they fare against one another. Which will reign supreme and which will crack under the pressure? Read on.

( **Join us on Spotify**)
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Denon

AVR X2100W

£500 ★★★★★



The Denon AVR-X2100W is all about doing things right. Aware that this price is bound to attract its fair share of first timers as well as the more seasoned users, Denon has put a lot of thought into making sure the X2100 is not only easy to set up, but that it's thorough too. As such, set-up is an in-depth but easy-to-follow affair. The amp takes you through every step on screen, even down to speaker placement and wiring, complete with animations where necessary.

Given 'The Rocket'

Unlike Onkyo, Denon has kept Audyssey for its auto calibration, but what *is* new here is something we're lovingly dubbing 'The Rocket' – a cardboard tripod included in every box to ensure you get the most accurate readings.

Put it together, plug in the Audyssey mic and slot it into the top, and you are prompted to put the tripod in eight different places around your listening position while test tones are emitted. It takes around 15 minutes to complete, but for something you do once it's not much to ask. Most importantly, results are accurate – but do check that things like dynamic range control are turned off. Sometimes these are on as standard.

The X2100 is a 7.2 channel amp with 150W per channel (into 6ohms). It's a clean-looking unit that bears more than a



Denon's Remote App is in its third iteration for iOS, and this year Android users get their own official app too. It's largely made up of two screens: the homepage, with a list of eight customisable shortcuts to inputs and settings, and a 'player view' that changes its look and use depending on the input selection. There's also multi-zone control, but in-depth EQ tweaking is nowhere to be found – you'll have to make do with the sound modes. Easy to use, if sometimes slow.

passing resemblance to last year's model – in fact, you will find the most changes on the back panel. This year there are eight HDMI 2.0 inputs (one on the front panel), all capable of 4K upscaling and pass-through with full colour resolution (30fps and 60fps respectively), as well as two HDMI outs and two sub outs. These are all one up on last year's count, so all set-ups should be catered for here.

Precise and revealing

Two more new, and very welcome, additions are the built-in dual antenna wi-fi (for a more stable connection) and Bluetooth (AirPlay and DLNA support have both been carried over). Getting the receiver onto the network can be done via on-screen menus, but iOS users have a quicker way: using the wireless accessory configuration built in to iOS7.

The receiver appears as an accessory under the wi-fi settings page, and you simply choose it to share your network settings – we are up and running in less than a minute. We play a Blu-ray of *Total Recall* and flick to the hover-car chase between Doug and the police. It's immediately clear this is a precise and revealing amp, picking out fine detail and doing a good job of placing sounds around the room. It's well balanced too, with bass, midrange and treble all holding a consistent, refined character.

We'd stop short of calling the Denon lightweight – there's plenty of power – but it certainly doesn't have the same impact or muscle as some rivals. The detail and zing in the treble is a strong point, however – it's clear and controlled even at volume, something last year's model wasn't always able to boast.

Switch to music and the X2100 has a lovely, expressive tone, with plenty of detail. It's balanced and perfectly enjoyable, but compare it to something like the Sony STR-DN1050 and it could do with a touch more rhythmic drive. A bit more attack wouldn't go amiss either. We play the music over Bluetooth, AirPlay and via Spotify Connect, although we'd still opt for hardwiring for reliability.

The X2100W is a beautifully made amp with lots to like – a great user experience and a well-balanced, detailed character. However, its dynamic hesitance and its lack of sofa-shaking bass means it's a solid four this time out.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Solid build; well specified; detailed, precise sound; spreads sound nicely; goes loud

AGAINST Lacks excitement and a bit of bass punch; could carry more weight

VERDICT A strong contender at this price, but competition is fiercer than ever

Onkyo

TX-NR636

£500 ★★★★★



Onkyo has struggled of late to hit the sweet spot, in terms of performance, when it comes to this hugely competitive price. We're intrigued, then, when we see Onkyo going all-out on the features again. Introducing Dolby's Atmos into an AV receiver at this level is a big move, something competitors are saving for flagship models. The feature hadn't landed via a firmware update at the time of writing - we will test it when it does (in September, says Onkyo) - but it's certainly an enterprising move.

Legacy connections

The TX-NR636 is a 7.2-channel amp that supports 4K/60fps upscaling through five of its seven HDMI inputs. One of these is front-mounted and MHL-compatible, for displaying 1080p content from tablets and smartphones with up to 7.1 channels of surround sound.

It's also the only receiver confirmed to support HDCP 2.2, the latest HDMI encryption/decryption scheme projected to be used by 4K Blu-ray players (should they be forthcoming). As for legacy connections, you get three composite video inputs and one out, one optical, two coax and six analogue audio inputs, plus a phono input for a turntable.

We're disappointed that a front-mounted USB port still only supports playback from USB keys rather than an



Onkyo's remote app has been updated to include compatibility for all releases between 2010-14. It offers a clean, easy-to-navigate interface, giving you general remote control abilities - such as input selection, volume and EQ tweaking and zone playback control - plus easy streaming from online services and network-connected devices. Browse a NAS drive via the app and you will find all the tracks you have for playback, while streaming services can be accessed from here too.

iPhone or iPod. But as with last year, there is Bluetooth built-in for Spotify, Deezer, TuneIn Radio and Aupeo, plus it's DLNA-certified for streaming high-res audio (including 5.6MHz DSD files) from connected network devices too.

In another room

For set-ups with a second zone, the TX-NR636 is able to output the same sound from the receiver to a second pair of speakers in another room, or alternatively control independent analogue-only audio instead. If you're looking to output a digital signal you'll have to look elsewhere, perhaps in the direction of the Sony STR-DN1050.

We're disappointed when it comes to set-up - Onkyo has dropped the Audyssey calibration in favour of its proprietary AccuEQ instead, and we're not convinced it's a good move. The system is easy to use, but we have issues with it not detecting our sub where all other systems did. It also registers our large speakers as small. We'd recommend double-checking your results to be sure they are accurate.

We play *Fast & Furious 6* (the fight on a plane scene) to see how the Onkyo handles an action sequence. We find a confident, detailed sound spreading seamlessly around the room with agility. There's weight here too, thought not as

much as with the Yamaha or Sony. The Onkyo lacks the solidity its competitors offer too - it's capable of going loud and sounding impressive, but with some fragility. We often get the hard edges of the notes, but without enough substance to compensate. We're left wanting dynamically, too. You will need to be careful with partnering kit.

Musical performance proves a similar experience, and struggles to hold our interest. There are few grumbles when it comes to balance or timing, but it's just not an engaging experience due to a shortfall of dynamic expression and insight. We've seen quite an improvement in the stereo performance of AV receivers this year, but this Onkyo can't quite compete.

There's no denying the TX-NR636's spec list is superb, but when there's a price to be paid in performance then the balance is wrong. We expected more from the TX-NR636, but it just doesn't deliver.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Large-scale sound; will go loud; precise with sound placement; well specified

AGAINST Bass could be punchier and tighter; lacks solidity; dynamically soft

VERDICT An impressively specified receiver, but its sound performance leaves us wanting

Pioneer

VSX-924

£500 ★★★★★☆



If we placed Pioneer's recent receivers at this price on a scale, they'd come out around fair-to-middling. Good rather than great, they've just not been able to make that jump to the next level of the likes of Sony and Yamaha. The VSX-924 is trying to change that. From the moment you first hear it, it puts precision and clarity at the top of the list.

Set-up is a cinch. The once lengthy Pioneer Advanced MCACC room calibration seems shorter – although it's still a harsh few minutes on the ears.

Remote redesign

Pioneer has an excellent app function (see panel, right): all the step-by-step instructions on wiring and calibration you will need are here, plus an interactive guide on what each of the remote buttons do. There is an iPad app, should you prefer, for more in-depth and interactive information on the MCACC measurement data. Talking of the remote, it's still a rather button-heavy affair, but a redesign has improved its usability. This was one of our niggles last year, and we're happy to see the reduction in the double-function keys, which caused confusion in the past.

There's plenty of 'new' packed into this receiver: 4K upscaling at 60Hz and full-colour resolution across all seven of the 924's HDMI ins, a new DAC (also



Set-up is easy using Pioneer's newbie-friendly AVNavigator built in to the receiver. Meanwhile, the iControl AV5 control app has features such as a searchable music list and is backwards compatible to amps dating from 2012.

seen in the £1500 Yamaha RX-A2030), DSD file playback over your home network, and built-in Bluetooth with aptX support. Unfortunately, wireless connectivity remains an external add-on via an adapter, but it is at least included in the box now.

We start with a high-speed car chase from *Fast & Furious 6*. As Dom and Brian race through the winding roads of the opening scene, it's clear Pioneer is keen to add 'big and dynamic' to its attributes.

It sounds richer and weightier than last year's model, with a larger soundfield, but it still can't challenge the Sony STR-DN1050 or Yamaha RX-V677 for real authority. Precision and detail are still this amp's strong points, and sound effects are placed superbly around the room.

Punchy bass and zingy treble

The roaring engines of the racers are delivered with aggression, and you can hear and feel every change of pace thanks to a good handling of dynamics. Speed is highlighted by a solid punch from the bass, with zing in the treble giving a wonderfully layered sound.

For all that is good here though, there are competitors that can do all this, and better. The Yamaha RX-V677 offers more scale and grunt, while the Sony STR-DN1050 is capable of a superior

level of subtlety and better dynamics. We find this character in musical playback too, which times well but sounds much smaller and less engaging than via the Sony. CD playback or high-res networked tracks offer the most musical results, with less of the hardness that appears in AirPlay or Bluetooth tracks.

Spotify Connect is on board, so you'll be able to access and stream your playlists which, once connected, can be controlled via the receiver remote independently of your phone or tablet. As user-friendly as ever, it's stacked with stylised settings to tweak and a visual list of inputs and sources.

The Pioneer is a conundrum. Listening to it in isolation it's a tempting proposition, but when considered within this competitive market, it's overshadowed by others.

The VSX-924 is another good effort from the Pioneer stable, but falls just short of greatness.

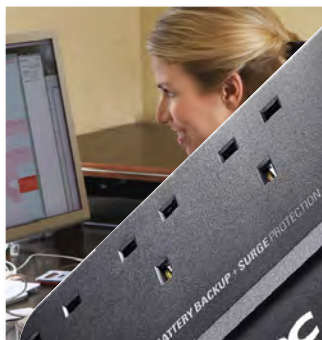
Rating ★★★★★☆

FOR Big, detailed sound; dynamically adept; well-placed surround effects; great control app

AGAINST Wi-fi still requires dongle; competitors offer more excitement

VERDICT A solid effort from Pioneer, but the excellent competition rob it of a fifth star

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Sony

STR-DN1050

£500 ★★★★★



We can't say we didn't have high expectations of the STR-DN1050. As the successor to the Award-winning STR-DN1040 and the big brother to the five-star STR-DN850, all eyes are on it to impress. No pressure, then.

Fortunately, Sony knows a thing or two about what makes a great amp at this price, and this 7.2ch amp with 165W per channel is quite the audience-pleaser.

Quick and accurate

The auto-calibration set-up experience is a swift and pleasant one, and surprises us with its accuracy – we tweak a few results but largely they tally with those from lengthier, more in-depth set-ups.

The menu system on the amp is equally enjoyable, offering bold, easy-to-navigate menus, and it's refreshing to see an amp remote that doesn't require its own manual to explain its functions.

When it comes to performance, Sony has certainly not rested on its laurels either. There's been a lot of internal tweaking since the 1040, including an improved power-amp circuit and jitter-reducing tech borrowed from the company's pricier ES range.

We put all this to test with *Fast and Furious 6*, and discover a big-sounding, muscular amp that immediately makes you sit up and pay attention. Its low-end is neighbour-botheringly weighty, giving



The Songpal app is new this year. Connect via wi-fi and you can change sources and tweak EQ settings. It's not as in-depth as some control apps (see Yamaha or Pioneer), but it is easy to use and delivers ample functionality.

real grunt to revving car engines while remaining full of detail and agility.

This is nicely balanced out by an articulate, spacious midrange and clear treble that all come together to produce a truly cohesive sound in a wide soundfield. Add in an expert handling on dynamics and pin-sharp precision, and the result is a thoroughly engaging and exciting listen even at lower volumes. The more you nudge the volume up the better it gets, although the top end does eventually become a touch bright.

Just as it performs with the blockbuster content, so it does with dialogue and more subtle sound effects, proving itself to be one of the most detailed amps we've tested at this price. Voices are crisp and textured, clarity is second to none and sound placement is spot on. It's a lot of what we loved in the 1040, but bigger and more refined.

Expanding list of features

Feature additions are more obvious, and you can now count on aptX Bluetooth, DSD playback via wi-fi and USB, and NFC for one-touch pairing with other devices.

Inputs are largely the same as last year, with six HDMI ins with 4K upscaling and 3D/4K passthrough, and three out. There are also four sets of inputs for analogue audio, three for composite, one coaxial and two optical.

Alongside Bluetooth, DLNA and AirPlay capabilities, you'll find Spotify Connect functionality (which is new this year), as well as a number of music services, including TuneIn Radio, Deezer and Sony's Music Unlimited.

No matter which way you choose to listen to music, we found all methods to be quick to connect and easy to use. Like the 850, the 1050 has real charm with music, holding together well in stereo for a rhythmic, musical performance.

Switch up to a CD and it's a fuller and richer sound, with improved precision and dynamics over streamed content.

Following the success of the STR-DN1040 was never going to be an easy task, but Sony has managed it, packing the 1050 with features we missed last year and refining an excellent performance to make it even better. Sony has raised the bar once again in the competitive £500 AV receiver market – how high can the competition jump?

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Big sound; wide soundfield; exciting and dynamic; lots of subtle detail; well-specified

AGAINST A touch of brightness at high volume

VERDICT A seriously good amp that balances muscle and subtlety with stacks of features at a great price

Yamaha

RX-V677

£560 ★★★★★



If **weight, scale** and pure blockbuster excitement are high on your list of receiver must-haves, the Yamaha RX-V677 is one to put on your shortlist.

But this 7.2ch V677 is far from a one-trick pony. Sure, you'll get an impressive bass performance that'll make action movies shine, but you'll also get an expressive receiver that will make the most of any content you throw at it.

Set-up on the Yamaha is quick and reasonably accurate. Ours needed some minor distance adjustments once the auto-calibration had done its thing, but nothing drastic. It's up there with the Sony STR-DN1050 (left) when it comes to speed and simplicity, and online menus are clear and easily navigated too.

What's not so simple is Yamaha's now-infamous remote - it really is still far too complicated for its own good. We reckon the company should take a leaf out of Sony and Pioneer's books, who have recently simplified theirs.

Wi-fi but no Bluetooth

Wi-fi is an integrated feature in the V677 this year, though there's still no Bluetooth (which you'll find in most of Yamaha's competitors). If you decide this is the amp for you, you'll have to make do with AirPlay, DLNA and Wireless Direct.

Spotify Connect is on board here too, and works well, alongside HTC Connect



Yamaha's AV Controller app provides clear and concise options for tweaking levels, selecting sound modes and changing inputs. It's not as visually appealing as Pioneer's effort, but saves you using the complicated remote.

for streaming from HTC smartphones. The Sony offers more extensive options, but this should cover most bases.

Getting the lowdown

We choose *Fast & Furious 6* to put the Yamaha through its paces, and we certainly aren't short of scenes to give that powerful bass centre stage. It's not overbearing, but that low end is a large part of the Yamaha's character and appeal. It's a big, powerful and immediately exciting listen that packs gunshots with impact and solidity, and car engines with grit and impatience.

Sound effects are passed from speaker to speaker effortlessly, and the level of detail on show is superb.

The midrange is expressive and spacious, giving great texture and direction to dialogue, while the slightly forward treble that packs real zing into every crash of metal only helps to push excitement levels up another notch.

Unlike the agile Sony, however, the V677's bass can be a little reluctant to keep up with the rest of the mix, and sounds a little lazy in comparison. There's never a drop in enthusiasm or excitement though - the Yamaha is always keen to please and always engaging. We can't say that its treble, midrange and bass are the most balanced when it comes to character, but

throw them all together and the results work - it's the eagerness to entertain that is endlessly enjoyable.

This character passes through to its stereo performance, which stands up as a decent option for those who aren't able or willing to buy a separate stereo amp. Play The Verve's *Bittersweet Symphony* and the unmistakable violin melody powers along with enjoyable drive.

We'd suggest steering clear of the Bass Enhancer setting, particularly when playing music. It pushes the already-weighty bass into being overpowering and heavy-handed. It'll add some extra rumble to explosions, but for the most balanced performance we'd keep it off.

The Yamaha RX-V677 is a fun receiver with a keenness to please that's endearing. Its bold character isn't always the most subtle, but its detail retrieval is top notch. At £560 it has slightly more refined receivers nipping at its heels, but if it's a showstopper you're after, stop here.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Weighty sound; great detail retrieval; solid low-end; sound placement; strong with music

AGAINST Not the most balanced; no Bluetooth; complicated remote

VERDICT An endlessly entertaining receiver that's full of character



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THE WINNER

Sony STR-DN1050 £500 ★★★★★



Sony has raised the AV receiver bar once again with the **STR-DN1050**, serving up improved sound and features

After a superb time in this market last year, Sony has done it again, producing a £500 AV receiver that we can't quite believe is for sale at £500.

The Award-winning STR-DN1040 was always going to be a hard act to follow, but Sony has nailed it with the DN1050, adding all the features we missed last time while improving sound quality.

Elsewhere, Yamaha's RX-V677 also scores the full five stars, winning us over with an endlessly entertaining character that's eager to please. It doesn't have the same level of agility and tonal refinement as the Sony, but its big, show-stopping performance is one that keeps us glued to our seats.

We have two four star amps here. The Pioneer VSX-924 loses out purely because of

the quality of its competition: we found it detailed, precise and dynamic, but the Sony is capable of better. And, while the Pioneer sounds bigger and weightier than its predecessor, the Yamaha still offers more in terms of sheer scale.

Our second four-star rating went to the likeable Denon AVR-X2100W, which scored well for its usability and balance but dropped points for its smaller soundfield, occasional dynamic hesitance and a slight lack of excitement. Finally, Onkyo finished with three stars. While it should be applauded for the features it is packing into receivers at this price, we would rather see it invest more time in working on making the sound quality as competitive as it once was. Until then, Sony reigns supreme.

SYSTEM BUILDER

Three partners that will help make sure you hear the Sony STR-DN1050 at its best



Speakers

QAcoustics Q200i £650 ★★★★★

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



Blu-ray player

Sony BDP-S7200 £220 ★★★★★

Offering a brilliant picture quality combined with even better sound, this is our favourite Blu-ray player at this price.



Television

Samsung UE48H6400 £700 ★★★★★

Punchy, subtle and exciting, this Samsung TV is fantastic for the price, and sets the benchmark for great value Full HD TVs.

Total build from £2070



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

Facts & figures



Denon AVR X2100W
£500 ★★★★★

Power 150W •
HDMI in/out 8/2 • 4K
upscaling Yes • Wi-fi Yes •
Bluetooth Yes • Dimensions
(hwd) 167 x 434 x 339mm •
Weight 9.7kg



Onkyo TX-NR636
£500 ★★★★★

Power 160W •
HDMI in/out 7/2 • 4K
upscaling Yes • Wi-fi Yes •
Bluetooth Yes • Dimensions
(hwd) 297 x 570 x 423mm •
Weight 13kg



Pioneer VSX-924
£500 ★★★★★

Power 150W •
HDMI in/out 7/2 • 4K
upscaling Yes • Wi-fi Yes (via
adapter) • Bluetooth Yes •
Dimensions (hwd) 168 x 435 x
362.5mm • Weight 9.8kg



Sony STR-DN1050
£500 ★★★★★

Power 165W •
HDMI in/out 6/3 • 4K
upscaling Yes • Wi-fi Yes •
Bluetooth Yes • Dimensions
(hwd) 172 x 430 x 329mm •
Weight 10kg



Yamaha RX-V677
£500 ★★★★★

Power 150W •
HDMI in/out 6/1 • 4K
upscaling Yes • Wi-fi Yes •
Bluetooth No • Dimensions
(hwd) 171 x 435 x 364mm •
Weight 10kg

4K: reality TV?





As prices for Ultra High Definition TVs start to tumble, the idea of actually owning one is no longer a fantasy. We cast a (pin) sharp eye over five screens

It wasn't long ago that exorbitant prices were the norm for 4K TVs. But sense has prevailed in the past six months, and now you can get a good one for as little as £2100. You'll get eight million pixels no matter what, but some sets offer more. From super-slick system interfaces to internet-based streaming, the battle for Ultra High Definition supremacy is just beginning. Step this way for a front-row seat...

WHAT'S ON TEST

LG 55UB950V
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Samsung UE55HU7500
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Sony KD-55X8505B
£2100 page 68

Toshiba 58L9363DB
£2300 page 71



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NAD D 7050 Direct Digital Network Amplifier

The D 7050 Direct Digital Network Amplifier now features Spotify Connect, so you can stream millions of songs wirelessly using any smart device or computer, with NAD's legendary true hi-fi sound. The D 7050 is a completely modern twist on the amplifier of yore. It offers NAD's most advanced power-packing Direct Digital™ amplifier technology, along with Apple AirPlay, WiFi, and aptX Bluetooth for the ultimate in high fidelity streaming and convenience. A 24-bit/96kHz asynchronous USB input connects your computer for incredibly accurate high res audio playback, and we added a premium headphone amplifier output in case you don't want to disturb your neighbours with the D 7050's powerful digital sound.

Designed for the digital audiophile, the D 7050 with Spotify Connect's effortless control of music, is a compact solution with endless options.



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The picture is good, but it's the superb LG WebOS that is the real star of the show here. It's a real joy to use



LG 55UB950V £2300

★★★★☆



Use Magic or a wand?

LG's Magic Remote

has gyroscopic sensors, which control an on-screen pointer in the same way you use a mouse. If that's not for you, though, there's the option of a traditional black wand.

The LG 55UB950V is our first 4K TV from the company this year and it's armed with a fancy, smart new interface as well as all the specification to handle 4K. Is it too good to be true?

We'll start with the most remarkable thing about this LG: WebOS, which made its debut in 2009 on the short-lived Palm. WebOS's big appeal is the ability to multi-task, and its use here is a revelation. No longer do you need to load up the 'home' or smart 'hub' to do anything. Instead, you get the Launcher. It shows everything (apps, inputs, live TV) as tiny cards, and appears as an overlay like the pop-up on Blu-ray discs.

Want to pause BBC iPlayer and check something on live TV? Go for it, and the next time you click on iPlayer you will be exactly where you left off, without needing to reload. Switching from Blu-ray to live TV to catch-up apps feels just like changing channels here.

It's an intuitive system: everything is laid out chronologically, from left-to-right. In the centre is a large image (current choice); to the left, a list of your recently used sources, easily called back; to the right, is whatever you might use in the future. The brightly coloured tiles are easily identifiable and not as overwhelming as the 'hub' offerings of Panasonic and Samsung. All TVs should work like this. So the LG is great to play

with, but how does it look? We switch to the Netflix app for a bit of *House of Cards* and the picture is exceedingly sharp. The LG makes a strong case for 4K, with its 8-million pixels doing a great job with details and textures.

Particularly subtle set

It's not a particularly subtle set, however. Colours are bold and punchy, but rivals such as the Panasonic TX-58AX802 and Samsung UE55HU7500 offer more nuances in the gradation and shading of contours - which helps with the illusion of depth. The difference is more noticeable when we load some colourful stock footage, some of which has (it seems) been tuned for retinal damage.

Then there are black levels, which are rarely deep and dark. The panel struggles with contrast, and images can appear washed out. It's not serious with lighter images, but in a dark scene (there are quite a few in our 4K clip of *Elysium*), the shortcoming is apparent.

Activating local dimming helps. We turned the backlight level to just over halfway, and put local dimming on low - this made the black levels more palatable, and improved contrast.

Full HD pictures make good use of the LG's superb clarity and sharpness. Our Blu-rays are upscaled with little picture noise, and lines are clean. 3D is of the

passive variety, and comes with comfy, metal-framed glasses. The LG's punchy colours really help here: it's a bright, vibrant image. Standard def is much like the other resolutions, though, with typically more noise and less clarity.

LG bucks the trend of poor-sounding flatscreens here. Voices are clear without being harsh. There's detail, and weight too. What you get is a full-bodied sound, direct and cohesive.

There's a thin bezel around the screen, and the simple metallic stand is attractive. Close up, the set doesn't feel as premium as the Samsung UE55HU7500 but you can't tell from the sofa. Around the back are four HDMI 2.0 inputs, three USBs and LAN.

The LG 55UB950V isn't without its flaws, but we like it. The picture isn't class-leading, but its WebOS interface is. And if you're after a bold, attractive picture and a great user experience, this is well worth checking out.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Sharp, clean picture; punchy colours; WebOS is a work of genius

AGAINST Issues with contrast; could do with more subtlety

VERDICT A talented TV that's good to look at and great to use

It looks great, but this Panasonic's inability to stream 4K from Netflix puts it at a serious disadvantage



Panasonic TX-58AX802B £2800

★★★★☆



Remote yet beguiling

The main handset's lovely metal finish and clear layout instantly make it one of our favourites, but a simplified smart remote is unintuitive. Sadly, both seem to suffer from a degree of lag with menus.

We're sad and excited. Sad because we're still not quite over the demise of Panasonic's plasma TVs, but excited to see what's next. What's next? The Panasonic TX-58AX802B, that's what.

The bulk of it

The stand is roughly the size of the Oxford English Dictionary and the screen itself is unusually heavy. It's well equipped though, complete with a pop-up camera and a generous set of connections including four HDMI 2.0, three USBs (one rated 3.0), an SD card slot and Freeview HD and Freesat. Wi-fi is built in, although you get an ethernet socket too. It's worth noting that of the four HDMI slots, only one can handle 4K.

The bigger worry here is that the AX802 cannot handle Netflix 4K streams. Rivals from Sony, Samsung and LG have no such problem. Netflix is one of the only readily available sources of proper 4K content, so this is a glaring omission.

This is a shame, because in many areas the AX802 is rather good. We've long been fans of Panasonic's smart TV interface, but this year it's even better. The 'My Home Screen' system makes a return, letting you choose from pre-set screens or build your own, and the Freetime TV guide lets you scroll back on primary channels to watch shows broadcast up to seven days ago.

The flashiest element here is the Info Bar. The TV goes from standby to a semi-conscious state, showing a band of data at the bottom of the screen - it's activated by a proximity sensor and is a neat idea, although the sensor can be triggered by bright lights or wandering pets. We managed to activate it just by drinking a cup of tea. Thankfully you can turn it off, although it's tempting to keep it on and see how the cat reacts.

Slightly more useful is TV Anywhere, which lets you stream live or USB-based content to your smartphone or tablet.

Old qualities reborn

Start watching it and this screen feels much like a Panasonic plasma of old, right down to the warm colour reproduction and ink-deep blacks.

Flicking through our server of 4K stock video and film clips, it's hard not to be amazed by the colour reproduction. While the richness of the palette may not be entirely lifelike, the wide range of hues breathes real life into the picture.

When it gets dark it is properly dark, although the normally sky-high levels of detail are occasionally compromised in the darker areas. Contrast is excellent throughout. In terms of outright sharpness the LG 55UB950V has the edge, but the Panasonic's more subdued approach feels a little more natural.

Blu-rays and Freeview HD are upscaled with skill, although you won't get the crispness of the Samsung UE55HU7500 (see right).

As for 3D, you get two pairs of active-shutter glasses. There's an inevitable degree of image instability in action scenes, but we like the sense of depth.

It's not perfect, however. Viewing angles aren't particularly wide, and you don't need to go far off axis before the contrast and colours start to wash out.

We have mixed feelings about the TX-58AX802B. We admire its features, and we're very impressed by its picture. But we can't ignore its inability to stream Netflix in 4K, especially at this price. As things stand, not doing Netflix 4K essentially means not doing 4K at all. There may come a time when 4K content is readily available, and antennas and HDMI inputs will suffice. If that happens, we would be happy to reconsider our verdict.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Deep blacks; rich, warm colours; plenty of subtlety

AGAINST Expensive; no Netflix 4K; narrow viewing angle

VERDICT Panasonic's gorgeous picture is undermined by technical limitations

As if a quality picture across all formats weren't enough, this Samsung also offers an improved smart interface



Samsung UE55HU7500 £2300



The point of it all

The smart remote acts as a pointer, corresponding to a dot on the screen. It's very responsive but there's also a traditional handset, plus the Samsung Smart View 2 app, so you can watch TV on your tablet or phone.

Recently we gave our first ever five-star 4K TV verdict to the Samsung UE65HU7500. That's the big brother to the one you see before you today. It wouldn't be much of an exaggeration to say we're expecting great things.

What we're really after is great picture performance across 4K, Full HD and standard definition. Is that too much to ask? Not according to this Samsung, which proves to be a rounded, versatile individual - and not just in its restrained, elegant, near-rimless appearance.

We'll start with 4K. This Samsung is fully equipped with HDMI 2.0 ports and the HEVC decoder needed to stream Netflix in 4K. We waste no time in queuing up a few episodes of *House of Cards*, and it looks lovely.

The main draw of 4K - the ultra-high resolution - is present and accounted for. Everything is afforded texture aplenty. Edges are sharp and well defined. The picture is wonderfully crisp and very clear, even during slow panning shots.

Vibrant yet subtle

Colour reproduction is excellent - in the past we've bashed Samsung for its overblown approach to colours, but here the hues are beautifully judged. It's still a vibrant picture, but the approach is subtle and altogether more mature. We put it next to the Panasonic TX-58AX802

(left): the Panasonic has a warmer, richer palette, but the Samsung's subdued approach means it's more realistic.

Black levels are good, and contrast is strong. The Panasonic offers deeper blacks, but the Samsung counters with more visible dark detail. There's plenty of texture in shadows.

Upscaling is top-ranking

Time for a spot of Full HD, and we're pleased to see the Samsung is just as capable here. The upscaled picture looks as good as it does on some of the best Full HD TVs. The picture is crisp and detailed, with barely a hint of picture noise (unless we lean forward and squint). Brighter shades are punchy while maintaining that subtlety, while skin tones are convincing. The LG 55UB950V offers a sharper image, but it looks more artificial than the Samsung's.

For 3D, you get two pairs of active-shutter glasses. The picture has plenty of detail and a real sense of depth. There's a touch of instability to more chaotic scenes (like the flying fish segment in *Life of Pi*), but that's not unusual.

We move down to standard definition and, although there's no avoiding the jump in noise and blurriness, the Samsung still does an excellent job.

The sound is the weak point here, but only in the usual flatscreen-TV way: it

could do with more weight and greater dynamics, despite a decent sense of scale and good tonal balance.

We were fans of last year's smart interface, and Samsung has given it a facelift this year. You get five pages of content: games, apps, live TV, on-demand content and 'multimedia', which is where you go after you plug in a USB stick. The most welcome development is the implementation of the 'Smart Hub' button, which opens the hub without booting you out of whatever you were doing before.

Connections are generous: three USBs, four HDMI and one each of component, composite and SCART. There's also a satellite tuner to go with the standard Freeview HD option.

We're very impressed by the Samsung UE55HU7500. Its picture looks great across all resolutions and it has plenty of good features. If you're looking to get a 4K TV right now, look no further.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Detailed, sharp picture across 4K, HD and SD; faithful colour reproduction; good smart interface; elegant design

AGAINST Nothing at the price

VERDICT Top marks for another outstanding all-rounder from Samsung

With this 'entry-level' screen Sony proves that you can supply gorgeous 4K images without charging a fortune



Sony KD-55X8505B £2100

★★★★☆



Stick with convention
Sony follows the recent trend by offering two remote controls – a standard stick, which is nicely laid out and easy to use, and a minimal One-Flick remote with a touch pad, although the latter is not very intuitive.

The Sony X85 series is the company's entry-level 4K TV range. It sits below the higher-end X9 and flagship X95 series, and comes in 65, 55 and 49 inches. This KD-55X8505B is one of the more affordable 4K TVs around. Better still, it's rather good, even if it doesn't look as flashy as its big brothers.

Move your feet

The stand takes the form of two small feet instead of the traditional pedestal. Why? So you can move them, to suit your rack. You can have them in the middle (as shown), or at each end of the screen. They're sturdier than they look.

Go round the back and you'll find a generous set of connections: four HDMI 2.0 inputs and three USBs. Legacy inputs include component and SCART.

There are both Freeview HD and satellite tuner options. Internet comes in wired and wi-fi flavours. You also get a small camera for Skype calls.

We're big fans of Sony's new smart TV portal. It's a mature, neatly laid out interface. The main categories of TV, Movie, Music and Apps are divided into panels, and navigation is intuitive.

Sony's app offering is fairly strong: there's still no sign of ITV Player or 4oD, but you get BBC iPlayer, YouTube, Amazon Instant and Netflix – and while on the subject of Netflix, we're pleased

to see this TV offers HEVC decoding. That means you can stream Netflix in 4K, if your connection is up to it – 15-20mbps is recommended.

With 4K the Sony looks lovely. The picture is superbly detailed and very sharp – edges are nicely defined without being overly etched. We hook up an ethernet cable and stream a few episodes of *Breaking Bad*: the desert looks suitably grainy, while Walter White's beard is finely drawn.

Colours are rich, but skin tones remain convincing. We won't go as far as to call the palette natural, however. It's a bit too punchy for that, but it never feels unrealistic.

Paint it blacker

The depth of the black levels is the weak point here. It's far from disastrous but it never gets properly dark, and very dim scenes suffer. We'd recommend turning on the Black Corrector setting, which helps a bit.

Time for a bit of Full HD with a Blu-ray of *Skyfall*. The picture is nicely upscaled and the colours are just as nicely handled, even if the Samsung UE55HU7500 has the edge on detail and subtlety.

Motion is fine for the most part, with only a hint of judder during panning shots. We tend to turn off as much additional processing as we can, but

we'd recommend putting Motionflow on low. This keeps the picture smooth but with enough subtlety that James Bond doesn't look unnaturally etched. 3D pictures are good: bright enough, with minimal crosstalk issues.

The passive 3D glasses are comfortable, but the sense of depth isn't as convincing as from the active-shutter offerings of the KD-65X9005B.

Stepping down to standard definition, the performance is similar. There's an inevitable bump in grain and fall in sharpness, but it's a perfectly serviceable picture as we watch Andy Murray crash out of Wimbledon on BBC One.

The audio performance is average for a flatscreen TV. The sound is spacious enough, but without the large speakers of the X9 range it sounds a little thin.

We really like the Sony KD-55X8505B. It's an attractive TV with a good set of features and an enjoyable performance. The competition, though, is very strong.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Sharp picture across the board; lovely colours; plenty of subtlety

AGAINST Blacks could be better; smart interface is not as comprehensive as rivals

VERDICT Sony shows that you don't need to pay a fortune to get a good 4K TV

Aria 900

Innovation Extraordinaire.

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Flax Technology

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



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



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ARCAM

www.arcam.co.uk

Nicely designed, yes, but viewed alongside the latest competition this Toshiba is left chasing the pack



Toshiba 58L9363DB £2300

★★★★☆



Delayed reaction

Unlike all the other screens in this test, the 58L9363DB has just the one remote. Its controls are neat enough, but the TV is slow to respond to its commands, leaving you unsure whether the signal got through at all.

Timing can make all the difference. In the case of the Toshiba 58L9363, this test couldn't have come at a worse time. This is technically the company's flagship range from 2013 - its 2014 TVs have yet to arrive. It goes up against the latest from rival companies, and comes away rather bruised.

Stand that delivers

We'll start with the design, which is neat. We're quite keen on the minimalist, skeletal stand, which swivels (although our review unit was a little wobbly). The connections are fairly generous: four HDMI ports, two USBs, as well as legacy inputs via adaptor (component, composite, SCART).

Sadly the HDMI inputs aren't built to the 2.0 standard, which means the set can't accept 4K frame rates higher than 30Hz. It also doesn't have the HEVC decoder found on newer sets, so Netflix 4K streaming is out.

There's a single, rather large, remote control, which goes up against the two-remote policy adopted by recent TVs. That's fine by us - some smart remotes are a little gimmicky anyway - but this one isn't amazing. Its layout is clear enough, but it doesn't feel that ergonomic, and it's not very responsive.

Part of that is down to the TV itself, which feels sluggish in operation. It

doesn't bode well for the more complex tasks that the circuitry has to face, such as faffing about on smart interfaces.

That leads us to Toshiba's Cloud TV platform. It's a fairly recent redesign, but it already feels a little dated. There are a few big apps - Netflix, BBC iPlayer, Deezer - but the offering is limited. You'll find a lot more on Samsung's UE55HU7500, while LG's 55UB950V is much more user-friendly thanks to WebOS.

What about picture quality? Here, as in other areas, the Toshiba is outdone by rivals. We start with a server full of 4K stock footage and film clips, and the TV does a reasonable job in isolation. There's a decent amount of detail and colours are rich. Punchy, even. It handles contrast quite well too.

But then we put it next to the Sony KD-55X8505B, and the Toshiba begins to struggle. It isn't as sharp or as subtle as the Sony, and the colours seem overblown in comparison.

Vibrant but unconvincing

How about upscaling? We switch to a Blu-ray of *Skyfall* and the Toshiba's weaknesses are more apparent. This screen's performance is punchy and vibrant, but Ralph Fiennes' blue shirt looks less than natural, while his thinning hair isn't as finely drawn as on the Samsung UE55HU7500.

The Toshiba's 3D performance is more encouraging. You get two pairs of active-shutter glasses, and the performance is surprisingly good. The picture is detailed, contrast is strong and there's a sense of depth. There's minimal judder, although a certain amount of image instability is often present.

Going soft

We move down to standard definition and find the Toshiba really quite out of its depth. The 2014 batch of 4K TVs have really upped their game in terms of upscaling, with the Samsung UE55HU7500 putting out one of the best upscaled SD pictures we've seen. In comparison, the Toshiba's output is softer, noisier and a lot less subtle.

This test has been a rough ride for the 58L9363. It might have been fine in last year's company, but now it is outgunned in nearly every department. You can buy better for the same money or less.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Contrast is decent; convincing 3D performance; the stand looks nice

AGAINST Outdated and outgunned by rivals in nearly every way

VERDICT The ultra-high-def market is moving fast and this 4K TV is ready to be retired

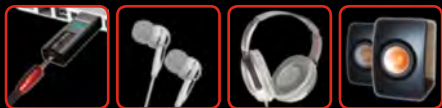


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Round One: No Competition
Round Two: The "DragonFly Killers"
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v1.2 Only £129

"The new version of the DragonFly costs a third less than the original model, yet it sounds even better. It seems, for now, that there's no competing with that combination."

– WHAT HI-FI? Sound and Vision, Test Verdict, April 2014

"Where the original DragonFly excelled in clarity and detail, v1.2 added a richer, more colorful midrange, improved spatial abilities, and a greater sense of ease. The new DragonFly added the color, texture, body, and soul that the older model missed."

– Stereophile, Stephen Mejias, Mar. 2014

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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.

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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"

TEST VERDICT**THE WINNER****Samsung UE55HU7500** £2300 ★★★★★

4K is no longer an expensive fantasy for most people and the **Samsung UE55HU7500** has turned our dream TV into a reality with its top picture, usability and nice price

This time last year, 4K TVs were a pricey pipe-dream for many people. Now, you can get 8-million pixels for a realistic amount of money. But not all 4K TVs are created equal, and we've done the sorting of the best for you here.

In first place is the Samsung UE55HU7500. It's a great example of everything we expect from a 4K TV: excellent picture performance across all resolutions, and a satisfying and smart user interface - all for a decent price. It's a no-nonsense approach from Samsung and we're very impressed.

Next up we have the LG 55UB950V and Sony KD-55X8505B, each with a rather different approach. The LG is bold, and its WebOS interface is a revelation. Its clean look and smooth multitasking is what smart TVs have been crying out for, and outshines a good (but somewhat unsubtle) picture.

The Sony offers fewer bells and whistles than the LG, but its picture is nuanced, subtle and we're pleased with the colour balance. Blacks could be better, but it can be amended to a degree in the settings - and that low price helps a lot.

These three TVs are fully equipped for 4K, and you can't go wrong with any of them... which brings us to the Panasonic TX-58AX802B, which we wish we could love. Its picture is beautiful and proves that the company's strength doesn't lie only in plasma. But, as impressed as we are, we cannot ignore its inability to handle one of the only existing sources of 4K content, and for that we had to mark it down.

In last place, is the Toshiba 58L9363DB: a relic of 4K's first phase, outgunned by its rivals, and a casualty of the changing ultra high-definition landscape.

SYSTEM BUILDER

Three sonic partners that will help make sure you hear the Samsung UE55HU7500 at its best

**Streaming service****Netflix** £6.99/per month ★★★★★

Even with the £1 increase, this is the best TV and film-streaming service

**Soundbar****Philips HTL9100** £580 ★★★★★

You will want a better sound and this Philips soundbar is a great choice

**Blu-ray player****Sony BDP-S7200** £250 ★★★★★

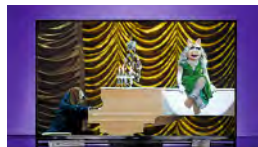
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Facts & figures**LG 55UB950V**
£2300 ★★★★★

Screen size 55in •
Resolution/ppi 3840 x 2160 •
Dimensions (hwd) 78 x 123 x 24cm • Weight 24.2kg •
Remotes 2 • 3D Passive •
HDMI 2.0 Yes • Netflix 4K Yes

**Panasonic TX-58AX802B**
£2800 ★★★★★

Screen size 58in •
Resolution/ppi 3840 x 2160 •
Dimensions (hwd) 80 x 130 x 29cm • Weight 48kg •
Remotes 2 • 3D Active • HDMI 2.0 Yes • Netflix 4K Yes

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
TEST WINNER**Samsung UE55HU7500**
£2300 ★★★★★

Screen size 55in •
Resolution/ppi 3840 x 2160 •
Dimensions (hwd) 75 x 123 x 27cm • Weight 21.1kg •
Remotes 2 • 3D Active • HDMI 2.0 Yes • Netflix 4K Yes

**Sony KD-55X8505B**
£2100 ★★★★★

Screen size 55in •
Resolution/ppi 3840 x 2160 •
Dimensions (hwd) 78.5 x 123 x 29cm • Weight 24.1kg •
Remotes 2 • 3D Passive •
HDMI 2.0 Yes • Netflix 4K Yes

**Toshiba 58L9363DB**
£2300 ★★★★★

Screen size 58in •
Resolution/ppi 3840 x 2160 •
Dimensions (hwd) 86 x 131 x 37cm • Weight 35.5kg •
Remotes 1 • 3D Active • HDMI 2.0 No • Netflix 4K No

YOU CAN'T JUST LEAVE IT ALL ON THE FLOOR...

As if. And a pair of quality speaker stands with a solid, isolating rack will lift your kit sonically as well as physically



1

Atacama Moseco 6

£120 ★★★★★

These Moseco 6s might just be our new favourite affordable speaker stands. With our reference ATC SCM 11s placed on top, these Atacamas allow our system to flourish by letting the speakers deliver their best in terms of punch, detail and rhythm. There's texture to basslines, a twang to guitars, and expressive (if slightly forward) vocals. Overall, it's an enjoyable performance.

Reassuring rigidity

The Mosecos are rigidly built too. Two metal columns - one filled for better stability, one for cable management - and a bamboo base offer sturdy support and a neat look. Those with large speakers might find the top plate on the small side, but Atacama is planning to offer the Mosecos in different sizes in the future.

We're impressed with how weighty and dynamic these stands make our system sound. They work well with a variety of speakers across the price range, too and, at a relatively modest £120, they're one of the best-value stands we've come across.

2

Custom Design FS103

£160 ★★★★★☆

The FS103s can best be described as a 'lite' version of the Award-winning Signature FS104 stands from Custom Design.

When mounted on these stands, our reference ATC SCM 11s deliver



2



3

more zing to the treble than oomph in the bass - Eminem's *Marshall Mathers* LP reveals a snappy and light-footed rhythm, but there's not enough weight and punch to flesh out his angry vocals, and we'd like a more solid sound overall.

Get your fill

Loading the stand with inert filler adds a touch more substance to the ATCs' sound, as well as giving the tripod design (which feels a bit unsteady at times) more stability. Tip: take the stands outside when filling them, so the sand doesn't spill over in your living room.

You can buy the FS103's satellite poles in black, white, chrome or brushed-chrome finishes, while the central column comes in black only. While the all-metal construction looks good to our eyes, rivals provide a better option for overall performance.



4

3

Hi-Fi Racks Podium Slimline Speaker Stands

£120 ★★★★★☆

We like the warm, full-bodied and gentle sound these slim wooden stands bring out of our reference ATC SCM 11 speakers. We're less fond of the somewhat tubby bass and fuzzy edges, though.

Play a Norah Jones CD, and the combination of the ATCs and these stands suits the languid pace and sweet vocals - it's such a comfortable listen. The presentation is open and airy, but we'd like more precision in the bass to get us through the attacking rhythms of an Iggy Azalea track.

Height variations

There is the choice of 50, 60 and 70cm stand heights to place your speakers at the right ear level. In the standard oak finish, the Slimline stands will cost you just £100, but if you opt for our review sample's glossy-mahogany finish (or the black, walnut and cherry options), then you're looking at £120 for the pair.

The stands are surprisingly light, so make sure the legs are tightened and floor spikes adjusted for maximum rigidity. Any unevenness can affect your speakers' performance.

4

Q Acoustics Concept 20 Speaker Stands

£200 ★★★★★

£200 for a pair of speaker stands? When they help our kit sound this good, we don't mind. These stands may have been designed for Q Acoustics' Concept 20s, but the clever construction - a layer of compliant compound in the metal top plate helps dampen unwanted resonances by turning them into heat energy - makes them superb supports for all types of speakers.

Gloss plus glass equals class

They look classy too: the high-gloss finish (in black or white) and elegant glass brackets with shiny floor spikes should appeal to the house-proud. The stands have cable management at the back, too.

But what really seals the deal for us is how the Q Acoustics allow our ATC SCM 11s to soar with superb detail, subtle dynamics and a cohesive, musical rhythm. Compared with rivals, these stands allow our demanding reference system to sing with bite, punch and grace - all in equal measure.

5**Alphason Finewoods FW1350SB****£350** ★★★★★

Alphason's new range is designed for soundbases to take pride of place on a dedicated, fitted shelf at the top of the unit, under your TV. Four lower compartments hold your other AV and hi-fi kit, with cable slots on each of the shelves. The 1350mm-wide rack - which also comes in a 1100mm version - is large enough to fit a 60in TV and it's made up of a steel, glass and wood veneer, so has plenty of heft.

Neat and tidy

The rack looks good and is a tidy set-up for someone wishing to keep their kit in one place.

Once housed in the rack, our reference hi-fi system sounds taut, bold and full of bite with plenty of treble - but it veers on the brash side of exciting. A little subtlety and warmth is missing here.

When we place a soundbase in the Alphason, the sound is rather muffled and boomy. We move the unit to the top of the rack, but it doesn't improve things much.

The Alphason may be a neat all-in-one solution, but for the best sound performance, you will want to go for a dedicated hi-fi rack.

6**Atacama Evoque Eco 60-40****£450** ★★★★★

It isn't often that hi-fi racks get an appreciative 'ooh' from us at first glance, but Atacama's new Evoque range wins points on design alone. The solid bamboo shelves, the glossy, black legs and the shiny steel cone caps and spikes all add up to a rather gorgeous-looking rack. Build and finish is excellent too.

Build and customise

It's a modular design: you can add extra shelves for £150, and customise the height of each tier with a number of leg-length options. Bamboo naturally darkens with age, but you have the choice of natural, medium and dark finishes for the 40mm thick shelves.

The Atacama isn't just a pretty piece of furniture. With our Cyrus CDi/Roksan Caspian M2 reference system, the sound is confident, insightful and hugely enjoyable. There's a satisfying rumble to the punchy baselines, a clear and open

top end, and voices are presented with nuance. It might not initially sound quite as immediate as some rivals, but longer listening reveals plenty of attack. It's pricey, but we think the Evoque is well worth it.

7**Custom Design Discrete Inert Hi-Fi 4****£300** ★★★★★

This Custom Design rack certainly lives up to its 'discrete' tag. The neat, slim build will appeal to many, but the shelves - made from damped aluminium - feel a little flimsy next to the wooden slabs of rivals. We want reassuring heft. Assembly takes some work, too: the instructions are not very clear. We do some head-scratching to figure out which bits go where.

Lacking in depth

With our usual reference system on board, the sound is tight, fast and nimble. The system's top end shines, but the rack seems to hamper our set-up's capacity to deliver deep, punchy bass. We want more weight in terms of a more rounded and detailed performance from our system. John Williams' orchestral theme to

Jurassic Park sounds a little light on texture and detail here, and dynamically it feels a little muffled, too. The Custom Design allows our kit get the rhythmic structure of a song right, but at the expense of its subtleties.

8**Hi-Fi Racks Podium Slimline Akorner XL****£260** ★★★★★

We love how easy it is to build Hi-Fi Racks' Slimline products. You simply screw the wooden legs into the oak platforms, adjust the floor spikes, *et voilà!* We just wish the Akorner XL's legs lined up when fully tight (there are multiple lengths and five types of wood finishes). The rack looks neater when the legs are aligned, but having them so makes the overall structure less rigid and thus compromises the sound.

The Akorner XL is a solid foundation for our reference kit, and helps it to deliver a relaxed, airy performance we warm to. Voices are mellow and engaging.

Nothing demanding

The twang of guitars in The White Stripes' *In The Cold, Cold Night* could be tauter and Meg White's vocals could have more bite, but overall it's an undemanding listen. It's not the last word in punch or precision, but at £260 for three tiers, the Akorner XL is quite a good deal.

**Dimensions (hwd)****Alphason Finewoods FW1350SB**

51 x 135 x 45cm

Atacama Evoque Eco 60-40

Variable x 60 x 40cm

Atacama Moseco 6

60 x 24 x 28cm

Custom Design Discrete Inert HiFi 4

Variable x 53 x 40cm

Custom Design FS103

61 x 22 x 26cm

Hi-Fi Racks Podium Slimline Akorner XL

Variable x 80 x 40cm

Hi-Fi Racks Podium Slimline Speaker Stands

50 x 15 x 21cm

Q Acoustics Concept 20 Speaker Stands

67 x 39 x 24cm

LG G₃

SIMPLE IS THE NEW SMART

Last year, LG launched its G2 handset. It won awards, it surprised, it changed the game. How do you better that? You launch the G3.



What's so good about LG's new smartphone, the G3? That's simple. Why is it receiving such strong reviews and recommendations? That's simple, too. What makes it stand out in this crowded marketplace? Again: simple. And that really is the key: simplicity. LG has taken everything that was good about the G2 – everything that's

good about smartphones – and simplified it. You don't lose any of the features, you can do everything (and more) that you've ever been able to do with a smartphone – it's now just much easier to use. Simple really is the new Smart. To demonstrate, we've picked out five features that just make using the G3 better than anything that's gone before...

THE ESSENTIAL NUMBERS

DISPLAY 5.5-inch Quad HD IPS (2560 x 1440, 538ppi) **PROCESSOR** Qualcomm Snapdragon™ 801 (up to 2.5GHz Quad-Core) **MEMORY** 16GB eMMC ROM / 2GB DDR3 RAM/microSD slot (128GB max) **CAMERA** Rear 13.0MP/front 2.1MP **BATTERY** 3,000mAh **OS** Android 4.4.2 KitKat



1. THE CAMERA

The 13MP camera comes with laser-fast auto-focus – a smartphone first. There's no more waiting for the camera to focus before snapping: just tap the area on the screen you want sharp and the G3 takes the perfect image instantly. And as for selfies... hold up your hand in front of the front-facing lens, clench your fist, undench and trigger a three-second timer.



3. THE SMART NOTICE

A personal assistant in your pocket. It keeps track of where you go, timings, and your phone habits.

So, if you respond to a missed call with a text saying you'll call back later, the G3 will remind you. It'll let you know how it's feeling: if there are apps you haven't used in ages, it'll suggest a clear-out. It will also alert you to big changes in local weather – "Take an umbrella!".



5. SCREEN STAR

There's some clever stuff going on behind that cut-glass exterior. The richness of the screen has to be seen to be believed: its resolution is four times greater than HD, thanks to a reduction in pixel size. That's the science bit – what it means in reality is a deep-coloured, clear, smooth, astonishingly crisp screen, with great viewing angles. Oh and the bezel... what bezel?



2. BATTERY AND MEMORY POWER

Yes, it's a smartphone that won't have to spend half its life hooked up to the mains. The G3 has clever ways of making sure you're never without power. For a start, it has a 3,000mAh battery with a huge 22 hours of talk-time and 25 days on standby. The battery is easy to remove, and the memory can expand to 128GB via microSD. Now you can shoot 4K videos and keep them.



4. SIMPLE, SMART TYPING

Research has shown that we spend more time typing on our smartphones than anything else.

Anything. Yet we all know how clunky and thumbs-and-fingers typing on even the biggest screen can be. The G3 has tackled the smartphone QWERTY with a range of intuitive predictive and corrective short cuts. Stop fingers stampeding, start them dancing.

WHAT HI*FI?
SOUND AND VISION
WHATHIFI.COM



"Everything we loved about its predecessor and then some. LG has done it again"

LG G3 EXTRAS



QUICKCIRCLE™ CASE

Great protection and great access – you can get to the six most frequently used functions without even having to open it.



LG G-WATCH

The LG G-watch is at the forefront of wearable tech. Track your movements, get notifications, stay connected in the simplest way possible.



WIRELESS CHARGER

Compact and foldable, this stops you having to plug the G3 in to charge. It just makes staying charged that bit more convenient and simple.

The world's most desirable kit

TEMPTATIONS

“It’s a bit of a nerd thing...”

■ Yamaha A-S3000 Integrated amplifier

■ £4000 ★★★★★

If you’re a reader of this magazine we imagine the Yamaha brand makes you think of home cinema amplifiers and soundbars. The company, of course, makes a massive range of products including a selection of motorbikes and the odd grand piano.

We’d be surprised if too many people connected Yamaha with high-end hi-fi; it’s not that it doesn’t have pedigree in this area, it’s just that its concentration has always been elsewhere. But the A-S3000 amplifier, with the partnering CD/SACD player (to be reviewed soon), is an effort to revise that impression.

We’re impressed the moment we unpack this unit. The A-S3000 is a beast of an integrated, weighing in at a hefty 25kg and taking up as much space as a baby hippo. It’s beautifully built too. The casework is rock-solid, and the fit and finish is second to none.

Build quality is first-rate, and we love the retro front-panel power meters



We love the way the switches and controls feel: there’s a crispness and precision to their operation that makes them a joy to use. The remote control handset is almost as nice: it’s simple, well designed and feels like a luxury item. We admit to having something of a soft spot for the amplifier’s front-panel power meters too – it’s a bit of a nerd thing. The overall visual effect is distinctly retro and none the worse for it.

The A-S3000 uses an elaborate case-within-a-case structure to reduce the amount of vibration that reaches its sensitive circuit boards. There’s been a strong effort to minimise signal path lengths too, with a view to reducing the amount of distortion the music signal picks up on its route through the amp.

This Yamaha is generously equipped as far as the high-end is concerned. Not only has the company included six line-level inputs, but a switchable moving magnet/moving coil phono stage too – unusual in a high-end integrated.

TECH SPECS

Type Integrated
Power 100W
Inputs Line-level x6, MM phono, MC phono, tape loop
Outputs Speaker x2, preamp, headphone
Tone controls Yes
Remote control Yes
Finishes 2
Dimensions (hwd) 18 x 44 x 46cm

Stage performance

The phono stage built into the A-S3000 is a decent one. It’s relatively quiet and had more than enough gain to work well with our reference Clearaudio Stradivari V2 moving coil (output of 0.6mV). We would have liked some adjustment for cartridge loading to optimise the cartridge’s performance though. Still, it’s nice to be able to swap between magnet and coil settings via a front-panel switch.

Tone controls aren’t something we talk about a lot, but the ones fitted to the A-S3000 are well designed. Keep them on the zero setting and the tone circuitry is bypassed totally, preserving the integrity of the signal. Use them and the

Round the back

1 Speaker terminals

The well engineered nature of these terminals adds to the quality feel and they’re switchable (A to B) via a front switch.

2 Built-in phono stage

This is unusual at the high end, but we’re glad Yamaha made the effort. Handles moving magnet and moving coil cartridges.

3 Line-level inputs A

generous helping of these, including balanced and single-ended. If your source has balanced outs it’s worth using them.



The A-S3000 uses an elaborate case-within-a-case structure to reduce the amount of vibration reaching its sensitive circuit boards
See overleaf for more detail...



The A-S3000 is a beast of an integrated, weighing in at a hefty 25kg and taking up as much space as a baby hippo. The casework is rock-solid and the fit and finish second to none

TEMPTATIONS

Yamaha A-S3000

In detail

1 Symmetrical circuit design

Yamaha has designed the pre and power sections of the amp symmetrically and has separated the two parts to minimise signal degradation. The main benefits of this should be better stereo imaging and greater transparency.

2 Power supply It's not unusual to find a large power supply inside a high-end integrated, but the difference

here is the care Yamaha has taken with its mounting. The engineers have fixed it on its own independent structure within the main casing to minimise the level of vibration reaching the audio circuits.

3 Build quality Every care has been taken with the construction of the A-S3000. Everything lines up beautifully and it all exudes a level of quality beyond even this price.

drop in performance is subtle. They can be useful: if you're listening to a recording that's a bit edgy tonally, say.

The Yamaha's power output of 100 watts per channel isn't particularly outstanding, but we found it ample with a whole host of speakers.

After a few days of running in we admire aspects of this Yamaha's performance too. We start off with a record player as source, in this case our reference Clearaudio Innovation Wood package. The results are pretty good.

As is often the case we notice the tonal balance first. We're used to Yamaha's products sounding smooth and rich, and are surprised to find this amplifier doesn't conform. It's forceful in the treble and has real bite when required, yet it stays on the right side of

Susumu Kumazawa Lead engineer



We focused on two issues that we think conventional power amplifier circuitry has. These affect its ability to express musicality accurately and dynamically.

First, the power amplifier is not completely symmetrical. It is constructed by paired elements on each side of the output stage, but each one has a different polarity. Similarly, the semiconductor process is different in a pair of MOSFETs. Even though they have the same characteristic, they work in opposing ways.

Yamaha's patented Floating Balance Power Amp addresses issues of power loss that often occur at the output stage. It has two completely different characteristics from any other power amplifier. The circuit is completely symmetrical, using MOSFETs with the same polarity on the plus and minus sides of the output stage.

The drain of the MOSFETs is directly connected to the speaker, this means power is supplied directly to the speaker without going through any elements. Because of this, the A-S3000 is uniquely placed to express musicality and dynamics.



Listen to the *Jaws* OST by John Williams and the Yamaha has no trouble delivering a lot of information. What it doesn't do quite as well is communicate the savage nature of the music

acceptability. At the other end of the scale the bass sounds full-bodied and tautly controlled. The balance between the treble and bass is nicely judged too.

There's a good level of finesse, particularly through the midrange where Mary J Blige's voice on *No Drama* comes through with all the passion intact, but the presentation seems just a little veiled, and lacks the kind of rhythmic drive and large-scale dynamics necessary to truly grip our attention.

Improvements coming on stream

Switching source to our Naim NDS/555ps streamer improves the Yamaha's performance in some areas and confirms our criticisms in others. The A-S3000 is certainly more insightful through its line-level stages, and the sound is notably clearer and more informative. Its terrific level of detail means that it has no trouble capturing the harmonic richness of a complex instrument like a piano (on Satie's *Gymnopedie No.1*) or the rasp of Miles Davis's trumpet.

We're still not totally convinced by the rhythmic aspect of this amplifier's performance or its ability to deliver a truly visceral experience. Listen to the *Jaws* OST by John Williams and it's obvious the Yamaha has no trouble delivering a lot of information. What it doesn't do quite as well is communicate the savage nature of the music, thereby reducing the level of excitement.

We play a host of recordings from Ólafur Arnalds' hauntingly beautiful *Found Songs* to Bob Marley's *Exodus* and our opinion of the Yamaha's performance holds true. There's plenty of detail here, plus precision and agility that we don't normally associate with the brand. But there are also shortfalls in excitement and organisation that leave us wanting more.

We take a listen to the headphone output with a pair of Grado RS1s and AKG's K812 and decide it's a decent effort. True, it lacks the sheer clarity of the speaker outputs, but there's still enough insight here to please.

All things being equal an integrated solution would win (for us) every time. But all things aren't equal, and while the A-S3000 has obvious talent, it's not the fully rounded performer we hoped for.

Consider if You want a fully featured, beautifully made integrated stereo amp
Highlight Build quality. As immaculately finished as we've seen at this price

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Superb build and finish; clarity; impressive agility and insightful midrange; fully featured

AGAINST Lacks a degree of dynamic grunt; rhythmic precision could be better

VERDICT Sound quality is good but needs to be better to fully justify that hefty price

Xpression Carbon

Xpress your sound,
Xpress your look...



March 2014



February 2014



NEW UKX VERSION AVAILABLE NOW!

Includes free acrylic
platter with Bordeaux
and Midnight Blue
finishes.

A Classic Made New...

The Xpression Carbon is the latest version of Pro-Ject Audio Systems' original turntable, the Pro-Ject 1. This new model employs a brand new carbon fibre tonearm with an Evolution-inspired support structure. The superior motor, with isolation blobs designed by Ortofon, drives a high-quality platter that can be fitted with either a Cork or Felt mat. The plinth is available in three stunning finishes*, and the arm is rounded off with an Ortofon 2M Silver cartridge to create a comprehensive package that would suit any system.

Available in the UK through Henley Designs Ltd.

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* Bordeaux finish shown



Even on a basic recording it's apparent the D30Rs are unusually transparent. They dig up an awful lot of information and organise it in a natural and structured way

You can buy the D30Rs with a soft-dome tweeter, but the ribbon design gives the treble more sparkle

“Superb all-rounders that work well across all genres of music”

■ ProAc Response D30R Floorstanding speakers

■ £4750 ★★★★★

ProAc's Response D30Rs are easy speakers to underestimate.

They're decently large two-way floorstanders that come in a traditional wooden box and are bass-loaded by a reflex port. Nothing unusual there, but as always with hi-fi it's all about the detail - and it's here ProAc's considerable engineering skill shines through.

The cabinets feel solid and have crisp (but not sharp) edges that give the impression of proper craftsmanship. The ebony veneer on our review sample (a

bass driver, augmented by a downward-firing port in an arrangement we've seen before with other Response floorstanders. It's a carefully conceived design that makes the speakers less fussy about their placement in a room than most alternatives. We think the 30s still shine brightest in free space.

Once they're up and running we're really impressed by these ProAcs. They're lively yet subtle with it. We start off with something low key - Bruce Springsteen's *Terry's Song* - and the D30Rs are right at

TECH SPECS

Type Floorstander

Sensitivity 89dB/W/m

Impedance 8 ohms

Max power 200W

Birirable Yes

Finishes 6

Dimensions (hwd)

104 x 22 x 31cm

Our respect for these floorstanders grows further when we play Orff's *Carmina Burana*. Here we're impressed by both their handling of wide-ranging dynamics and their composure during the quite brutal crescendos.

Layered depth, extended width

These ProAcs deliver a beautifully layered soundstage packed with superbly focused images. The presentation extends well beyond the outer edges of the speakers too - and that's rare.

There isn't quite the low-end reach or dynamic punch of their bigger brothers the D40Rs, but considering they have just one mid/bass driver and cost £1400 less, that's no surprise. What they do produce at low frequencies is still impressively controlled, punchy and fast, and, most important of all, tuneful.

These ProAcs are superb all-rounders that work well across all genres of music. Feed them a quality signal, position them with care and we're sure you'll be pleased.

The downward-firing bass port means positioning is less of an issue than it might be. Quality build is evident throughout



hefty £950 extra, as is the rosewood option) is immaculate and is applied with obvious care. Standard finishes include black ash, mahogany, cherry and maple. Whichever option you pick we think you'll still end up with a smart, but relatively low-key, speaker.

Take a look at the drive units and it's the ribbon tweeter that draws your attention. There's the option to buy the D30 with a standard soft-dome unit, saving in the region of £250 depending on cabinet finish, but we wouldn't. The 60mm x 10mm ribbon adds a degree of sparkle to the performance that makes its inclusion vital.

Below the off-set tweeter is a carefully developed 16.5-cm carbon-fibre mid/

home. The Boss's vocals are delivered with real passion and the minimalist instrumental back-drop rendered with skill. This recording is quite hard and coarse, and these ProAcs don't try to hide that. But equally they don't try to make a meal of things either.

The integration between the drivers - usually a ProAc strength - is spot-on here too. This gives a wonderfully expressive and full-bodied midrange that has no trouble delivering vocals in a convincing and fluid way.

Even on a recording as basic as this, it's apparent the D30Rs are unusually transparent. They dig up an awful lot of information and manage to organise it in a natural and structured way.

Consider if You value subtlety and finesse as much as outright muscle

Highlight A wonderfully transparent and communicative midrange performance

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Dynamic, insightful and subtle sound; excellent midrange; controlled low-frequency performance; terrific build and finish

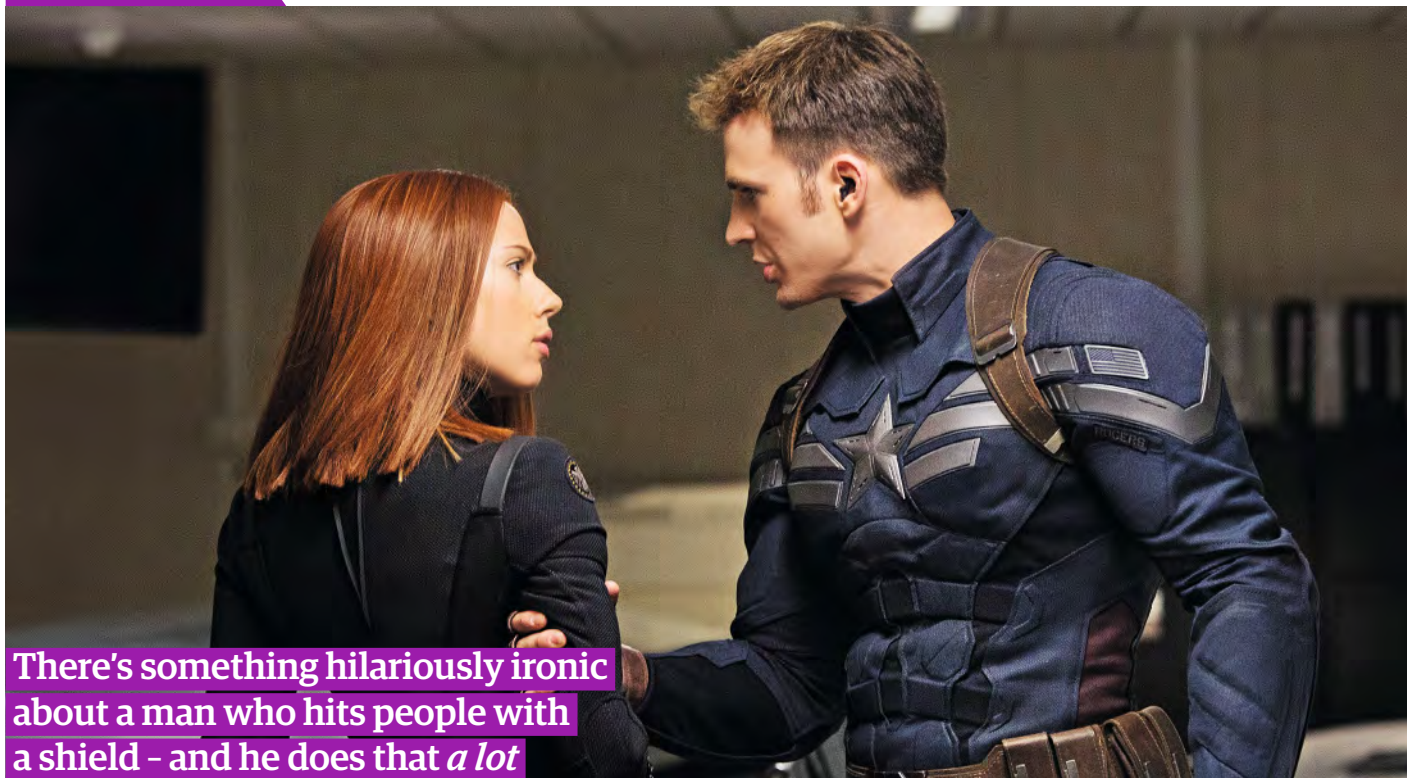
AGAINST Need care with system matching

VERDICT The Response D30Rs reinforce ProAc's excellent reputation for producing high-quality speakers. They're a great buy

PLAY LIST

The movies, music and games to test your system

Out this month...



There's something hilariously ironic about a man who hits people with a shield - and he does that *a lot*

Attack of the killer Frisbee is a marvel

**Captain America:
The Winter Soldier**
Blu-Ray Out 18th August

★★★★★



Bonus content

- Making-of featurettes
- Deleted scenes
- Audio commentary
- Bloopers

Duration 136m

Audio English: DTS-HD
Master Audio 7.1

Picture 2.40:1, 1080p



This is the ninth film in Marvel's series of interconnected superhero flicks - and arguably the best.

It's all about the timing: Captain America was dull in the 1940s as an unabashed symbol of wartime propaganda. Stick him on ice until the 21st century and he becomes a badass outcast.

With his friends long dead and his values outdated, Steve Rogers struggles for relevance. Marvel has only briefly touched on this so far, usually as tech-based gags.

Now SHIELD has become more controlling, and the perfect soldier finds himself unwilling to toe the line. Things get complicated when the agency comes under attack from someone in his past.

The Winter Soldier is unusually sensible for a Marvel flick. Gone are the primary colours: the vibe is primarily that of a 1970s political conspiracy thriller, complete with Robert Redford in a key role.

The decision to dig at shadowy government practices is a bold move, and allows the film to strike a more serious, realistic tone.

Not Chris Nolan's kind of serious and 'realistic', of course: Marvel has steered well clear of the tedious mopey that threatened to drown *The Dark Knight Rises*.

More mature, yet still witty

Despite its more mature ambitions, *The Winter Soldier* never forgets its roots in a comic about a man with a killer Frisbee.

Heavier moments are nicely balanced with nicely timed, well-scripted humour. Outlandish elements are celebrated, not excused or glossed over. There's something hilariously ironic about a man who hits people with a shield - and he does that *a lot*.

The action is skilfully handled. Set-pieces tend to be short and savage, never labouring the point.

You won't get Michael Bay's extended car-flipping sessions. Violence is up close and direct like a wrench to the face.

It's coherent and enjoyable to watch if you do it in 2D - 3D messes with the clarity of more anarchic scenes. Fireworks are rare but loud, and quite astonishing on more dynamic systems.

Most importantly, there's room for characters to develop. The Cap's continuous struggle to understand modern society is an endless source of hilarity.

Scarlett Johansson's Black Widow is finally allowed to do more than hit people, and Anthony Mackie's amiable Falcon (backpack with Buzz Lightyear wings) is a welcome addition.

Some day, Marvel might put out a dud. But we're safe for now. *The Winter Soldier* is one of the most refreshingly competent action films we've seen in a long time.

Spotify highlights [Join us on Spotify whf.cm/playlist2014](https://whf.cm/playlist2014)



M83: We Own The Sky

The epically ambitious high-sheen sound of the 80s filtered through an arch Gallic sensibility. But in a good way.

Kirsty MacColl: Terry "...you thought you were such a smartie, but Terry knows about karate. There's other things he's good at too - Terry's not a bit like you..."

Sebalter: Hunter of Stars When you can manage only 13th place (with 64 points) in the 2014 Eurovision Song Contest then you know you're doing something right.

George Ezra: Budapest The recent release of Ezra's debut album should be enough to broaden his appeal from its current, rather random, concentration on Italy.

Music

GAMES, MOVIES
& FORTHCOMING
RELEASES
p86



Download, CD, vinyl



KING CREOSOTE From Scotland with Love Out now

★★★★☆

Kenny 'King Creosote' Anderson has had a restless and wildly productive couple of decades, from self-releasing numerous CD-R albums a year during the 90s to vinyl-only (and available-at-concert-only) recordings and a Mercury Prize nomination (2011's *Diamond Mine* collaboration with Jon Hopkins). But *From Scotland with Love* may be his most ambitious and highest-profile work yet.

Written and recorded as the soundtrack to Virginia Heath's film of the same name, *From Scotland with Love* is an exploration of Scotland's

collective past. And it's just as thoughtfully reflective, just as outward-looking and future-facing, as Scotland's 2014 (what with the Commonwealth Games and the Independence Referendum) has been/is being/will be.

It's obvious when you hear it

As seems indecently common with King Creosote, *From Scotland with Love* is packed with obvious-after-the-event melodies that seem to just hang around waiting for Anderson to write them. *Something To Believe In*, *Miserable Strangers* and *Pauper's Dough* rank among the most affecting and memorable songs in his canon - which is far from faint praise.

Separation, staging and dynamics are all crucial elements to proper enjoyment here, although if you're not moved by the stirring arrangements, heartfelt sentiments or hook-laden melodies packed onto this album, perhaps music just isn't your thing.

Specifications

Duration 34m 05s

Standout track *Miserable Strangers* Want crescendos? And a terrace-anthem melody? Here you go.

Download, CD, vinyl



VENA PORTAE Vena Portae Out 18th August

★★★★☆

Not sure how sound a move it is to invoke internal organs in your band's name ('vena portae' is literally 'vein portal' - it carries blood to the liver), and it's doubly bold to make it the title of your debut album too. Luckily, Vena Portae's credentials, and the hushed assurance of their eponymous recording, is far more palatable and much less icky.

A collaboration between singer/songwriter Emily Barker, composer/theatre-maker Dom Coyote and Swedish scenester Ruben Engzell, Vena Portae is a wood-grained,

whiskery and vaguely Americana recording, reminiscent of the more pastoral moments of Sufjan Stevens (without quite the melodic inspiration). On *Summer Kills*, *Foals* and *Stingrays*, the combination of mournful picked banjo, amplified harmonica and sweetly evocative boy/girl harmonies makes for a tastefully sepia-tinted and agreeably backwoods-y sound.

A layered, careful recording

On first acquaintance Vena Portae sounds reasonably simple and undynamic. But a closer listen reveals this to be a layered and carefully executed recording with more than enough dirt under its fingernails and sleep in its eyes to give your system a proper examination. If your set-up can tell the difference between melodica and pump-organ (even when the instrument is buried under a piano/guitar/voices front line) then there are many pleasant discoveries to be made here.

Specifications

Duration 35m 10s

Standout track *Before The Winter Came* A rare venture into mid-tempo and a sly little earm-worm.

Listen to it this way

The system

Monitor Audio Airstream A100

£400 ★★★★★

One of the very best bendy amplifiers you can buy

Apple iPad Air £400 ★★★★★

Control interfaces don't get any more intuitive or any more elegant

Q Acoustics Concept 20 £350 ★★★★★

Better made, more refined and more revealing than £350 standmounters have any right to be



A modern system
for a thoroughly
modern Scotland

Listen to it this way

The system

Pro-Ject Essential II £200 ★★★★★

£200 simply doesn't buy a better-sounding source of music

Marantz PM6005 £300 ★★★★★

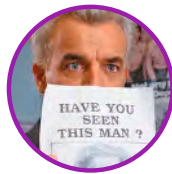
The latest in a distinguished line of cracking-value Marantz integrated amplifiers

Dali Zensor 3 £300 ★★★★★

These fully entertaining standmounters like all your tunes



Vena Portae will
benefit from this
revealing system



Movie shorts

Noah

Bible story with an identity crisis: this life aquatic with Russell Crowe flits between Sunday school and Stephen King. And there's not a duck in sight.

Twin Peaks: The Entire Mystery

David Lynch's surreal masterpiece has an FBI agent investigating a small-town murder. He finds a midget, a giant, deceptive owls and cherry pie.

Both seasons and the (somewhat questionable) prequel hit Blu-ray, remastered. Ten discs with hours of rare footage, some old, some new.

The Double

In a Dostoyevskian dystopia, a man meets his more successful double. Jesse Eisenberg stars as both, but no-one else can spot the similarity.

On-screen

System tester



Yurusarezaru mono (Unforgiven) Blu-ray Out now

★★★★★

It's usually Hollywood that remakes foreign films; now it's getting a taste of its own medicine. More unconventionally, it's not rubbish.

Getting the treatment today is Clint Eastwood's *Unforgiven*, which has crossed the Pacific. It's a seamless translation. Not for the first time, cowboy and samurai seem inherently compatible.

Mr Eastwood cannot be replaced, of course. The remake doesn't try, even if the plot is nearly verbatim.

An old warrior is lured from retirement for justice and money (mostly money) and things get messy for all involved. It's a masterful deconstruction of the very notion of legends.

The Japanese version offers the same weary determination, but instils a degree of the existential in place of resentment and one-liners.

The bonus: early Meiji Japan is a hell of a lot prettier than the old West. You can't go wrong here.

Watch it this way

The system
Samsung UE48H6400
£700 ★★★★★
 Frankly unlikely value for money

Panasonic DMP-BDT460
£190 ★★★★★
 An all-rounder of rare ability

Sony STR-DN1050
£500 ★★★★★
 ...and it's good with music

Q Acoustics 7000i
£900 ★★★★★
 Energy, detail, warmth, you name it

Games

Grid: Autosport

Xbox 360, Playstation 3, PC Out now

★★★★★

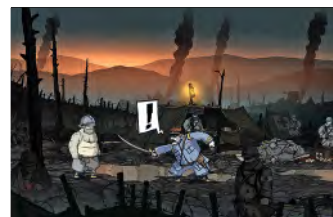


A welcome return to the series' hardcore simulation roots. There's no faffing about with arcade-style 'story' modes. Choose a team, admire the stats, and enjoy the diversity: 78 cars, 22 locations and 100 tracks. Not the same scale as *Gran Turismo*, but you get the thrill of racing at over 140mph.

Valiant Hearts: The Great War

Xbox 360, Xbox One, Playstation 3, Playstation 4, PC Out now

★★★★★

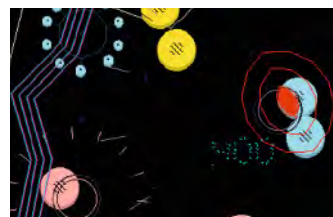


A genuinely unique game that juggles a kooky art style with side-scrolling platform mechanics and education about the horror and sadness of war. It's an unusual mix, but the story is deep and moving, it looks gorgeous, and the snippets of WW1 knowledge mean you might learn something too.

Eliss Infinity

Android, iOS Out now

★★★★★

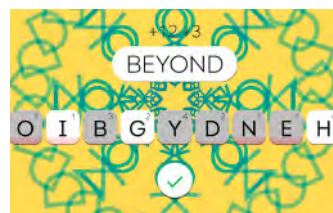


It's an abstract universe and you're tasked with keeping everything clean (read: empty). Planets of varying colours appear and you can dump them only in portals of the same colour. Things escalate quickly. It's addictive, makes great use of touch screens and it's finally available on Android.

LEX

Android/iOS Out now

★★★★★



Imagine Scrabble. Make a word from some tiles. But then they vanish, whirling in the distance as new tiles appear. And then you notice timers on the tiles, and things speed up. The better you do, the harder and faster it gets. The music taunts and encourages in equal measure. Infuriating. Addictive.

What we are waiting for...

Movies (Cinema) **The**

Inbetweeners 2 (6th August)
The British *American Pie* continues, with a gap year as an excuse to venture Down Under. Fnarr.

Movies (Blu-ray) **Transcendence**

(25th August) Johnny Depp's consciousness is transferred to a computer, because these days he's not nearly robotic enough.

Music (CD box-set) **Underworld**

- **Dubnobasswithmyheadman** (6th October) 20 years since its release, one of Brit Dance Music's finest hours gets the five-disc treatment.

Music (Download, CD, vinyl) **Caribou - Our Love**

(6th October)
We like to imagine it will sound like house, hip-hop and confessional indie-pop all sorted out a flat-share.

August in Hi-Def

The best on the box



Sharp, stylish and darkly comic, **Utopia** returns with its central ethical debate unresolved

Comedy

The Simpsons

Sky 1 HD - 19th August 5.30pm

What better way to celebrate *The Simpsons'* quarter-century birthday than with a Lego-themed episode? In *Brick Like Me*, Homer finds himself stuck in an alternate reality where everything and everyone is made up of Lego bricks. As he goes about his day in Lego-Springfield, he has visions of his normal cartoon self - leading him to choose whether he wants to go back to his real world or stay in the perfect Lego universe where everything is awesome.

Drama

Doctor Who

BBC One HD - 23rd August

New series! New adventures! New Doctor! Series eight of Doctor Who is here, which means we can finally see the sublime Peter

Capaldi in all his glory as the 12th Doctor. Best known for playing foul-mouthed Malcolm Tucker in political comedy series *The Thick Of It*, Capaldi is a childhood fan of the time-travelling show, and the snatches of dialogue in the teaser trailer confirm that he'll be using his native Glaswegian accent.

The first episode of the series, *Deep Breath*, introduces us to the new Doctor - what will he be like? Will he still hate pears? Will he have a new catchphrase? Will he bemoan the fact that he's still not ginger? Showrunner Steven Moffat has said the 12th Doctor is a "fiercer, madder, less reliable Doctor" - we're already excited.

The Killing

Netflix - 1st August

Fans of *The Killing*, rejoice! Netflix has taken on the cancelled crime drama and commissioned its fourth and final series to tie up loose ends. Itself an American

adaptation of popular Danish TV series *Forbrydelsen*, the show's last six episodes has homicide detectives Sarah Linden and Stephen Holder working together on one last case.

Their relationship is strained after the shocking events of the last series, but there's a murdered family who need their wits and detective skills - and the sole surviving member might hold the key to solving this final case.

Utopia

Channel 4 HD - Mondays, 10pm

Bringing all its trademark gore and black humour to our screens for a second series, this conspiracy thriller continues to shock and delight in equal measure. The Utopia Experiments gang is still being hunted down by shady organisation The Network, as they attempt to decipher the prophetic tellings in a graphic novel manuscript.

Sharp, stylish and darkly comic, the series returns with its central ethical debate unresolved: what should humans do when overpopulation leads to global bloodshed?

Sport

2014 Formula 1 Championship

BBC One HD 24th August 12pm

The circus arrives in Belgium, where the epic Spa-Francorchamps circuit is in turns both beautiful and terrifyingly unforgiving. Spa is always an eventful race, and we can't wait to see this year's drivers battle it out. It's all still up for grabs...



Tucker's luck? The wait is over for fans of the good Doctor

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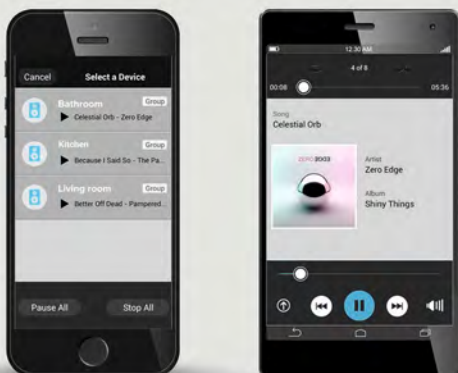
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BUYER'S GUIDE

NEW

How does Google's new **Android L OS** compare with Apple's upcoming iOS 8? We give you a sneak preview

Wireless streaming is fast becoming the default option for home listening, but which system is best for you?



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All the latest kit, all the latest ratings...

Welcome to the **UK's best guide** to TVs, hi-fi, home cinema and mobile, with star ratings for more than **1500 products**. Where other magazines rely on isolated

writers reviewing in a range of locations, our star ratings are decided by an **expert team** of reviewers working together, in a **state-of-the-art testing facility**.

Within this guide you'll find all our favourite **four- and five-star** products - including **Award-winners** - to help you pick the best kit for your budget.



Kobina Monney, Buyer's Guide Editor

Exciting new additions...



Monitor Audio Airstream A100

"A brave design that performs to a high standard"

p124



Samsung UE65HU7500

"This TV is a strong all-rounder that now leads the field"

p98

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★★★★★
£95

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SPEAKERS



Q ACOUSTICS 2000i 5.1 PACK
★★★★★
£625

Our 2013 Award winner produces sound with impressive scale for movies and music.

DISPLAYS



SONY KDL-40W605
★★★★★
£450

If you're after a great all-rounder in both picture quality and smart features, this TV is it. Splendid.

CD PLAYERS



MARANTZ CD6005
★★★★★
£350

This incredibly musical player offers detail in spades, not to mention a great way with dynamics.

AMPLIFIERS



MARANTZ PM6005
★★★★★
£300

A return to form by Marantz in this market, and a fine match for its CD-player sibling.

SPEAKERS



Q ACOUSTICS 2020i
★★★★★
£165

Refined, exciting and detailed – the 2020i deliver an endlessly listenable performance.



SONY BDP-S7200
★★★★★
£250

Sony's new Blu-ray offering is a really remarkable achievement. It has huge ability with images and sound.



SONY STR-DN1050
★★★★★
£500

Incredible value, this home-cinema powerhouse has pretty much all the features and ability you could hope for.



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.



SAMSUNG UE48H64800
★★★★★
£700

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NAIM CD5si
★★★★★
£1000

Exceptional player, combining superb sound with great value for money. An Award winner.



NAIM NAIT 5si
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£925

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NEAT SX2
★★★★★
£1395

A nicely refined, dynamically strong, beautifully musical presentation from diminutive, well-made floorstanders.



MARANTZ UD7007
★★★★★
£700

This universal player is fantastic with Blu-rays, CDs and even SACD and DVD-A formats.



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.



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.



SONY VPL-HW55ES
★★★★★
£2800

Superb in 2D, this projector also excels at 3D. Edges are sharp, pictures have depth and stability.



ROKSAN CASPIAN M2 CD PLAYER
★★★★★
£1800

Combines bite, refinement and rhythm better than anything else we've heard at this price.



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B&W ASW610XP
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Dali Zensor 15.1
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Philips HTL9100
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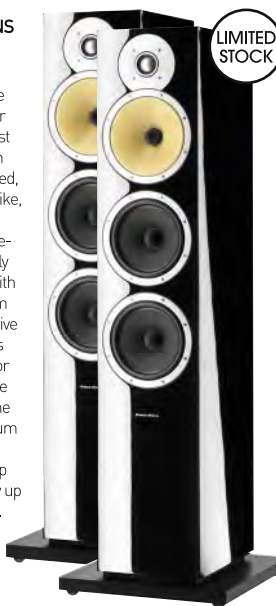
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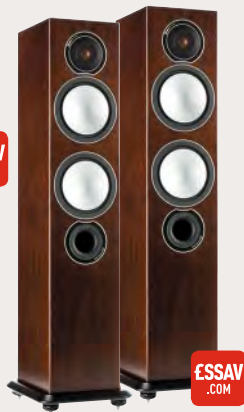
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An innovative concept derived from the legendary LS3/5a. Rarely the case in such a compact design, the LS50 monitor delivers a rich, multi-dimensional 'soundstage experience' that is out of all proportion to its size.



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NAD • VISO 1AP • WIRELESS MUSIC SYSTEM
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.

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Play music wirelessly from your iPod, iPhone or iPad. AirPlay allows the Zeppelin Air to wirelessly connect to any PC or Mac computer running iTunes. Dock with Lightning connector.

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With P7, everything is designed to allow you to lose yourself in music. Bass is tight, vocals are precisely defined, and there's a wonderful sense of space, balance and clarity across the whole frequency range. P7's cable comes with a remote/microphone attachment, so it works seamlessly with your iPhone.

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**SONOS
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The Sonos Wireless Hi-Fi System delivers all the music on earth, in every room, with deep, richly textured sound. Sonos is the only system that combines Hi-Fi sound with high-performance wireless. Plus it's simple to set-up, control and expand so you can easily fill your home with music.



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Real Stores

Sevenoaks Sound & Vision have 27 stores nationwide with plans to open more during 2014. Each carries the best in home cinema and Hi-Fi equipment on display, ready for you to watch, listen to and compare in our dedicated demonstration rooms.

Real Products

A wide selection of products from the world's leading manufacturers is in stock and available for you to take home. We also offer a delivery and installation service as well as a convenient on-line click and reserve option for many of our products.

Real People

Our staff are friendly, knowledgeable and passionate about music and film and the equipment needed to get the most out of your collection. They will be delighted to assist you in making the right selection to ensure you enjoy your system for years to come.

Real Value

Fantastic value for money is our aim. Although we remain independent, you will be pleasantly surprised just how competitive we can be - with the added benefit of seeing, hearing and touching the product before you buy, and someone to help if things go wrong.

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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: MARANTZ UD7007



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PANASONIC • DMP-BDT460 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

Offers high-definition 3D images, faithfully reproduced, with a level of quality that approaches the original plus enjoyment of the internet, smartphones and various other content.

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The Pioneer BDP-160 3D Blu-ray Player offers Blu-ray, DVD, CD and SACD playback, wireless streaming, audio and video from YouTube and access to Picasa photo albums.

Also Available: PIONEER BDP-450



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SONY • BDP-S6200 • 3D BLU-RAY PLAYER

Bring your favourite movies, photos and more closer to the depth and clarity of 4K with four times the detail of Full HD with the new Sony BDP-S6200 3D Blu-ray Player.

Also Available: SONY BDP-S7200



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ARCAM • FMJ AVR400 • AV RECEIVER

7.1-channel AV receiver using technology developed from the acclaimed AVR600 receiver and AV888 processor.

Also Available: ARCAM FMJ AVR380 & AVR450



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NAD • T 748V2 • AV RECEIVER

The remarkable 7.1 channel NAD T 748V2 is an ideal choice for the most advanced home cinema and multi-room systems.

Also Available: NAD T 758 & T 787



NEW

ESSAV
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SONY • STR-DN1050 • AV RECEIVER

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Also Available: DENON AVR-X3100



NEW

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YAMAHA • RX-V677 • AV RECEIVER

New highly capable and versatile 7.2-channel Network AV receiver with AirPlay and Spotify Connect.

Also Available: YAMAHA RX-V377 & RX-V477



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DENON • DHT-T100 • SOUNDBASE

The Denon DHT-T100 is an under TV Soundbase that dramatically improves your TV watching experience. Simply connect the all-in-one system to your television and enjoy powerful, dynamic audio from your favourite TV shows, movies, games and music.



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If ever there was a complete home entertainment audio system built for today's media delivery, then the ASB-2 is it. The miraculously compact ASB-2 soundbar combines a high performance active audio system with the very latest wireless streaming technologies.



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SONOS • PLAYBAR SOUNDBAR & WIRELESS SPEAKER

This plug-and-play unit incorporates 9 integrated amplified speakers. Simply connect it to your TV with the supplied optical cable to deliver an epic home cinema sound in your own living room. PLAYBAR can also expand your existing Sonos system.



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Bluetooth

YAMAHA • YSP-1400 DIGITAL SOUND PROJECTOR

The Yamaha YSP-1400 soundbar reproduces presence-rich sound over a wide area. Supporting both Bluetooth and a dedicated app for smartphone control, this new-generation soundbar increases enjoyment and convenience.



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Q ACOUSTICS • Q7000i • SPEAKER PACKAGE

Stylish 5.1 package that delivers dynamic sound for movies, but with the ability to play music. Classic black or white matt finishes.



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SYSTEM AS SMALL AS
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KEF • R100 5.1 • SPEAKER PACKAGE

Comprises four R100 speakers, an R200C centre speaker and R400B active subwoofer. Great for both home cinema and music.



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MONITOR AUDIO • RADIUS R90HT1 • SPEAKER PACKAGE

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B&W • MT-60D • SPEAKER PACKAGE

Speaker package combining M-1 speakers with the stunning power and control of a PV1D subwoofer. Available in a matt black or white.



NEW

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SONY • VPL-HW55ES • SXRD PROJECTOR

A fantastic option for movie lovers who want an incredible cinematic experience at home, far beyond the reach of TV.



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4K Projector with a high contrast ratio achieved by adopting an optical engine with new wire grid and 6th generation D-ILA device.

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SAMSUNG

HU8500 SERIES • CURVED 4K UHD TV

Introducing a breakthrough in TV viewing that will change the way you watch TV forever – the Samsung HU8500 Curved UHD. Wider viewing angles, pure and accurate colour reproduction and a sense of depth never experienced before are only possible on a curved Samsung screen, specifically shaped for UHD viewing at its very best.

55 65 78 **FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY**



Panasonic

AX800 SERIES • 4K UHD TV

A high-end model that combines 4K picture quality with high-level innovative functions in a stylish design.

The use of the 3840 x 2160 4K panel produces high-definition picture quality. The newly developed high-brightness, high-color-space panel and 4K Remaster Engine provides a higher dimension of 4K picture quality.

As with the other models in the new VIERA range, you get Freetime built in. This allows you to get the advantages of roll back TV (for the past seven days) and easy access to all major catch up services directly from the Freetime programme guide including BBC iPlayer, ITV Player, 4oD and Demand 5.

FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY 50 58 65

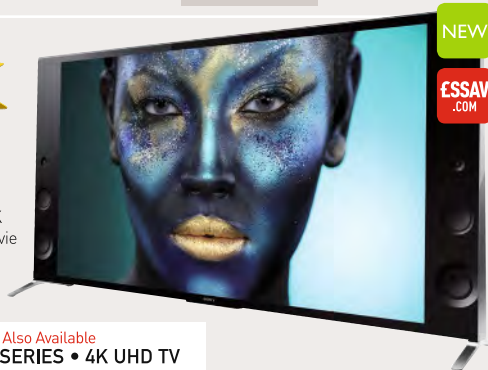
SONY 4K

X9000B SERIES • 4K UHD TV

Picture quality that must be seen to be believed. With a screen resolution of 3840 x 2160 – that's 8 million pixels – 4K technology offers four times the detail of Full HD. Take a movie you've seen hundreds of times and you'll see things that you couldn't before, from an individual leaf on a distant tree to a tear drop in the heroine's eye.

55 65 79 **FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY**

Also Available
SONY X8 SERIES • 4K UHD TV



SONY • W8 SERIES • FULL HD TV

42 50 55 **FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY**



PANASONIC • AS740 SERIES • FULL HD TV

42 47 55 **FREE 5 YEAR WARRANTY**



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SAMSUNG • HU7500 SERIES • 4K UHD TV

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LCD, LED & plasma TVs

LCD	Once only in smaller screens; now the most common type of panel
LED	This refers to the kind of backlighting used on an LCD panel
Plasma	The rival to LCD, now usually only seen on larger screens

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Hannspree SL22DMBB

"It may be light on features, but it excels in performance. If you want a small, no-frills TV, this Hannspree is an excellent choice."



NEW ENTRY

Samsung UE48H6400

"It's a subtler, more controlled and balanced picture, and we think that the TV giant has got its approach just right this year."



NEW ENTRY

Samsung UE65HU7500

"We're impressed by the Samsung. It's got plenty of nice features, including a neat new interface. It's an attractive looking set."

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	Active 3D	Passive 3D	Freeview	FreeSat	HDMI	Dimensions (hwd, 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 32F8030-T	280	02.13/ST	★★★★★	Great picture and the latest online features: bargain	LED	32	1920x1080					4	49x78x4
Finlux 32F7020-T	280	09.13/ST	★★★★★	Patchy 3D but still worth a look for budget buyers	LED	32	1920x1080					4	48x77x4
Finlux 40F8073-T	330	03.14/GT	★★★★★	ATV with a sharp, exciting picture at a terrific price	LED	40	1920x1080					3	55x93x4
Hannspree SL22DMBB	135	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best 22in TV, Awards 2013	LCD	22	1920x1080					1	53x39x17
Hannspree AD32UMMB	220	02.13/ST	★★★★★	A solid option set for mainly watching TV	LED	32	1366x768					3	44x73x7
Kogan LULED24DVDYA	134	02.13/ST	★★★★★	This versatile little set is fine value for money	LED	24	1920x1080					2	38x58x5
Kogan KULED22XXXYA	110	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Cheap and cheerful and all the better for it	LCD	22	1920x1080					2	39x54x17
Linsar 22LED906T	230	12.12/GT	★★★★★	A great 22in set with a DVD player and Freeview HD	LED	22	1920x1080					2	38x53x4
LG 32LS5600	299	02.13/ST	★★★★★	This budget TV gets the basics right	LED	32	1920x1080					3	46x75x36
LG 50PA650T	499	01.13/GT	★★★★★	Good picture and price, but we'd like more detail	Plasma	50	1920x1080					3	70x117x5
LG 32LN575V	400	09.13/ST	★★★★★	A decent looking TV with credible smart and streaming features	LED	32	1920x1080					3	45x74x8
Panasonic TX-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-L32E6B	380	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best 32in TV, Awards 2013	LED	32	1920x1080					3	43x72x5
Panasonic TX-P50X50B	453	01.13/GT	★★★★★	Hard to beat on performance per pound	Plasma	50	1024x768					2	72x118x8
Panasonic TX-P50X60B	430	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Compromised, but this Plasma is an admirable effort nonetheless	Plasma	50	1024x768					2	72x118x8
Philips 22PFL3517T/12	270	12.12/GT	★★★★★	An accomplished set with Freeview HD and YouTube	LED	22	1920x1080					3	32x51x5
Philips 32PFL4258T	480	09.13/ST	★★★★★	A talented TV with excellent picture quality	LED	32	1920x1080					3	45x74x2
Samsung UE40F6400	480	03.14/GT	★★★★★	A stunning, feature-laden TV from Samsung. Recommended	LED	40	1920x1080					4	54x93x5
Sony KDL-26EX553	400	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Capable enough for a kitchen or child's bedroom	LED	26	1366x768					2	41x64x6
Sony KDL-32W653A	430	09.13/ST	★★★★★	Its picture lacks subtlety but this Sony is still a worthwhile option	LED	32	1920x1080					2	44x73x7
Technika 22-212i	168	02.13/ST	★★★★★	Great value, with plenty of features	LED	22	1366x768					2	37x54x1
Toshiba 32L6353	450	09.13/FT	★★★★★	A decent TV for the money but response times can be sluggish	LED	32	1920x1080					4	44x76x7
Toshiba 40L6353	400	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Clunky interface aside, this is a decent TV with a great HD picture	LED	40	1920x1080					4	54x92x27
£500-£2000													
Finlux 47S9100-T	800	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Good picture, decent 3D and a low price. Worth a look	LED	47	1920x1080					4	67x112x4
LG 47LB730V	1000	08.14/ST	★★★★★	Solid sound, premium build and a good picture. A fine effort from LG	LED	47	1920x1080					3	62x106x55
Panasonic TX-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
Panasonic TX-P42GT60B	1000	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best 40-46in TV, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	Plasma	42	1920x1080					3	60x99x5
Panasonic TX-P42GT50B	1200	10.12/GT	★★★★★	This sensational all-rounder remains a favourite	Plasma	42	1920x1080					4	60x99x5
Panasonic TX-L47AS650B	800	08.14/ST	★★★★★	A talented set, but other TVs have the edge in terms of value	LED	47	1920x1080					3	63x107x5
Panasonic TX-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

TELEVISIONS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Type	Size (in)	Resolution	Smart	Active 3D	Passive 3D	Freeview	Freesat	HDMI	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Panasonic TX-L50E6B	850	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Fine picture quality but there are TVs that give more for less	LCD	50	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	3	71x112x27
Panasonic TX-P50GT60B	1200	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best premium 47-52in TV, Awards 2013	Plasma	50	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	3	70x117x5
Philips 42PFL6008	1000	08.13/ST	★★★★★	Impressive picture with comfortable 3D – a strong contender	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	56x95x3
Philips 46PFL8007	1700	12.12/FT	★★★★★	A strong start for Philips' new range	LED	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	5	67x104x21
Philips 47PFL6008	1200	06.13/GT	★★★★★	A few niggles but forgivable thanks to its brilliant picture quality	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	3	63x106x3
Philips 55PFL6007T	1500	01.13/FT	★★★★★	This should be on anyone's big-screen shortlist	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	74x124x3
Philips 55PFS6609	1200	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Dazzling with HD content, but rivals offer better overall performance	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	72x123x4
Philips 48PFS57093	750	08.14/ST	★★★★★	Excels in many areas but its SD performance is an area of concern	LED	48	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	62x108x6
Samsung PS51E550	850	09.12/GT	★★★★★	A pedigree 50in plasma at a steal of a price	Plasma	51	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	3	72x120x6
Samsung PS51E8000	1700	06.12/FT	★★★★★	A big-screen plasma that should be tried out	Plasma	51	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	3	71x119x5
Samsung PS51F5500	680	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best budget 47-52in TV, Awards 2013	Plasma	51	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	3	71x112x27
Samsung PS51F8500	1900	07.13/FT	★★★★★	A top-class plasma screen	Plasma	51	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	3	74x119x6
Samsung UE40ES6800	950	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Good spec and looks, but the backlight isn't great	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	3	67x92x33
Samsung UE32F6400	500	09.13/ST	★★★★★	Some niggles but a desirable set with excellent catch-up TV features	LED	32	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	44x74x5
Samsung UE40F6500	900	08.13/ST	★★★★★	Not a class leader but offers a lot for your money	LED	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	3	91x60x27
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
Samsung UE48H6400	700	08.14/ST	★★★★★	For £700 this is one of the best TV deals of the year so far	LED	48	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	63x109x5
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-42W705B	530	08.14/FT	★★★★★	A promising start for Sony's Full HD range. A consistent performer	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	56x96x6
Sony KDL-42W805A	1000	08.13/ST	★★★★★	A great-looking TV with many strengths	LED	42	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	58x97x6
Sony KDL-46W905	1550	09.13/FT	★★★★★	A very capable TV with stunning detail but the picture lacks vibrancy	LCD	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	65x105x30
Sony KDL-48W605B	700	08.14/ST	★★★★★	A competitive performer with good picture quality	LCD	48	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	68x108x9
Sony KDL-50W829B	900	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Loses a star but this TV is still worth an audition	LED	50	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	66x112x6
Sony KDL-55W955B	1600	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A good TV but we expect more from a flagship set	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	79x124x9

£2000 and above

Bang & Olufsen BeoVision 11	5250	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A truly luxurious TV that delivers a great performance too	LCD	40	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	6	89x96x6
LG 55LA860W	2300	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Close but no cigar. A good TV but the competition is strong	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	72x123x4
LG 55EA980W	8000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	A great first OLED effort from LG	OLED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	80x123x19
LG 65LM960W	5500	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Fantastic to look at, but lacks the detail of depth of rivals	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	3	84x143x41
LG 84LM960V	22500	02.13/FT	★★★★★	Stunning with Ultra High Def, but ordinary elsewhere	LED	84	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	102x190x4
Panasonic TX-L47WT50B	2000	08.12/ST	★★★★★	Stylish, with real areas of expertise	LED	47	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	63x107x3
Panasonic TX-P55VT65B	2000	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best 55in+ TV, Awards 2013	Plasma	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	3	77x132x5
Panasonic TX-L55WT65B	2470	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A good performer but there are more capable sets	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	3	72x123x3
Panasonic TX-P60ZT65B	3850	08.13/GT	★★★★★	An accomplished set, but not the best TV pound-for-pound	Plasma	60	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	3	83x140x5
Panasonic TX-P65WT600	5000	12.13/GT	★★★★★	A capable set that handles 4K footage very well	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	86x147x6
Philips 46PFL9706	2300	05.12/GT	★★★★★	A great flatscreen from Philips	LED	46	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	66x108x4
Philips 50PFL7956T	2000	09.12/GT	★★★★★	The best 21:9 set we've seen: brilliant for films	LED	50	2560x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	58x124x3
Philips 55PFL8008	2500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A great TV from Philips	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	72x124x3
Philips 65PFL9708	4500	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Smart features aren't as good we'd like but this is still a strong 4K set	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	5	84x146x4
Samsung KE55S9C	7000	01.14/GT	★★★★★	An excellent first step for large screen OLED TVs	OLED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	78x142x14
Samsung UE55F8000	2500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Can't keep up with the very best. Still a smart, user-friendly set	LED	55	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	71x122x4
Samsung UE65F9000	5000	01.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented set with few weaknesses to speak of	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	84x146x4
Samsung UE65H8000	3300	07.14/FT	★★★★★	A fine set, but high price and lack of 4K knock it down a star	LED	65	1920x1080	●	●	●	●	●	4	89x145x31
Samsung UE65HU7500	3600	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Whether it's 4K, HD or SD, this TV will gobble it up	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	88x145x30
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	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Good looks and great sound but needs 4K material to shine	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	90x168x10
Sony KD-65X9005B	3600	07.14/FT	★★★★★	This Sony set has issues with upscale content but it looks great with 4K	LED	65	3840x2160	●	●	●	●	●	4	88x172x10

Buying a TV? What to consider

Don't dismiss a four-star set

If you don't want bells and whistles, consider one of our four-star sets: it could be that picture quality is better, at the expense of features.

Screensize

Consider getting the size up from the one you think you'll need. In our experience, people tend to get home and then want just a bit more...

Network connections

We always recommend a wired connection for stability reasons. But that isn't always practical. If your router is a long way from your living room, you can go wireless or

use a powerline system, which uses the mains supply to send data. An increasing number of TVs offer built-in wi-fi, but you might need a dongle.



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



Panasonic DMP-BDT460



AWARD WINNER
Marantz UD7007



AWARD WINNER
Sony BDP-S4100

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	HDMI out	Optical out	Co-axial out	Multichannel out	Dimensions (wxd,cm)
Up to £500								
LG BP740	200	08.14/GT	★★★★★					4x43x21
Panasonic DMP-BDT230	160	07.13/GT	★★★★★					4x43x18
Panasonic DMP-BDT260	120	07.14/FT	★★★★★					4x31x18
Panasonic DMP-BDT330	200	09.13/GT	★★★★★					4x43x18
Panasonic DMP-BDT320	220	05.12/FT	★★★★★					3x43x18
Panasonic DMP-BDT460	190	08.14/GT	★★★★★					4x42x18
Philips BDP3380	80	01.14/GT	★★★★★					4x41x21
Pioneer BDP-160	120	01.14/GT	★★★★★					6x44x25
Pioneer BDP-450	225	01.12/FT	★★★★★					9x44x25
Pioneer BDP-LX55	350	03.12/ST	★★★★★					9x43x25
Samsung BD-F6500	130	07.13/GT	★★★★★					4x43x18
Sony BDP-S4100	80	01.14/GT	★★★★★					4x36x20
Sony BDP-S5100	140	07.13/GT	★★★★★					4x36x20
Sony BDP-S490	110	12.12/FT	★★★★★					4x43x20
Sony BDP-S6200	180	08.14/GT	★★★★★					4x36x20
Sony BDP-S790	200	09.13/GT	★★★★★					4x43x19
Sony PlayStation 3 (2012)	250	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★					6x29x23
Sony PlayStation 4	349	02.14/FT	★★★★★					19x3x3
Xbox One	430	01.14/FT	★★★★★					8x33x27

System killers... take a trip to outer space



Marvel's Avengers Assemble

Josh Whedon's superhero film deftly weaves several characters' storyline into one, in this blockbuster. The Blu-ray boasts great detail and natural skin tones, and although the CG looks soft and out of place in some areas, the forceful DTS-HD MA 7.1 soundtrack will batter you into submission.



Star Trek (2009)

J.J. Abrams reboot gave new life and renewed hope for the ailing *Star Trek* franchise. While the Dolby TrueHD soundtrack is not as hard-hitting as we imagined it would be, it's the enveloping soundstage it creates that really impresses. And the image quality is simply stunning. Bodes well for the upcoming *Star Wars* film.



John Carter

Maligned on its cinema release, *John Carter* is a flawed but fun film. Like any Blu-ray from Disney, it looks and sounds fantastic, the DTS-HD High Resolution soundtrack hitting the appropriate highs and lows, with Michael Giacchino's score bestowing the film with a gracefully epic feel. Enjoyably old-fashioned.



The Fifth Element

We'd argue Luc Besson hasn't made a film as good as *The Fifth Element*, a sci-fi/fantasy that's as bizarre as it is fun. It looks great, with bright colours clashing with each other and there's a nice level of film grain throughout. The music score by regular collaborator Eric Serra is as colourful as the visuals.

BLU-RAY PLAYERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	HDMI out	Optical out	Co-axial out	Multichannel out	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
£500 and above								
Cambridge Audio Azur 752BD	800	04.13/FT	★★★★★	Features and functions combine in fine style, but audio performance could be a little better	2	1	1	8ch 9x43x31
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	★★★★★	Asplendid master of all trades	1	0	1	8ch 11x44x33
Marantz UD7007	700	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Best Blu-ray player £300+, Awards 2013	1	1	1	No 11x44x31
Onkyo BD-SP809	500	04.12/GT	★★★★★	A fine choice, but not an all-rounder	2	1	1	No 10x43x31
Oppo BDP-93EU	500	04.12/GT	★★★★★	Perfect for the midrange Blu-ray player market	2	1	1	8ch 8x43x31



Projectors

Screens Buy one of these. A painted white wall is simply not good enough
Noise Fan noise can be a major issue if you sit close to your projector
Lamp life Projector bulbs have limited lifespans and need to be changed regularly

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Type	Throw Ratio	Resolution	Rated Brightness (Lumens)	HDMI in	DVI in	PC in	Component in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Weight (kg)
Up to £1000													
BenQ W1060	700	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Solid effort for a budget projector	DLP	1.59-1.9	1920x1080	2000	2	1	1	15x33x25	3.6
BenQ 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													
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
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
Optoma HD83	2400	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Healthily priced, with a solid performance	DLP	1.45x2.28	1920x1080	1600	2	0	0	19x49x37	8.4
Philips Screeneo HDP1590TV	1500	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A great idea that's executed well, but not perfectly	DLP	0.321	1280x800	500	3	0	1	0 15x34x29	5
Sony VPL-HW55ES	2800	04.14/GT	★★★★★	An impressively capable projector	SXRD	n/a	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1 18x41x46	9.6
£3000 and above													
Epson EH-TW9000W	3200	06.12/FT	★★★★★	If you need wireless HDMI, buy this Epson	LCD	1.34-2.87	1920x1080	2400	2	0	1	1 16x47x40	8.5
Epson EH-TW9200W	3000	04.14/GT	★★★★★	A fine projector, but not the showstopper we expected	LCD	1.34-2.87:1	1920x1080	2400	6	0	0	1 14x47x40	9
JVC DLA-X35BE	3000	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Good but not great, this JVC appeals if you like bright pictures	D-ILA	n/a	1920x1080	1300	2	0	1	1 18x46x47	15
Panasonic PT-AT6000E	3000	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Best projector £2000+, Awards 2013	LCD	1.18-2.36	1920x1080	2400	3	0	1	1 15x47x36	8.7
SIM2 C3X Lumis 3D-S	30000	11.11/FT	★★★★★	The best 3D projector we've ever seen	DLP	1.82-2.48:1	1920x1080	3000	2	0	0	1 46x21x46	11
Sony VPL-HW30ES	3000	02.12/GT	★★★★★	Very capable, but there's better for the money	SXRD	1.47-2.18	1920x1080	1300	2	0	1	1 18x41x46	10
Sony VPL-HW50ES	3000	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Shows why home cinema can't be beaten	SXRD	1.64-2.37	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1 18x41x46	9.6
Sony VPL-VW500ES	8500	04.14/FT	★★★★★	Stunningly good with 4K content but pricey nonetheless	SXRD	1.64-2.37	1920x1080	1700	2	0	0	1 18x41x46	9.6
Sony VPL-VW95ES	5000	01.12/FT	★★★★★	By class standards, it's one of the best projectors around	SXRD	1.38-2.83	4096x2160	1700	2	0	0	0 20x50x46	14

Small projector, big screen experience

They say bigger is better but there are exceptions. For a modest-sized home cinema set-up, a projector with a shorter throw ratio might just be the ticket. Here are two contenders that fit the bill.

BenQ W1080ST

Smaller than its rivals, the BenQ W1080ST's compact build and short throw ratio (0.69-0.83) make it ideal for transforming a smaller room into a home cinema. We placed the unit six feet from the screen and found that to be the sweet spot, and a sturdy coffee table is a good stand-in for a dedicated rack. It's the picture that matters and the BenQ's performance is crisp, clear and bright, although colours can be overstated just a little.



The BenQ is a steal at £850

Philips Screeneo HDP1590TV

The Philips Screeneo is a curious looking projector. Designed with portability in mind, place it 10cm from a wall and it will produce a 50in image, drag it to 44cm and the image grows to 100in. It has no qualms about projecting straight onto a wall (we'd still recommend a screen) and while it lacks authority when it comes to image subtlety and fine detail, contrast is strong and whites are punchy. The lack of Full HD resolution is a disappointment, but a suite of network connections and a TV tuner ensure it's a capable performer.



£1500 sounds a lot but it does have a speaker built in



AV receivers & amplifiers

Up to £500	Well-equipped and delivers convincing surround sound
£500-£1000	There are gains in features, build quality and sonic performance
£1000+	Real powerhouses that pack loads of features and cinema-style sound

The shortlist



Yamaha RX-V377

"If this is your first step towards a home cinema system, then the Yamaha RX-V377 is a great place to start."



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									
Pioneer VSX-528	285	02.14/GT	★★★★★	A well-equipped budget amp with good surround sound capabilities	5x130	6	1	●	17x44x33
Sony STR-DH820	230	04.13/GT	★★★★★	A capable, if not faultless, option for those looking for a sub-£250 7.1 channel amp	7x115	4	1	●	16x43x32
Yamaha RX-V375	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier up to £350, Awards 2013	5x100	4	1	●	15x44x32
Yamaha RX-V377	260	07.14/FT	★★★★★	Superb surround sound on a budget	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-DH840	350	02.14/GT	★★★★★	A talented, energetic amp that delivers plenty of precision and attack	7x150	6	1	●	16x43x33
Sony STR-DH850	400	08.14/FT	★★★★★	An impressive all-rounder at a great price	7x150	5	1	●	16x43x33
Sony STR-DN1030	470	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Gives the best (at this price) a run for their money	7x120	5	1	●	17x43x33
Sony STR-DN1040	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £350-£700, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	7x100	8	2	●	16x43x32
Yamaha RX-V675	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	A powerful and thrilling amplifier for the money	7x150	6	1	●	17x44x36
£500-£1000									
Denon AVR-2113	550	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Solid, likeable option for both novices and enthusiasts	7x125	6	1	●	17x44x33
Denon AVR-X2000	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Marks a fine return to form for Denon	7x150	7	1	●	17x43x33
Denon AVR-X4000	900	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Decent if you're looking for a sub-£1000 AV receiver	7x125	7	3	●	17x43x38
Harman-Kardon AVR-365	800	03.12/ST	★★★★★	Great looks, but lacks some precision	7x110	6	1	●	17x44x39
Pioneer VSX-923	450	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Needs more heft but it's still a confident and compelling amp	7x150	8	2	●	17x44x36
Yamaha RX-S600	500	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A small, excellent amp that delivers great sound and good features	5x90	5	1	●	17x43x33
Yamaha RX-V673	500	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £350-£700, Awards 2012.	7x150	6	1	●	17x44x36
Onkyo TX-NR626	500	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Well-featured but not as compelling or as immersive as rival products	7x160	6	2	●	17x44x33
£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
£2000 and above									
Anthem MRX 700	2100	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Fantastic-sounding and worthy of a serious audition	7x90	4	1	●	17x44x39
Arcam FMJ AVR450	2200	03.14/GT	★★★★★	There's plenty to like with this receiver, but its rivals better it	7x110	7	2	●	17x43x42
Arcam AVR750	4000	12.13/FT	★★★★★	It's not flawless, but this AV receiver is very good	7x100	7	2	●	17x43x43
Pioneer SC-LX87	2000	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Pioneer strikes gold again with this feature-laden powerhouse	9x220	9	3	●	19x44x44
Onkyo TX-NR1010	2000	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Power-packed heavyweight needs a touch more precision	7x200	9	2	●	20x44x59

AV RECEIVERS & AMPLIFIERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Channels / power (w)	HDMI in	HDMI out	Networking	3D passthrough	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Onkyo TX-NR3009	2000	04.12/GT	★★★★★	Produces seriously rewarding surround sound	9x200	8	2	●	●	34x61x60
Onkyo TX-NR3010	2000	03.13/ST	★★★★★	A solid performance but lacks the subtlety to cut it as a complete all-rounder	9x160	9	2	●	●	20x44x60
Yamaha RX-A3020	2000	03.13/ST	★★★★★	A shot across the bows of the class leaders	9x230	8	2	●	●	19x44x47
Yamaha RX-A3030	2000	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier £1500+, Awards 2013	9x150	8	1	●	●	19x44x47



Subwoofers

Sealed cabinet _____ Tends to produce the tightest bass but limits outright quantity
Reflex port _____ A more common design that tends to deliver more bass
Room equalisation _____ Evens out the subwoofer's response to produce a more balanced sound

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
Bowers & Wilkins ASW610



Bowers & Wilkins ASW610XP



AWARD WINNER
Velodyne SPL-1000 Ultra

Also consider

Also consider																			
Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Power (w)	Driver (cm)	Passive radiator	Sealed	Ported	Drive unit orientation	Line inputs	Speaker ins	Line outputs	Speaker outs	Phase invert	Remote control	EQ	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500																			
B&W ASW610	450	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Best subwoofer up to £700, Awards 2011	200	25		●		Forward	1	1			●		●	4	31x31x38
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
RELAcoustics T-Zero	350	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Small and discreet, but limited by size	100	16.5		●		Downward	2	1			●			2	24x22x26
Tannoy TS2.10	430	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Small, but packs a ferocious punch	300	25	●			Forward	1	0	●		●			3	39x38x33
Velodyne EQ-Max 8	495	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Small, but punches well above its weight	180	20			●	Forward	2	2	●	●	●	●	●	1	37x33x38
Velodyne Impact-10	295	07.09/GT	★★★★★	This sizeable subwoofer needs to be more controlled	150	25			●	Forward	2	2	●	●	●		●	4	35x32x37
Velodyne Impact-12	365	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Fine sub, more of a movie than a music classic	165	30			●	Forward	2	1		●	●			1	39x66x45
Velodyne Impact-Mini	435	10.09/FT	★★★★★	Amazingly small sub with fine movie performance	180	16.5		●		Forward	2	2		●	●			1	25x25x30
W'fedale Powercube SPC-10	300	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Nearly a terrific subwoofer - but there are issues	215	25		●		Downward	1	1	●		●			8	38x35x31
£500-£1000																			
B&W ASW610XP	700	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for big bass from a small box	500	25		●		Forward	2	1			●		●	4	32x32x37
Monitor Audio Apex AW-12	950	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Beautiful to look at, and punchy too	500	30.5		●		Forward	1	0	●		●		●	2	34x34x41
RELAcoustics 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 Playspeakers	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

"There's a huge amount to enjoy with the Denon AVR-4520. An exhaustive spec list gives you everything you'd expect in an AV receiver and much more, coupled with a cohesive, engaging and easy-to-enjoy character"

March 2013



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

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Front speaker (hwd, cm)	Center speaker (hwd, cm)	Rear speaker (hwd, cm)	Subwoofer (hwd, cm)	Finishes
Up to £500								
Boston Ac. Soundware XS SE	220	12.11/FT	★★★★★	Just as good as its predecessor: a must-hear	11x11x9	11x11x9	11x11x9	31x28x40 2
Canton Movie 130	450	05.12/FT	★★★★★	Likeable and listenable	12x9x10	9x19x10	12x9x10	41x24x42 3
Harman-Kardon HKTS20	450	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Neat, but a conservative listen	22x11x9	11x26x9	22x11x9	36x27x27 1
Jamo A101HCS5	230	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A great way to get started with home cinema	9x15x15	9x15x15	9x15x15	30x57x16 1
Jamo S426 HCS3	350	01.12/FT	★★★★★	A worthy home cinema solution	91x18x24	12x34x12	21x12x12	n/a 3
Teufel Motiv 3	460	06.10/GT	★★★★★	Another solid showing from this manufacturer	12x12x14	12x12x14	12x12x14	26x26x32 1
Teufel Theater 80	449	01.10/FT	★★★★★	Big sounds for not too much money	23x15x19	23x15x19	23x15x19	40x26x40 1
Wharfedale DX-1HCP	400	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Gets a lot right for this kind of money	19x12x12	12x29x12	19x12x12	34x29x32 2
£500-£1000								
Boston Ac. SoundWare S	510	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Dinky yet substantial-sounding	14x14x14	14x14x14	14x14x14	34x32x44 2
Cambridge Audio Minx S215	500	05.11/FT	★★★★★	Lots to admire here from very little	8x8x9	8x8x9	8x8x9	22x21x22 1
Dali Zensor 1 5.1	980	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £700-£1500, Awards 2013. Product of the Year	27x16x22	16x44x29	27x16x22	31x29x31 3
Jamo A 200 HCS 5	640	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A gutsy and entertaining sound at this price	22x9x5	22x9x5	22x9x5	31x28x31 7
KEF KHT3005 HD2	900	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Great build with an expansive sound	25x13x15	13x25x15	25x13x15	38x37x18 1
KEF E305	900	11.13/ST	★★★★★	A room-filling system but there are more dynamic packages out there	26x14x16	16x22x15	26x14x16	32x43x27 2
Mission MX15.1	600	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for a medium sized room	28x17x26	15x42x19	28x17x26	30x30x33 4
Monitor Audio MASS	800	11.13/ST	★★★★★	Still an excellent system, it narrowly falls short of the best	22x13x13	13x22x13	22x13x13	42x38x38 1
Q Acoustics 2000i 5.1	625	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Best traditional package up to £700, Awards 2013	23x15x20	23x16x12	23x15x20	23x16x12 2
Q Acoustics Q7000	800	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Product of the year - Speaker packages, Awards 2011	24x10x16	12x21x16	24x10x16	37x51x22 2
Q Acoustics Q7000i	900	11.13/ST	★★★★★	Best style package £700-£1000, Awards 2013	24x10x16	12x20x16	24x10x16	32x46x20 2
Tannoy HTS-101	400	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Best style package up to £700, Awards 2013	16x11x14	11x25x17	16x11x14	42x28x37 1
Teufel Theater 200	799	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Big-screen soundtracks don't come bigger than this	44x20x29	25x44x27	23x16x12	60x38x49 1
Wharfedale 100-HCP	950	11.13/FT	★★★★★	A very good package, but could do with a better centre speaker	32x17x26	17x47x27	32x17x26	39x33x31 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

Dolby TrueHD vs. DTS-HD Master Audio

When it comes to film soundtracks on Blu-ray discs, it's between Dolby TrueHD and DTS-HD Master Audio for audio supremacy

Dolby TrueHD

TrueHD is Dolby's entrant in the lossless audio format war.

It supports multi-channel audio of up to eight channels at 24-bit/96kHz resolution and six channels of 24-bit/192kHz (there is the option for film studios to employ 16-bit versions).

A TrueHD soundtrack takes up less space than a PCM (Pulse Code Modulation) alternative would and, in theory, once it's decoded by your

Blu-ray player or AV receiver, should reproduce a signal that's identical to the Studio Master.

In theory there should be no compromise when it comes to sound quality.

Handily if you don't have a 5.1 surround speaker set-up, a TrueHD soundtrack can downmix to a 2.0 stereo mix. Good for those who may need to use desktop speakers for space reasons.

If your player isn't compatible with Dolby TrueHD, then it'll substitute the TrueHD track for a lower standard Dolby soundtrack instead.

Pros:

Takes up less space than PCM soundtrack, is required to come with Dolby Digital 5.1 soundtrack ensuring playback compatibility

Cons:

Its 18Mbit/S audio is less than DTS-HD Master Audio's variable 24.5Mbit/S output



SURROUND SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Front speaker (hwd, cm)	Center speaker (hwd, cm)	Rear speaker (hwd, cm)	Subwoofer (hwd, cm)	Finishes
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	★★★★★	A vibrant and exciting 5.1 package	32x18x20	15x41x13	14x30x12	43x36x50	1
Monitor Audio Bronze BX2 5.1	1050	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Thrillingly fit for purpose	35x19x26	17x46x17	29x28x11	33x32x33	4
Monitor Audio Bronze BX5 5.1	1215	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Does a good job of filling a big room	85x17x25	17x46x17	29x28x11	33x32x33	2
Monitor Audio Radius R90HT1	1500	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Best style package £1400-£1800, Awards 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 3-Series 5.1	2425	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Build, looks and performance combine for an attractive speaker package	90x19x30	19x45x26	30x19x25	36x36x36	2
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 5 Mk2	2500	06.14/GT	★★★★★	An exciting speaker package that will thrill film and music fans	81x15x28	15x57x26	38x27x15	45x41x46	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
KEF R100 5.1	2850	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £2500-£3500, Awards 2013	28x18x29	17x53x31	28x18x29	37x33x35	4
M&K 950-Series	5445	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Exceptional system with thrilling sound	41x18x22	41x18x22	26x18x22	60x39x51	2
Monitor Audio Apex	2400	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Best style speaker package £2000+, Awards 2011	25x14x14	14x61x10	25x14x14	34x34x41	2
Monitor Audio PL200AV	11400	08.10/FT	★★★★★	Exceptional in every sense	100x25x28	22x58x29	37x34x36	45x48x47	3
Monitor Audio PL300 AV	13500	10.09/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest 5.1 speaker packages on the market	111x41x47	22x58x29	37x22x28	45x48x47	2
Monitor Audio Silver 6 AV12	2875	06.14/GT	★★★★★	A hugely capable surround package. Worthy of serious consideration	94x35x20	19x50x24	25x31x12	23x16x14	6
Mon. Audio Silver RX6 AV12	2200	10.11/GT	★★★★★	Best traditional package £1500-£2500, Awards 2011	85x19x25	19x50x20	30x12x25	34x34x41	6
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 5.1	2000	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Guaranteed to keep you on the edge of your seat	95x21x32	18x46x23	95x21x30	42x31x36	3
Mordaunt-Short Mezzo 5.1	2300	11.08/GT	★★★★★	Lots of attack, with little respite	100x22x28	18x49x22	35x22x28	32x34x35	2
Paradigm MilleniaOne	2500	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Smooth and detailed, but slightly lacking in attack	20x12x15	20x12x15	20x12x15	34x30x32	2
PMC DB1i 5.1	4675	12.09/FT	★★★★★	Small and sonically brilliant package	29x16x23	16x29x23	29x16x23	55x20x55	4
Tannoy Revolution SEAV	2400	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Despite a few issues with the centre and sub, this is an exciting package	95x20x25	15x31x16	37x20x25	44x43x37	1
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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DTS-HD Master Audio

On the other side of the fence is DTS-HD Master Audio soundtrack.

Like TrueHD it's a lossless audio format supporting eight channels of discrete sound at 24-bit/96kHz resolution and 24-bit/192kHz for two to six channels.

DTS-HD MA also supports variable bit-rates up to 24.5Mbit/S, giving it a technical advantage over TrueHD's 18Mbit/S.

Unlike TrueHD, DTS-HD MA does not carry an extra lower standard track. A Master Audio soundtrack is made up of two components: a core and an extension.

The core, like the lower standard Dolby Digital track, is used when the Blu-ray player/home cinema amplifier features no support for the codec, or it's used when you're sending the audio signal along an Optical or Coaxial cable.

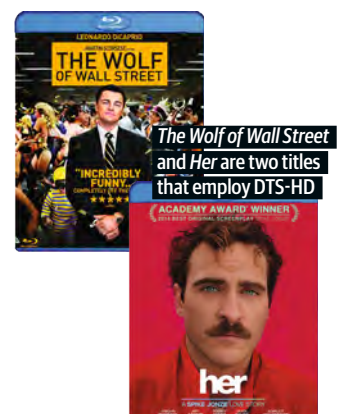
The additional stream (the extension) contains additional information specific to the codec variant. Once both the core and the extension have been decoded, the soundtrack should be identical to the original Studio soundtrack.

Pros:

Is becoming the more popular audio codec of choice for Blu-rays

Cons:

Some suggest it sounds better than Dolby TrueHD, we're not sure





Integrated Transport	Has both a CD mechanism and digital-to-analogue conversion tech Needs an outboard DAC but can deliver a higher standard of sound
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Our recommendations					Integrated Transport	Co-axial out	Optical out	XBout	RCa out	Headphone out	Co-axial In	Optical In	AES/EBU In	USB In	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict													
Up to £500																
Cambridge Audio Azur 351C	300	11.12/FT	★★★★★	A worthy rival to the Award-winning Marantz CD6004	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	9x43x31
Cambridge Audio Azur 651C	450	03.12/FT	★★★★★	A spacious sounding disc spinner	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x31
Marantz CD6004	300	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Best CD player up to £500, Awards 2012	●	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	11x44x34
Marantz CD6005	350	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Best CD player up to £500, Awards 2013	●	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x44x34
Sansui CDD-201V	200	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Sensibly priced, but not quite an all-rounder	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	7x43x28
£500-£1000																
Arcam FMJ CD17	650	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Basic on features, but capable enough	●	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	9x43x29
Audiolab 8200CD	800	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1000, Awards 2012	●	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	0	1	1	8x44x30
Audiolab 8200CDQ	950	09.11/FT	★★★★★	Improves on the sky-high performance of the 8200CD	●	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	0	1	2	8x44x30
NAD C 546BEE	500	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Talented but struggles against the more enjoyable budget Marantz	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	9x44x31
Cyrus CDI	975	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Arguably the best, most insightful integrated player Cyrus has ever made	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	7x22x36
Cyrus CD Transport	750	01.12/ST	★★★★★	An impressive and affordable CD transport	●	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36
Cyrus CD6 SE2	700	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Subtly upgraded, with worthwhile results	●	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	8x22x36
Naim CD5si	995	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Best CD player £500-£1500, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	7x43x30
Pioneer PD-50	500	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Worth considering but this SACD player doesn't quite engage	●	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	13x44x33
Rega Apollo-R	550	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Admirable, but lacks some cohesion	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	9x22x32
Roksan Kandy K2	900	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Big and powerful, with an entertaining sound	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	10x43x38
Yamaha CD-S2000	979	03.09/GT	★★★★★	A beautiful object that's involving to listen to	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	14x44x44
£1000 and above																
Audio Research CD6	8050	08.14/FT	★★★★★	In the market for a top-class CD player? This could be the one	●	0	0	1	1	0	0	2	1	1	2	13x48x31
Burmester 069	35840	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Quite possibly the best CD player money can buy		2	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	16x45x34
Cambridge Audio Azur 851C	1200	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Impressive sonic presentation but a touch too clinical for our tastes	●	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	1	1	2	12x43x34
Copland CDA825	4298	05.13/FT	★★★★★	A hugely capable player with stunning sound quality	●	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	10x43x39
Cyrus CD 8 SE2	1200	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Best CD player £1000-£1500, Awards 2012	●	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36
dCS Puccini	11300	02.11/FT	★★★★★	With the master clock it's an amazing combo	●	1	0	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	2	11x46x40
Esoteric K-05	7495	01.14/FT	★★★★★	A great place to start... if you're looking for your final disc-player	●	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	13x45x36
Leema Antila IIS Eco	2995	09.11/FT	★★★★★	The already good Antila goes up another level in performance	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	11x44x31
Musical Fidelity M6CD	2100	08.13/FT	★★★★★	Its powerful, yet refined sound will appeal to many, a fine performer	●	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	13x44x39
Naim CD5 XS	1950	Aw.09/FT	★★★★★	It's an excellent CD player, but faces stiff competition	●	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	7x43x30
Naim CD555/555PS	18345	10.09/FT	★★★★★	The CD555/555PS has a hefty price tag, but a classy performance	●	0	0	0	1							

What Hi-Fi? team members share their favourite albums and what makes them so good...



Formed of The Shins' James Mercer and Brian Burton, *Broken Bells* is an eclectic indie mix of catchy synth- and electro-pop tunes.



This classic D'n'B album showed the genre could be much more than bruising basslines; bringing strings, soulful vocals and complex piano arrangements.




Everyone hated the 80s, right? Not if you listen to Com Truise who will take you back to the future with 'In Decay' - kevstars at the ready...



Donald Glover combines beautifully-crafted lyrics, unapologetic music style and a few LeBron James references to make the best rap album since *Black Star*.

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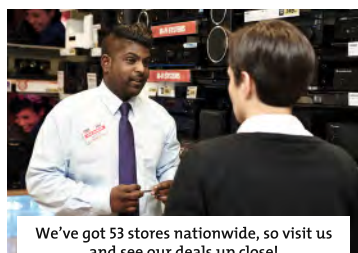


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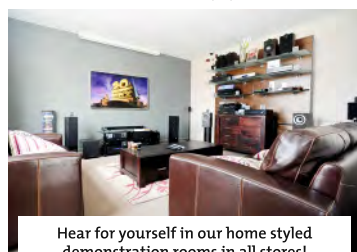
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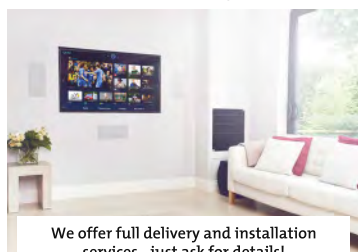
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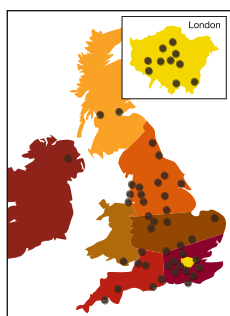
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DACs

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														
Product	£	Tested	Verdict		USB in	Optical in	Co-axial in	AES EBU in	HDMI in	Wireless	Headphone out	RCA out	Balanced XLR out	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £500														
Arcam airDAC	400	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Not as good as the irDAC but delivers good sound on a budget	0	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	4x19x12
Arcam irDAC	400	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Best DAC £300-£500, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	0	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	4x12x19
Arcam irDAC Wireless	380	09.12/GT	★★★★★	No longer the default choice at the money, still very much a contender	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	4x16x11
Arcam miniBlink	90	05.14/GT	★★★★★	A compact DAC that makes a huge impression. Bluetooth sounds brilliant	0	0	0	10	0	●	0	1	0	2.5x3x4
Arcam rPAC	150	04.13/ST	★★★★★	More desirable alternatives, but the rPAC still has plenty of merit	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	3x10x6
Audioengine D1	150	05.12/FT	★★★★★	A DAC and headphone amp with a fine sound	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	3x9x10
Audioquest DragonFly	215	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC up to £300, Awards 2012	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	6x2x1
Audioquest DragonFly v1.2	130	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Outrageously good sound quality at an aggressive price	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	6x2x1
Belkin Song Stream BT HD	50	05.14/GT	★★★★★	A solid performer for the price	0	0	0	0	0	●	0	1	0	n/a
Camb. Audio DacMagic 100	200	06.12/FT	★★★★★	An affordable, fine looking and listenable DAC	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	5x11x13
Camb. Audio DacMagic Plus	350	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Better sound and features than the original - but pricey	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	1	5x22x19
Camb. Audio DacMagic XS	100	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Drops down a star but still a delightful little device	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	5x3x1
Crystal Acoustics BluDAC	60	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Doesn't quite have the finesse of others but this is still a real entertainer	0	0	0	0	0	●	0	1	0	6.5x7.5x2
Denon DA-300USB	330	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Soft bass detracts from what is otherwise a great first DAC from Denon	1	2	1	0	0	0	1	1	0	6x17x18
Furutech ADL GT 40	400	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Product of the Year - Cables & Accessories, Awards 2011	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	6x15x11
Focal Universal Wireless Receiv.	85	05.14/GT	★★★★★	A very talented performer that comes with a few quirks	0	0	0	0	0	●	0	1	0	n/a
HRT Headstreamer	145	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A neat headphone amp and DAC combination	1	0	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	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	0	1	0	3x14x8
Meridian Explorer DAC	250	07.13/GT	★★★★★	The Explorer's design and assured sonic performance makes it a top contender	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2x3x10
Micromega MyDAC	260	04.13/ST	★★★★★	If you like your music to have an attacking edge, then this DAC's for you	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2x3x10
Musical Fidelity V-90 DAC	200	12.13/FT	★★★★★	A well-featured DAC that's a little too relaxed in its sound	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	5x17x10
NAD 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	06.14/GT	★★★★★	For those looking for a desktop DAC, the NAD D 1050 is a brilliant box of tricks	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	1	19x6x21
Pro-Ject DAC Box DS	299	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A solid performer but doesn't excel in any area	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	7x10x14
£500-£1000														
Audiolab M-DAC	600	08.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £500-£700, Awards 2013	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	6x25x25
Cambridge Audio Azur 851D	1000	07.14/GT	★★★★★	A fine DAC, even if it can't scale the heights of the class leaders	1	4	3	1	0	●	1	0	1	12x43x36
Chord Chordette QuteHD	990	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £700-£1000, Awards 2013	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	7x16x4
Rega DAC	500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Beefy build; natural, unforced, dynamic and detailed sound	1	2	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	8x22x27
Musical Fidelity M1SDAC	800	08.13/FT	★★★★★	An impressive spec list but performance is trumped by cheaper rivals	1	1	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	10x22x31
Parasound Zdac	500	11.13/GT	★★★★★	The Zdac produces a lively, likable sound	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	5x22x26
Rotel RDD-1580	600	05.14/FT	★★★★★	Plenty to be impressed with, but the poor quality of its USB input holds it back	1	2	2	0	0	●	0	1	1	5.5x43x32
Sony UDA-1	500	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Not the most musically exciting DAC, but an excellent choice for desktop users	1	2	2	0	0	0	1	1	0	7x23x26

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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													
Aesthetix Romulus	6500	06.14/GT	★★★★★	A fine performer that draws in the listener with a smooth and elegant sound	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	11x46x45
Antelope Zodiac Gold/Voltikus	3100	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Unique and appealing, it just misses out on a fifth star	1	2	2	0	0	2	1	1	11x17x19
Audio Research DAC 8	4698	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Pricy, but as organic-sounding as you can get	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	13x48x25
Arcam FMJ D33	2000	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A well-equipped DAC, but not the best in class	3	2	2	1	0	0	1	2	11x43x37
Bricasti Design M1 DAC	7000	03.14/FT	★★★★★	An understated but deeply talented performer. Thoroughly impressive	1	1	2	1	1	0	1	1	6x43x30
Bryston BDA-1 DAC	2350	06.11/FT	★★★★★	A great sounding DAC with appealing build quality	1	2	4	1	0	0	1	1	4x48x29
Burmester 113	2300	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Small and unassuming but packs a seriously exciting sound	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	6x20x17
Chord QBD76 HDSO	4995	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A top-class, visually appealing DAC that delivers brilliant sound	2	2	2	2	0	0	1	1	6x34x15
Chord Hugo	1400	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Superb sound quality in an unbelievably small and versatile package	2	1	1	0	0	3	1	0	2x13x10
dCS Debussy	7930	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Worth every penny of its asking price	1	0	2	2	0	0	1	1	7x45x39
McIntosh D100	3000	06.13/GT	★★★★★	A solid and entertainer performer. Well featured, too	1	2	2	0	0	1	0	0	10x45x41
Musical Fidelity M6 DAC	2000	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A mighty performer but its price and competition rob it of a fifth star	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	13x44x39
NAD M51	1500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Best DAC £1200+, Awards 2012	1	1	1	1	2	0	1	0	8x44x30
Naim DAC	2150	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Flexible, fine sounding and future-proof. The Naim is some DAC	2	3	3	0	0	0	1	0	7x43x30
Naim DAC-V1	1250	07.14/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



AWARD WINNER

Pro-Ject Essential II

Awards 2012: Best Turntable up to £500
 “We think this is one of Pro-Ject’s finest achievements and more than deserving of Best Buy status.”



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Rega RP3/Elys2

Awards 2013: Best Turntable £400-£800
 “This is the kind of product that concentrates the listener’s attention on music and nothing else.”



AWARD WINNER

Rega RP6/Exact

Awards 2013: Best Turntable £800+
 “We’ve heard rivals deliver similar amounts of insight but none that do it in such an attractive manner, or at this price.”

Also consider

Also consider					33.33	45	78	Elec. speed change	Manual operation	Phono amp	Tonearm inc.	Cartridges inc.	USB port	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Product	£	Tested	Verdict												
Up to £1000															
Edwards Audio TT1	380	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A tempting alternative to the class-leaders at this price	●	●			●		●	●		1	12x45x36
Pro-Ject Elemental	150	04.14/FT	★★★★★	A top-class budget deck from Pro-Ject	●	●			●		●	●		3	9x43x30
Pro-Ject Essential II	200	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable up to £400, Awards 2013	●	●			●		●			3	14x46x36
Pro-Ject 2-Xperience Basic +	600	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	Fuss-free package with a strikingly clear sound	●	●			●		●	●		1	14x46x36
Pro-Ject 2Xperience Classic	750	12.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine deck that's worth auditioning	●	●			●		●	●		3	16x46x36
Pro-Ject Debut Carbon	300	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable up to £500, Awards 2012	●	●	●		●		●	●		7	12x42x32
Rega RP1	225	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable up to £400, Awards 2011	●	●			●		●	●		3	12x45x36
Rega RP3/Elys2	550	10.11/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable £400-£800, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	●	●			●		●	●	●	3	10x45x36
TDK ETVT20102	350	01.12/FT	★★★★★	A neat solution to archive your vinyl	●	●		●		●	●	●	●	1	11x45x38
£1000 and above															
Clearaudio Emotion SE	2110	11.09/FT	★★★★★	For the money, this is an excellent performer	●	●			●		●	●		1	8x40x32
Clearaudio Ovation/Tali. V2 Gold	5995	04.14/FT	★★★★★	Beautifully made and a pleasure to use. A fantastic performer	●	●	●	●	●		●	●		4	14x42x35
Clearaudio Performance SE	2660	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Quality engineering and top-class sound	●	●			●		●	●		2	13x42x33
Kronos Turntable	30000	07.14/FT	★★★★★	Not perfect, but an incredibly tempting piece of kit nonetheless	●	●			●					1	28x56x36
Kuzma Stabi S/Stogi S	2940	04.10/FT	★★★★★	A worthy alternative to the Michell Orbe	●	●			●		●			1	14x40x30
Linn Majik LP12	2350	03.09/FT	★★★★★	The LP12 offers great value for money with no compromise	●	●			●		●	●		5	14x45x36

TURNABLES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	33.33 RPM	45 RPM	78 RPM	Elec. speed change	Manual operation	Phono amp	Tonearm inc.	Cartridges inc.	USB port	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
£1000 and above														
Michell Gyro. SE/TecnoArm A	1478	09.08/FT	★★★★★	Packs a sublime punch – it makes listening a pleasure				●	●	●			1	19x41x53
Michell Orbe SE/Tecnoarm A	2675	01.09/FT	★★★★★	Don't buy anything without hearing this deck first				●	●	●			2	26x64x53
Origin Live Calypso package	2440	12.11/FT	★★★★★	Impressive package, but lacks some attention to detail				●	●	●	●	●	1	14x45x38
Pro-Ject 2 Xperience X-Pack	1000	08.10/GT	★★★★★	Precision and integration to keep it among the top players				●	●	●	●	●	1	14x46x39
P'ject Xten./Ortof. RS-309D	4000	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Proves Pro-ject can compete at all price levels				●	●	●	●	●	4	25x55x45
Rega RP6/Exact	1000	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable £800+, Awards 2013				●	●	●	●	●	8	12x45x36
Roksan Radius 5.2	1375	Aw.09/FT	★★★★★	Best turntable £1200+, Awards 2010. Superb performance				●	●	●	●	●	8	15x45x37
Roksan Xerxes 20 Plus (Pack)	6275	10.08/FT	★★★★★	A truly exceptional turntable				●	●	●	●	●	3	12x45x37
Thorens TD160HD/TP250	1560	10.08/GT	★★★★★	One of the best at this price				●	●	●	●	●	1	18x43x34
Thorens TD309	1250	06.10/FT	★★★★★	The TD309 is a good deck, but it's no TD160HD on the cheap				●	●	●	●	●	2	13x47x43
Townshend Rock 7	1500	09.09/FT	★★★★★	It's got its quirks, but it's great value for the money				●	●	●	●	●	1	15x40x34



Radios

DAB _____ Digital radio signal that now offers coverage across most of the UK
 Internet _____ Allows you to listen to thousands of radio stations from around the world

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
Pure Evoke D2

Awards 2013: Best Radio up to £100



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Pure Evoke F4

Awards 2013: Best Radio £100-£200



AWARD WINNER
Geneva World Radio DAB+
 Awards 2012: Best Radio £200+

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	★★★★★			●			7x23x8
Pure Digital Elan II	99	01.10/GT	★★★★★	●	●			●	16x28x9
Pure Digital Move 2500	90	11.11/FT	★★★★★	●	●			●	10x6x1.5
Pure Digital Move 400D	90	11.12/GT	★★★★★	●	●			●	8.5x15x2.7
Pure Digital One Classic II	65	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	●	●			●	15x21x7
Pure Evoke D2	85	09.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●		●	●	15x21x7
Q2 Internet radio	90	03.11/FT	★★★★★	●	●		●	●	10x10x10
Roberts Duologic	75	01.10/GT	★★★★★	●	●			●	15x25x8.3
Roberts Expression	90	12.11/GT	★★★★★	●	●			●	18x26x9.0
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	★★★★★	●	●		●	●	13x39x2.3
Pure Evoke D4 with Bluetooth	150	08.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●			●	18x22x12
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

RADIOs continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	DAB	FM	MW	Internet	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Pure Digital Sensia	250	01.10/FT	★★★★★	●	●	●			17x28x18
Revo AXiS	200	12.10/GT	★★★★★	●	●				13x22x15
Revo AXiS XS	200	11.12/GT	★★★★★	●	●		●		12.5x22x15
Revo AXiS X3	200	01.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●		●		12.5x22x15
Revo Domino D3	170	05.10/GT	★★★★★	●	●		●		14x22x13
Revo Heritage	230	03.10/FT	★★★★★	●	●		●		18x26x10
Revo Pico RadioStation	170	12.10/FT	★★★★★	●	●		●	●	17x11x11
Revo Pixis	100	09.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●				13x16x16
Roberts Revival Cath Kidston	200	01.11/GT	★★★★★	●	●				23x16x12
Roberts Revival iStream	200	12.10/GT	★★★★★	●	●		●	●	15x25x13
Roberts Stream 83i	150	05.10/GT	★★★★★	●	●		●		21x25x13
Ruark Audio R1 MkII	160	11.12/GT	★★★★★	●	●				18x13x14
Tangent Uno	100	01.09/GT	★★★★★		●	●			13x19x13
Tivoli Albergo+	200	02.14/FT	★★★★★	●	●			●	11x19x11
Tivoli Model 10+	160	09.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●				20x12x12
View Quest Retro 1	100	12.11/GT	★★★★★	●	●			●	16x28x9



Hi-fi speakers

Standmounters Usually smaller speakers that need to be put on a stand, not bookshelves
Floorstanders Larger speakers that tend to go louder and deeper than standmounters
Powered Have built-in amplifiers and need mains power to work

Theshortlist



Q Acoustics Concept 20

Awards 2013: Best Stereo Speaker £200-£400



KEF LS50

Awards 2013: Best Standmounter £400-£800



PMC Twenty 22

Awards 2013: Best Standmounter £1500+

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount	Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £200								
Acoustic Energy Compact 1	150	10.11/FT	★★★★★	●			2	22x15x20
Audioengine P4	183	02.10/FT	★★★★★	●			3	23x14x17
Cambridge Audio S30	120	07.07/FT	★★★★★	●			2	23x16x22
Cambridge Audio SX-50	130	04.14/ST	★★★★★	●			2	23x16x24
Mission MX1	150	06.11/GT	★★★★★	●			4	28x17x26
Q Acoustics 2010i	120	07.12/GT	★★★★★	●			4	23x20x15
Q Acoustics 2020i	170	04.14/ST	★★★★★	●			4	26x17x28
SoundScience Frankenspieler FS-1	130	07.12/ST	★★★★★	●			1	9x9x9
SoundScience QSB	85	04.11/FT	★★★★★	●			1	85x85x85
£200-£500								
Acoustic Energy Neo One V2	210	08.11/GT	★★★★★	●			2	36x18x23
Acoust. Energy Neo V2 Three	399	09.10/FT	★★★★★		●		2	91x20x24
Acoustic Energy 301	425	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●			2	30x19x25
Audioengine A5+	290	07.12/GT	★★★★★	●			3	27x18x20
Audio Pro Addon T8	250	06.14/ST	★★★★★	●	●		2	16x10x14
Arcaidys DM1	299	10.10/GT	★★★★★	●			4	30x16x21
Bose Companion 20	200	05.13/GT	★★★★★			●	1	22x9x12
Bose Computer MusicMonitor	250	09.13/GT	★★★★★	●			2	12x7x12
Boston Acoustics A-25	200	08.11/GT	★★★★★	●			3	27x18x23
Boston Acoustics A-26	260	01.12/ST	★★★★★	●			2	33x21x27

SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
£200-£500							
B&W 685	400	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Great Award-winning speakers from B&W. Just edged out by newer rivals	●	4	34x20x33
B&W MM-1	399	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Still good, but there's better available	●	1	17x10x10
Cambridge Audio SLA-25	200	05.12/GT	★★★★★	Not at all bad, but some rivals are better	●	8	22x15x18
Cambridge Audio SX-60	200	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Impressive speakers but they could do with more refinement	●	2	34x20x27
Castle Knight 2	400	02.11/GT	★★★★★	Good, but not as adaptable as we'd like	●	8	38x20x34
Dali Lektor 1	250	10.09/GT	★★★★★	As musically enjoyable as you'll buy at this price	●	2	26x15x21
Dali Lektor 2	299	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Seriously entertaining speakers and simply stunning at this money	●	2	31x18x22
Dali Lektor 3	450	08.09/GT	★★★★★	Bigger isn't always better, as the Lektor 3s prove	●	2	39x20x26
Dali Zensor 1	200	04.14/ST	★★★★★	These brilliant budget standmounters demand a listen	●	2	27x16x22
Dali Zensor 3	300	01.14/FT	★★★★★	If it's entertainment you crave, then these standmounters deliver in spades	●	3	35x21x29
EB Acoustics EB1	470	08.09/GT	★★★★★	You'll have trouble faulting these nifty standmounters	●	2	31x17x27
Epos Epic 1	325	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Punchy and exciting but they can't deliver all-round ability	●	2	31x19x25
Focal Chorus 706V	390	03.11/FT	★★★★★	Thoroughly enjoyable but they may not cut it with dance music	●	3	39x22x29
Focal XS Book	300	07.12/GT	★★★★★	A potent-sounding speaker that brings hi-fi listening to your desktop	●	1	28x11x20
Focal XS Book Wireless	300	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Stacks of detail but not quite the measure of their rivals	●	1	28x11x20
KEF Q300	450	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Not quite at the top anymore, but still fine, engaging standmounters	●	3	36x21x30
Leema Xero	495	07.08/GT	★★★★★	Not a true all-rounder, but loaded with talent	●	5	25x25x16
Monitor Audio Bronze BX 1	200	05.11/FT	★★★★★	Stylish as you like, but not the complete article	●	4	26x17x18
Monitor Audio Bronze BX2	250	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers £200-£350, Awards 2012	●	4	35x19x26
Monitor Audio Silver RX1	425	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Well-made and refined speakers, just lacking the flexibility of its rivals	●	6	31x19x24
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 1XR	250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Still great, but the rivals have caught up	●	1	28x18x27
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 2	300	03.10/FT	★★★★★	Plenty of bang for your buck, and more besides	●	3	32x21x30
Mission MX2	200	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Dynamic enough but maybe too exciting	●	4	34x21x31
Mission MX3	350	11.11/GT	★★★★★	Peppy and communicative floorstanders	●	4	82x17x34
Pioneer S-CN301-LR	200	04.14/ST	★★★★★	Polished, insightful and appealing	●	1	23x14x22
Q Acoustics Concept 20	350	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers £200-£400, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	●	2	26x17x28
Q Acoustics Q-BT3	350	06.14/ST	★★★★★	There are few products as versatile and as easy to like as the Q-BT3s at this price	●	4	31x19x24
Q Acoustics 2050i	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	06.14/ST	★★★★★	Best desktop speakers, Awards 2013	●	3	17x13x14
Tangent Evo 5	200	05.09/FT	★★★★★	Considered, grown-up and a supremely easy listen	●	2	23x15x20
Tannoy Mercury V1i	150	04.14/ST	★★★★★	A stylish, self-assured pair of speakers that are well worth auditioning	●	2	30x17x26
Tannoy Mercury V4	380	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £350-£700, Awards 2011	●	2	97x20x28
Tannoy Mercury V4i	400	01.14/FT	★★★★★	An exciting and punchy listen, but it comes with compromises	●	1	100x20x28
Tannoy Revolution DC4	380	06.13/GT	★★★★★	Well worth considering if your listening room isn't too big	●	2	27x15x16
Tannoy Revolution DC6	400	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Best standmounter £350-£700, Awards 2012	●	1	36.5x20x25
Teufel Ultima 60	368	12.09/FT	★★★★★	Bargain speakers with a big, bold sound that's engaging and exciting	●	1	103x21x32
Triangle Color	470	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Small, but perfectly formed	●	3	29x17x24
Wharfedale Diamond 121	230	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Fabulous sound. For insight and entertainment, the 121s needn't fear any rival	●	7	32x17x23
£500-£1500							
Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic	1000	07.11/GT	★★★★★	A classic yes, but not the best around	●	2	30x18x26
Acoustic Energy AE22 Active	899	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Talented active speakers not easily matched	●	1	25x35x30
Audio Pro LV2e	700	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Wireless desktop speakers with a hi-fi flourish	●	3	98x14x24
Audiovector Ki1 Super	800	04.12/GT	★★★★★	These pint-sized speakers lack far-reaching dynamics, but are easy to live with	●	5	98x14x24
Audiovector Ki3 Standard	1200	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Packed with resolution and speed	●	5	98x14x24
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
AVI ADM9.1	1125	07.12/GT	★★★★★	A simple way to make the most of your music	●	5	30x20x26
B&W 683 S2	1150	07.14/ST	★★★★★	A strong, talented and versatile performer	●	4	99x19x36
B&W 685 S2	500	05.14/GT	★★★★★	A superb, hugely entertaining pair of speakers. Worth the wait? Absolutely	●	2	35x19x32
B&W CM8	1250	08.11/FT	★★★★★	Stunning in some ways but not the last word in integration	●	4	96x25x30
B&W XT2	700	07.08/GT	★★★★★	Classy, sophisticated but the sound lacks bite	●	2	31x15x20
Cabasse Minorca MC40	720	02.11/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for those who like finger-snapping ability	●	2	40x23x28
Dali Ikon 1 MK2	530	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Huge sound and good timing, these Dalis are heartily recommended	●	3	33x15x26
Dali Ikon 6 MK2	1200	09.10/FT	★★★★★	Cleaner, clearer and more insightful than its forerunner	●	3	100x19x36
Dali Lektor 6	750	12.08/FT	★★★★★	Only the bass stops these good speakers becoming great	●	3	26x16x14
Dali Lektor 8	1200	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Likeable as long as you can live with the size and bass	●	2	106x27x37
Dali Mentor Menuet	900	07.12/ST	★★★★★	These Menuets are something of a gem	●	2	25x15x23
Dali Zensor 5	549	11.11/GT	★★★★★	Compact and affordable floorstanders	●	2	84x16x27

SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Dali Zensor 7	729	06.12/FT	★★★★★	Not flawless, but musical and enjoyable performers	●		3	98x21x31
Dynaudio DM 2/6	535	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Best stereo speakers £300-£600, Awards 2010. Just the right amount of sparkle at the top end	●		2	29x17x24
Dynaudio DM 2/7	600	08.09/GT	★★★★★	A seriously competitive speaker at this price point	●		1	36x22x27
Dynaudio DM3/7	1300	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Plenty of positives in this mid-range floorstander	●		2	96x20x27
Dynaudio Excite X14	945	12.13/ST	★★★★★	A crisp and clean sound is shortchanged by a lack of versatility	●			29x17x26
Dynaudio MC-15	780	09.08/GT	★★★★★	Well-executed active speakers	●		1	26x17x24
Dynaudio Xeo 3	1365	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Versatile wireless speakers	●		2	28x17x26
EB Acoustics EB2	669	09.10/GT	★★★★★	Remarkable performers that should worry the competition	●		2	45x23x30
Eclipse TD508 Mk3	960	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Not an all-rounder, but still a rather special speaker	●		3	29x18x27
Edwards Audio SP1	550	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Enjoyable performers but up against top-quality competition at this price level	●		4	31x17x25
Elac BS243	1050	07.11/GT	★★★★★	These standmounters crave excitement	●		5	29x17x22
Elac BS 142	600	05.14/GT	★★★★★	An organic sounding and entertaining pair of speakers that are fun to listen to	●		1	26x16x26
Elac FS 147	1100	07.14/AT	★★★★★	A fun set of speakers if you're after entertainment over analysis	●		1	95x22x30
Elipson Planet L	600	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Charming in many ways, with good transparency	●		3	40x42x43
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	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Still great but now surpassed by newer rivals	●		4	28x18x29
KEF X300A	600	09.13/FT	★★★★★	A smooth, relaxed sound that lacks punch and dynamics	●		1	28x18x24
Kudos X2	1450	03.11/GT	★★★★★	These floorstanders have much to recommend them	●		6	78x17x21
Klipsch RB-81	540	08.09/GT	★★★★★	If you like to party hard, audition these Klipschs	●		2	48x24x31
Leema Xone	995	10.09/FT	★★★★★	In certain areas nothing else comes close at this pricepoint	●		6	85x14x21
MAD 1920	1350	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Impressive and powerful, although not as precise as its peers	●		5	28x19x23
Martin Logan Motion 15	795	12.13/ST	★★★★★	Needs a bit more authority but let loose in a smaller room they can really sing	●		2	29x13x24
Mission SX2	700	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Dependable and capable, the SX2s product an authoritative sound at a fine price	●		5	38x23x37
Monitor Audio Bronze BX5	500	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Fine, refined speakers but outclassed by stronger newcomers	●		4	85x17x25
Monitor Audio Gold GX50	950	12.13/ST	★★★★★	Still good and still great looking, but loses out to rivals in terms of musical engagement	●		5	30x17x26
Monitor Audio Silver 1	500	05.14/FT	★★★★★	A bit fussy when it comes to positioning, the Silver 1s still ooze quality	●		6	31x19x26
Monitor Audio Silver 6	1000	12.13/FT	★★★★★	The Silver 6s reveal plenty of detail, but there are better all-rounders out there	●		6	89x19x24
Monitor Audio Silver RX2	630	10.12/GT	★★★★★	A lot of speaker and a lot of sound	●		6	37.5x23x30
Monitor Audio Silver RX6	800	12.09/GT	★★★★★	A sensational product from Monitor Audio - detailed, dynamic and very attractive, too	●		6	91x28x31
Monitor Audio Silver RX8	1050	06.10/FT	★★★★★	If you're addicted to bass, these floorstanders 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



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SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (wxdxcm)
£500-£1500							
Neat Motive SX2	1395	07.14/ST	★★★★★	Great little speakers with only a few small imperfections	●	4	77x16x20
Neat Petite SX	1250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Small and perfectly formed standmounters	●	6	31x20x18
PMCD81i	1050	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Superbly detailed and rewarding small speakers	●	4	29x16x23
PMCTwenty 21	1485	10.13/GT	★★★★★	If you're looking for a top-class pair of standmounters, these are well worth a listen	●	4	33x15x28
PSB Imagine Mini	600	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Tiny speakers with a surprising amount of heft. Good for a smaller room	●	5	23x14x21
Opera Mezza	850	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Suave-looking and good-sounding, but these don't possess the sonic assertiveness of some	●	3	32x20x33
Q Acoustics Concept 40	1000	07.14/ST	★★★★★	A refined and easy-going pair of speakers. They deserve serious consideration	●	2	97x17x29
Quad 9AS	600	07.14/FT	★★★★★	A decent pair of speakers but they need more punch and verve	●	3	30x15x21.5
Quad 12L Classic	500	11.11/FT	★★★★★	There's plenty to admire here	●	4	34x21x28
Rega RS3	780	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Floorstanders that are effortless with dynamics	●	3	80x22x25
Revolver Music 3	650	06.10/FT	★★★★★	Big, bold looks disguise an easy-going character	●	4	39x21x28
Revolver Music5	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
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 S3/5R2	850	07.11/GT	★★★★★	A little less than the sum of their parts	●	4	31x17x18
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	07.14/ST	★★★★★	Best floorstander £800-£1500, Awards 2013	●	1	100x31x28
Tannoy Rev. Sig. DC4	600	07.12/GT	★★★★★	DC4s are still appealing across the board	●	2	27x17x18
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
Aurousal VS	1650	04.11/FT	★★★★★	When they're good, these Aurousal's are great	●	3	108x22x27
Analysis Audio Omega	14500	08.11/FT	★★★★★	These planar floorstanders are a sonic treat	●	1	168x61x6
ATC SCM 100A	11615	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Massively talented and proportioned	●	4	107x40x56
Beauhorn Rhapsody B2	2750	10.07/FT	★★★★★	Outlandish shape but treat them right and you'll be deeply rewarded	●	98	120x34x75
B&O BeoLab 9	5060	05.07/FT	★★★★★	Work not just as style but in hi-fi terms too	●	4	78x40x430
B&O 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 Easysa	1800	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Convenient and easy to use, these Focals are compromised by a relaxed delivery	●	2	90x17x24
GamuT M'inent M3	5140	03.14/FT	★★★★★	These are some of the best standmounters we've ever heard	●	10	40x23x46

SPEAKERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Image Audio IA8	2000	02.12/GT	★★★★★	Deeply impressive wall-mounted alternatives to convention			1	59x48x10
Jamo R907	5500	04.09/FT	★★★★★	The innovative R907s are stunningly capable speakers	●		1	119x44x19
JBL Studio 580	1500	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Hugely capable floorstanders for the money	●		2	107x25x35
KEF Reference 207/2	12000	10.08/FT	★★★★★	Big, bold and stunningly built, they major on bass	●		4	123x40x69
Kudos Cardea C30	5650	07.10/FT	★★★★★	Ideal if musical enjoyment is your top priority	●		7	112x20x27
Linn Akubarik	15600	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Deeply impressive engineering but its presentation veers towards the clinical	●	200+		105x35x45
Monopulse 42A	2000	07.09/GT	★★★★★	Odd appearance apart, there's an awful lot to like about these Monopulses	●		10	108x23x25
Monitor Audio Gold GX200	2300	03.12/FT	★★★★★	Pretty looks and excellent refinement	●		2	90x17x30
Mon. Audio Platinum PL300	6000	03.08/FT	★★★★★	Its been a long time coming, and it is well worth the wait	●		3	111x41x47
Naim Ovator S-400	3650	10.13/GT	★★★★★	The most rounded Naim speaker we've heard	●		5	106x33x35
Neat Ultimatum XLS	4500	09.12/FT	★★★★★	An entertainer of the highest order if partnered with care	●		9	38x22x37
Opera Callas	2375	01.09/FT	★★★★★	Arguably the best standmounter at this price level	●		3	37x23x34
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
PMC PB1i	5850	09.09/GT	★★★★★	Simply excellent speakers: big, bold and accomplished	●		1	108x20x40
PMCTwenty 22	1970	07.12/GT	★★★★★	Best standmounter £1500+, Awards 2013	●		4	41x18x37
PMCTwenty 23	2300	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £1500+, Awards 2013	●		4	92x15x33
PMC Wafer 2	2295	02.12/GT	★★★★★	A real achievement for those after proper hi-fi			2	57x35x10
ProAc Response D18	2145	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best floorstander £1500+, Awards 2011	●		6	93x19x27
ProAc Response 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
Sonus F. Cremona Auditor M	2690	06.08/FT	★★★★★	One of the best standmounts money can buy	●		2	35x20x37
Sonus F. Liuto Monitor Wood	1649	01.10/FT	★★★★★	These are classy and natural standmounters	●		2	35x19x34
SP Acoustics SP1 Signature	14950	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Able to challenge the very best at this exalted level	●	Any		106x35x46
Spendor A5	1695	03.11/GT	★★★★★	The most accomplished speakers for this money	●		4	79x17x25
Spendor A6R	2500	02.14/GT	★★★★★	An outstanding pair of speakers that do very little wrong	●		5	87.5x19x28
Spendor D7	3500	10.13/GT	★★★★★	The finest Spendors in years	●		6	95x20x32
Tannoy Precision 6.2	1700	10.13/GT	★★★★★	A beautifully balanced and hugely listenable pair of standmounters	●		3	100x31x28
Tannoy Precision 6.4	2200	02.14/GT	★★★★★	If bass is important to you, then these speakers are worth an audition	●		3	105x31x35
Tannoy Definition DC8	2500	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Capable of seriously controlled sound	●		3	47x27x26
Tannoy Definition DC10T	5250	10.13/GT	★★★★★	While the DC10Ts aren't the most refined speakers out there, they're easy to love	●		3	113x34x32
Totem Element Ember	3995	05.14/FT	★★★★★	If you're looking for entertainment, we can't think of a better alternative	●		2	36x11x25
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
Triangle Signature Delta	4900	07.14/FT	★★★★★	If you value excitement and entertainment, put these speakers at the top of your shortlist	●		3	123x37x39
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



Spondor D7 Technology or Music?

Spondor's approach is the most radical I've seen, going where no hi-fi manufacturer has gone before. D7 is extremely capable and very neutral indeed, but most importantly it puts the music first.

Hi-Fi + Dec 2013

However it's been achieved, we can't help but marvel at the sound from the D7's. Spondor D7's set the standard for speakers at this price.

What Hi-Fi Oct 2013

Let the technology work - Hear the music

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★

hi-fi+

HI-FI Choice
★★★★★

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Denon Mega-deals

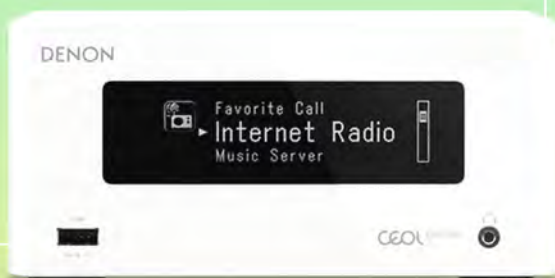
USB/AirPlay/WiFi Networked Micro
System with iPod Dock
Denon DRAH5

SAVE £49

RRP: £229.00
SAVE: £49.05

£179.95

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
MARCH 2013



CD/FM/USB/AirPlay/WiFi Networked
Mini System With iPod Dock
Denon RCDN8

RRP: £329.00
SAVE: £69.05

£259.95

SAVE £69



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2010 for only £99.95
and save £64.95

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
APRIL 2010



Speaker System
Boston Acoustic XS 5.1 SE

RRP: £199.95
SAVE: £20.00

£179.95

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
DECEMBER 2011



SAVE £20

Soundbar with Wireless Subwoofer
Roth BAR3

RRP: £249.00
SAVE: £100.00

£149.00

SAVE £100



Portable Wireless Speaker
with Bluetooth & AirPlay
Harman Kardon
Onyx

RRP: £429.00
SAVE: £130.00

£299.00

SAVE £130



Wireless Speaker
with Airplay
Audio Pro Allroom
Air One

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
AUGUST 2013

SAVE £100

RRP: £499.00
SAVE: £100.00

£399.00



Recertified Wireless Sound
System with Lightning Dock
B&W Z2

RRP: £329.99
SAVE: £79.99

£250.00

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
JUNE 2013

SAVE £79



55" Ultra HD LED Smart TV
Samsung UE55HU6900

55" Screen

Ultra HD



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40" Version available
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Sale Headphones

Recertified Mobile
HiFi Headphones
B&W P5

SAVE £64

RRP: £249.00
SAVE: £64.00

£185.00



Recertified
Headphones
B&W P3

SAVE £44

RRP: £169.00
SAVE: £44.00

£125.00



Noise Cancelling
Portable Headphones
Goldring NS1000
Expedition

RRP: £139.95
SAVE: £70.00

£69.95

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
OCTOBER 2012

SAVE £70



Closed-back
Headphones
AKG K551

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
FEBRUARY 2013

RRP: £228.95
SAVE: £133.95

£95.00

SAVE £133



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Bluetooth Wireless Speaker
JBL Flip 2

OUR PRICE
£99.95



Home Cinema Receiver
Yamaha RXV377

OUR PRICE
£259.95



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AUGUST 2014

Networked 3D Ready BluRay/DVD Player
Panasonic DMPBDT260

OUR PRICE
£119.00



WHAT HI FI? AWARDS 2014
AUGUST 2014

Speakers

Floorstanding Speakers
B&W 683 S2

OUR PRICE
£1149.00



WHAT HI FI? AWARDS 2013
AUGUST 2014

Speakers
Wharfedale 9.1

"A superb budget option"
What HiFi? Awards 2004

RRP: £179.95
SAVE: £80.00
£99.95

SAVE £80



WHAT HI FI? AWARDS 2005
WHAT HI FI? AWARDS 2004
DECEMBER 2007

Home Cinema

Projector
Epson EHTW6100

RRP: £1299.00
SAVE: £150.00
£1149.00

SAVE £150



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OCTOBER 2013

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NOVEMBER 2013

CD Player
Marantz CD6005

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WHAT HI FI? AWARDS 2013
NOVEMBER 2013

Stereo Amplifier
Marantz PM6005

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APRIL 2014

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Monitor Audio ASB2

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£800.00

SAVE £200



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OCTOBER 2013

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Price Match Promise

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Stereo amplifiers

Integrated These amplifiers combine a preamp and power section in one box
Power output A higher number usually means louder, depending on speakers
Digital inputs Some amplifiers now have a DAC built in, which could be useful

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Power (w)	DAC	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	USB in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Speakers out	Tone controls	Headphone out	Remote control	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
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		0	1				1	22x32x31
Marantz PM-KI Pearl Lite	900	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Decent performance at an affordable price	70		3	1	0		2	●	2	●	●	●	2	13x44x38
Marantz PM6004	310	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Product of the Year - Stereo amplifiers, Awards 2011	45		5	1	0		1	2	●	●	●	●	2	11x44x37
Marantz PM6005	300	05.14/GT	★★★★★	A shot across the bow to Marantz's rivals. An excellent system	45		5	1	0		1	2	●	●	●	●	2	11x44x37
Monitor Audio Airstream A100	400	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Insightful and composed, this is a worthy rival to the NAD D 3020	50	●	1	0	0		0	●	1			●	2	5x37x21
NAD C316BEE	260	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A decent listen that's overshadowed by rivals	40		5	0	0		1	1	●	●	●	●	2	8x44x29
NAD C326BEE	300	07.10/GT	★★★★★	A really musical amplifier to grace any budget system	50		7	0	0		2	●	1	●	●	●	1	10x44x29
NAD C356BEE	600	10.10/FT	★★★★★	A party animal of an amplifier	80		7	0	0		2	●	2	●	●	●	1	13x44x34
NAD C356BEE DAC	695	01.12/FT	★★★★★	A good amplifier with a great DAC	80	●	8	0	0	●	2	●	2	●	●	●	1	13x44x34
NAD D 3020	400	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp up to £500, Awards 2013	30		2	0	0	●	0	1			●	●	1	19x6x22
NAD D 7050	800	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Admirable, but not quite the measure of its cheaper rivals	50	●	0	0	0	●	0	●	1		●	●	1	24x7x27
Naim Nait 5i	875	05.13/ST	★★★★★	A strong all-round performer	50		4	0	0		1	1				●	1	7x44x31
Naim Nait 5si	925	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £800-£1500, Awards 2013	60		3	0	0		1	1	●	●	●	●	1	7x43x31
Onix A-25	775	05.13/ST	★★★★★	A good choice for those who value finesse over muscle	30		3	0	0		0	●	1			●	1	9x21x36
Onkyo A-9030	300	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Proof that Onkyo knows how to build good stereo gear	65		4	1	0		1	2		●	●	●	2	14x44x33
Onkyo A-9050	350	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Lean presentation, but there's plenty to like	75		5	1	0		1	●	1	●	●	●	2	14x44x33
Peachtree iDecco	999	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Ideal for a digital based set-up	40		1	0	0	●	1	●	1		●	●	1	13x38x29
Pro-Ject Stereo Box S	200	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A small amp that's worth investigation	40		2	0	0		0	1				●	2	4x10x10
Pioneer A-A6	350	03.08/FT	★★★★★	Among the most fluent amps under £500	45		3	1	0	●	1	1	●	●	●	●	2	10x42x36
Pioneer A-70	800	05.13/ST	★★★★★	Excels in many areas, falls short of class-leading	90		3	1	1	●	1	●	2	●	●	●	2	14x44x36
Rega Brio-R	480	06.12/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £400-£600, Awards 2012	50		4	1	0		1	1				●	2	8x22x31
Roksan Kandy K2	795	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amp £700-£1000, Awards 2011	125		5	1	0		1	●	1		●	●	3	10x43x38
Roksan Kandy K2 BT	895	05.14/FT	★★★★★	Full of power and punch but some heart and soul is missing	140		5	1	0		1	●	1		●	●	2	11x43x38
Rotel RA-10	350	05.14/GT	★★★★★	Sounds good, but rivals offer more insight and better digital features	40		4	1	0		1	●	2	●	●	●	2	7x43x34
Rotel RA-12	600	05.13/ST	★★★★★	Well priced, appealing amp, just lacks a little expression	60	●	4	1	0	●	1	●	1	●	●	●	2	14x44x36
Wadia 151 PowerDAC Mini	999	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A compact digital amp with plenty of appeal	25	●	0	0	0	●	0	1				●	1	7x20x20
Yamaha A-S300	195	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Solid performer but you can get better for a little more money	60		6	1	0		1	1	●	●	●	●	2	15x44x39
Yamaha A-S500	330	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier up to £500, Awards 2010.	85		3	1	0		2	2	●	●	●	●	2	15x44x39
£1000 and above																		
Audio Analogue Class A Int. SE	9190	06.11/FT	★★★★★	A fantastic, and sonically rounded performer	50		5	0	0		1	1				●	1	33x45x41
ATC SIA 2-150	2379	02.10/GT	★★★★★	One of the best amplifiers at this price level	150		4	0	0		1	●	1		●	●	1	14x44x35
Bryston B60R	2600	07.09/FT	★★★★★	The Bryston B60R may be unassuming, but has quality	60		4	0	0		1	1		●	●	●	2	5x43x28
Cambridge Audio Azur 851A	1200	12.12/GT	★★★★★	For scale, power, build and style, this is hard to beat	120		8	0	0		1	●	2	●	●	●	2	12x43x39
Chord Elec. Cyan Click HP	4215	07.10/FT	★★★★★	Stylish, and astonishingly well built too	100		2	0	0	●	0	1				●	2	6x34x15
Creek Evolution 5350	1025	06.10/FT	★★★★★	There's lots to like here, but better available elsewhere	120		5	1	0		0	●	2		●	●	1	9x43x34
Cyrus 6XPD	1250	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A sturdy DAC-toting amp that's a cracker	40	●	6	0	0	●	1	●	2		●	●	2	7x22x36
Cyrus 8a	1200	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Everything we've come to expect and love about Cyrus	70		5	0	0		1	●	2		●	●	2	7x22x36
Cyrus 8 DAC	1400	07.12/FT	★★★★★	Meticulous and engaging amp and DAC combo	70	●	6	0	0	●	0	2			●	●	2	7x22x36
Cyrus 8 XPd	1500	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Sets a sky-high standard at the price point	70		5	0	0	●	1	●	1		●	●	2	7x22x36
Cyrus 8XP	1250	11.09/GT	★★★★★	The Cyrus 8XP misses nothing out in sonic thrills	70		6	0	0		1	●	1		●	●	2	7x22x36

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)
Cyrus DACXP Signature	2750	11.13/FT	★★★★★	With the Signature upgrade, the DACXP remains a fine product	70	2	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	7x22x36
Dartzeel CTH-8550	16858	05.10/FT	★★★★★	Well engineered - but with a colossal price tag	200	7	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	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	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	18x43x44
Devialet 110	4490	02.14/FT	★★★★★	An exceptional all-rounder	110	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	4x38x38
Devialet D-Premier	11450	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A fresh look at amp design	240	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	4x40x40
EAR Yoshino V12	7000	07.13/FT	★★★★★	This terrific integrated amp needn't fear any rival at this price	50	5	0	0	1	1	1	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	1	1	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	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	1	8.5x43x35
Leema Tucana Mk II	3595	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier £2000+, Awards 2010.	148	7	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	10x43x36
Leema Elements	1395	12.12/GT	★★★★★	Solid choice, wide connection range and optional DAC	56	3	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	9x22x28
Myryad MXI2080	1000	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Assiduous, precise presentation	80	6	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	9x44x38
NAD C 390DD	2250	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Novel thinking delivers an alternative to the favourites	150	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	13x43x39
Naim Nait 5XS	1500	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Still a top class premium amplifier	60	3	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7x43x30
Naim Nait XS 2	1595	10.13/GT	★★★★★	An improvement on the Nait XS, even if it sacrifices a little detail	70	5	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	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	1	1	1	1	1	1	9x43x31
Pathos Ethos	3800	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Mixes style and substance better than any rival	100	7	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	15x43x49
Pathos InpolRemix	3800	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Not cheap or powerful - just brilliant	10	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	18x33x29
Pathos Logos	3650	09.08/FT	★★★★★	An inspirational amp: wonderful with all music	110	6	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	15x48x22
Plinius Hautonga	4455	07.11/FT	★★★★★	A powerhouse of an integrated amplifier	200	5	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	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	1	1	1	1	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	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	1	1	1	1	1	1	12x44x35
Rega Elicit-R	1600	10.13/GT	★★★★★	This is truly a fantastic amplifier	105	5	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	8x43x34
Roksan Caspian M2	1695	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best stereo amplifier £1500+, Awards 2013	85	5	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	8x43x33
Sony TA-A1ES	2000	04.14/FT	★★★★★	Not quite a flawless effort but talented enough in key areas	80	5	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	13x43x42
Synthesis Shine	2449	07.10/FT	★★★★★	This valve design needs sensitive speakers to fly	40	5	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	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	1	1	1	1	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	1	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	1	1	1	1	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	1	1	1	1	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	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	26x19x35
Unison Research Triode 25	2350	08.14/FT	★★★★★	An absolutely superb amplifier from Unison Research	45	5	0	0	Opt	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	20x30x45



Preamps

Preamps are also known as control units. On a most basic level, they perform two functions: source selection and volume control. Most powered preamps also amplify the signal slightly in order to make matching to a power amplifier easier. Some include phono stages.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Balanced out	Headphone out	Tone controls	Remote control	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £5000														
Audio Research LS17	3399	01.09/FT	★★★★★	This top quality product should serve you for decades	7	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	14x48x31
Audionet Pre 1 G3	3525	01.10/FT	★★★★★	As revealing as amplifiers get for the money	5	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	7x43x31
ATCCA-2	1058	12.09/FT	★★★★★	A matchless preamp when paired with the P1 power amp	5	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	9x44x32
Cyrus DACXP+	2550	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Massive ability in a small box	2	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	7x22x36
Cyrus Pre XP d	1300	02.10/GT	★★★★★	Works wonders when coupled with the matching 8 power amp	6	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	7x22x36
Heed Audio Obelisk pre/px	2230	04.13/FT	★★★★★	A superb-sounding preamp, but Heed needs to make it feel more luxurious	5	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	9x22x33
Lavardin C62	3471	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Belongs near the top of any shortlist	6	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	9x43x31
Leema Pyxis	3995	11.11/FT	★★★★★	A versatile, enjoyable preamp	5	1	1	1	1	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	1	1	1	1	9x38x38
NAD C165BEE	650	08.10/FT	★★★★★	A brute of a preamp	4	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	8x44x29
Naim NAC 152XS	975	02.10/GT	★★★★★	It's good, but could do better with dynamics	5	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	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	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	1	1	1	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	1	1	1	1	10x43x34
Townshend Allegri	1895	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Basic features, but terrific sound	6	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	5x13x31

PREAMPS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Balanced out	Headphone out	Tone controls	Remote control	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
£5000 and above													
Audio Research LS27	6500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	A fine preamp but struggles to shine in comparison to the Reference 75	6	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	13x48x34
Aesthetix Calypso Signature	6400	03.11/FT	★★★★★	One of the finest preamps on the market today	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	11x46x45
Bryston BP26DA	5050	08.06/FT	★★★★★	A must-hear preamp. Lacks style but built to last	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	6x49x28
Burmester 808 MK5	22242	02.13/FT	★★★★★	A beautifully constructed, highly versatile preamp for serious devotees	Opt	Opt	Opt	Opt	●	●	●	●	95x48x33
Chord Electronics CPA 8000	25500	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A magnificent preamp, but not quite the masterpiece its price demands	8	0	0	2	●	●	●	●	31x42x36
Chord Electronics Indigo	8670	11.09/FT	★★★★★	A far sighted design mixing useful features with great sound	6	0	0	0	●	●	●	●	36x42x9
Krell Phantom II	12000	11.12/FT	★★★★★	A hugely capable preamp that is able to dig deeply into any recording	8	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	10x44x46
McIntosh C2500	7495	01.14/FT	★★★★★	A refined and entertaining preamp that needs a little care in partnering	8	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	19x44x46
Naim NAC252/Supercap	9070	11.08/FT	★★★★★	Makes a magical combination with the NAP250 power amp	6	0	0	0	●	●	●	●	9x43x31
Plinius Tautoro	6325	09.08/FT	★★★★★	A mighty amplifier in every sense of the word	4	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	16x45x48



Power amps

These are effectively the powerhouse of the system. They deliver the high currents necessary to make a loudspeaker work. They can be configured as a stereo unit, or monoblocs, where the circuitry for each channel is housed separately. Don't judge a power amp by its output level.

Our recommendations

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

"We listened to the Plinius SA-REF amp extensively, yet never failed to be sucked in by its excellence. It makes for a hugely enjoyable experience that, in terms of value for money, almost makes sense"

September 2008

Peter Tyson

Audio Visual Experts

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The end for MP3?

If you own a half decent hi-fi system, using 'FLAC' instead of 'MP3' files could be music to everyone's ears

For those of us that consider themselves a music lover, albeit to different degrees, we are part of a very fortunate generation. We now have access to an ever-growing wealth of recorded music of extraordinary range and depth, effectively accumulated over the last 60 years. With the introduction of the microgroove LP record in the early 1950's, playback quality took a quantum leap forward and this also coincided with a far higher standard of recording techniques. Although further improvements have been made over the years, this was a watershed time that first introduced hi-fi as a reality.

Listening to music has many benefits

Hi-Fi is, of course, a means to an end – the reproduction of music. Many studies over the years have shown remarkable benefits for mankind through listening to music. Making music is intrinsic to all cultures and music is often used for various therapeutic purposes because it involves using the whole brain. It is believed to improve memory and intelligence, improve physical development and coordination, reduce stress and blood pressure, and even reduce levels of pain.

We now have literally millions of recorded music tracks available to us in all genres and many different formats. One trend over recent years, however, has been to deliberately downgrade the quality in order to offer quantity. The main culprits have been MP3 and AAC formats which were designed as a low cost form of delivery when download speeds were slow and computer chip memory was expensive. Neither now applies and both formats should be consigned to history

along with 78 rpm records and the 8-track cartridge. Unfortunately, such is the current market penetration of MP3 and AAC formats that many people today are listening to a considerably lower quality of music reproduction than their peers back in the 1970's.

Bach - my favourite!



Quality vs quantity

Let us explain. The maximum resolution from MP3 and AAC file formats, which are both highly compressed, is 320 kbps (kilobytes per second) which compares with CD quality of 1411 kbps. This means the resolution quality is less than a quarter of that provided by a standard CD. However, most MP3 or AAC files are downloaded over the internet and the most used download resolution is 128 kbps, which is around one-eleventh of CD quality. This should ring alarm bells. If you are only playing back these tracks on an iPod or mobile phone with a pair of earbuds, the quality may be irrelevant to

you. But if these tracks are your primary source of music, perhaps with an iPod dock into a decent hi-fi system, you are only making a very poor quality sound louder. Information is irretrievably lost and the full dynamic range is lacking. The quality will be very poor in contrast with a full resolution version even if you are completely unaware of the loss you are inflicting upon yourself. This can even affect the type of music listened to as most classical recordings downloaded as an MP3 or AAC file will have so much information missing, and all the complexities of the music lost, with the end result that the recording is reduced to just the essence of a tune.

What is the future of recorded music?

There are now positive signs for the future of recorded music. Audiophiles, or hi-fi connoisseurs, have been very important to the music industry as they are generally avid music lovers who aim to maximise their enjoyment by listening to music at its best quality level, which means the play-back of great recordings through hi-end hi-fi to achieve the most outstanding results. Without them, a main driver for quality would probably be removed from the music industry. They have always sought out quality but there is now an increasing awareness among the wider public of the serious deficiencies of the highly compressed formats. Full resolution audio streaming, as well as CD quality downloads, are already available and will surely become the eventual norm with this greater awareness of the tremendous quality benefit. Consumers will vote through their purchases and will seek out higher resolution recordings. Look at Qobuz for a new high-profile entry into this field who offer CD quality (16 bit/44.1 kHz FLAC) streaming for over 15 million tracks.

The benefits of using a specialist dealer

Specialist hi-fi dealers are also a significant driver for maintaining high quality in the music industry. Hi-end hi-fi very soon exposes poor quality recordings and specialist hi-fi dealers are constantly assessing the relative merits of different brands from manufacturers for potential stocking. With specialist hi-fi dealers, achieving the best system performance and seeking out the most outstanding combinations is almost invariably both their hobby and their livelihood. Without them, hi-fi manufacturers and potential customers would have to rely on the opinion of magazine reviewers to assess levels of performance – a notoriously unreliable decision making process. For specialist hi-fi dealers, their relationship with audiophiles and hi-fi connoisseurs is also crucial to them for, if they are to stay in business, they must satisfy the most discerning customers in the industry. The reality is that audiophiles and specialist hi-fi retailers (and the ones listed on this page represent the UK's finest) are essential to each other.

Specialist dealers know how to choose the products that combine as a superb system and how to get the best out of it by expert installation in the home. They also appreciate how exciting and involving music can be and how it can deliver a powerful emotional experience. If there's a price premium over an internet purchase by choosing a specialist dealer, it's probably a small one, but it's unquestionably worth the difference.

“...there is now an increasing awareness among the wider public of the serious deficiencies of the highly compressed formats. Full resolution audio streaming, as well as CD quality downloads, are already available and will surely become the eventual norm.”

Listed below is our selection of **THE BEST HI-FI DEALERS IN THE UK**. They have been chosen because they are known to do an excellent job in guiding customers towards hi-fi that will give years of musical enjoyment and total satisfaction.

Our Top 20 UK Hi-Fi Dealers

SOUTH

Ashford, Kent

SOUNDCRAFT HI-FI
40 High Street.
t: 01233 624441
www.soundcraftthifi.com

Chelmsford

RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
216 Moulsham Street.
t: 01245 265245
www.rayleighhifi.com

Kingston-upon-Thames

INFIDELITY
9 High Street,
Hampton Wick.
t: 020 8943 3530
www.infidelity.co.uk

Maidenhead

AUDIO VENUE
36 Queen Street.
t: 01628 633995
www.audiovenue.com

Norwich

MARTINS HI-FI
85-91 Ber Street.
t: 01603 627134
www.martinshifi.co.uk

Rayleigh

RAYLEIGH HI-FI
44a High Street.
t: 01268 779762
www.rayleighhifi.com

Southend-on-Sea

RAYLEIGH HI-FI SOUND & VISION
132/4 London Road.
t: 01702 435255
www.rayleighhifi.com

LONDON

Ealing

AUDIO VENUE
27 Bond Street.
t: 020 8567 8703
www.audiovenue.com

N1

GRAHAMS HI-FI
190a New North Road.
t: 020 7226 5500
www.grahams.co.uk

SW11

ORANGES & LEMONS
61/63 Webbs Road.
t: 020 7924 2043
www.oandlhifi.co.uk

SOUTH WEST

Bath

AUDIENCE
14 Broad Street.
t: 01225 333310
www.audience.org.uk

Exeter

GULLIFORD HI-FI
97 Sidwell Street.
t: 01392 491194
www.gullifordhifi.co.uk

MIDLANDS

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3 Church Lane.
t: 01295 272158
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Savile Street, Hull
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www.theaudiroom.co.uk

York

SOUND ORGANISATION
2 Gillygate.
t: 01904 627108
www.soundorg.co.uk

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iPod docks

Docks with power _____ These are ready-made systems for your iPod and usually include speakers
Docks without power _____ These integrate an iPod into an existing system as a line level source

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	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
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
Marantz Consolette	700	05.13/FT	★★★★★		●	iOS		150	26x54x21
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

Which wireless streaming tech is right for you?



Bluetooth

Bluetooth streaming is the most versatile method, working with Bluetooth-enabled Android, iOS and Windows smartphones and tablets, as well as many computers. Some makes also offer the higher quality aptX codec.



Airplay

AirPlay streams from Apple products only. Your iPhone, tablet or computer running iTunes will have to be on the same home network as your wireless speaker, and you'll need the internet (and a laptop) to set up AirPlay speakers.



NFC

Near-Field Communication connects to the speaker with one tap of your smartphone or tablet. NFC is available on Android and Windows phones (Apple users will be out of luck), but streaming takes place via Bluetooth.



Wi-fi Direct

Wi-fi direct is used by AudioPro and Libratone, and have a 'Direct' option on their AirPlay speakers. This lets the speaker create its own network that's easy to connect to without the hassle of setting up on the internet beforehand.



Wireless speakers

Bluetooth _____ Universal wireless system that's incorporated into most sources
AirPlay _____ Apple's accepted wireless system; works over your home network

The shortlist



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Cambridge Audio Minx Go



AWARD WINNER
Audio Pro Allroom AirOne



NEW ENTRY
Sony SRS-X9

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	Aux	Charging	Battery	Dimensions (wxd, cm)
Up to £1000									
Audio Pro Allroom Air One	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★						20x31x19
Bayan Audio SoundBook	150	01.14/GT	★★★★★						9x16x4
Bose SoundLink Mini	170	01.14/GT	★★★★★						5x18x6
B&W A5	400	08.13/GT	★★★★★						18x30x20
B&W A7	700	12.12/FT	★★★★★						22x36x16
Bose SoundLink Air	300	12.12/GT	★★★★★						17x31x10
Cabasse Stream 1	500	08.14/GT	★★★★★						14x46x33
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
Dali Kubik Free	625	03.14/FT	★★★★★						31x15x15
Denon Cocoon Stream DSD-501	250	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★						24x45x17
Eclipse TD-M1	1000	08.14/FT	★★★★★						24x16x22
Geneva Model M Wireless	500	08.14/GT	★★★★★						22x30x18
Geneva Model S Wireless DAB+	330	10.13/ST	★★★★★						15x14x18
Harman/Kardon Go+Play	280	05.13/FT	★★★★★						24x50x23
Jawbone Big Jambox	260	09.12/FT	★★★★★						9x26x8
iLuv MobiOut	70	05.13/GT	★★★★★						0x0x0
JBL Charge	120	01.14/GT	★★★★★						18x7x7
JBL Flip	100	05.13/GT	★★★★★						0x0x0
JBL Flip 2	100	07.14/GT	★★★★★						6.5x16x16
JBL OnBeat Rumble	260	10.13/ST	★★★★★						17x45x22
Libratone Zipp	370	10.13/ST	★★★★★						26x12x12
Libratone Loop	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★						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
NAD Viso 1 AP	500	08.14/GT	★★★★★						26x48x30
Panasonic SC-NA10	130	01.14/GT	★★★★★						10x20x3
Philips Fidelio E2	300	06.14/ST	★★★★★						30.5x16x16
Philips Fidelio P9	240	03.13/FT	★★★★★						12x29x5
Pioneer XW-SMA4	350	12.12/GT	★★★★★						21x36x17
Pure Jongo S3	170	06.13/FT	★★★★★						13x13x14
Pure Jongo S3 (pair)	340	06.14/ST	★★★★★						13x13x14
Roth Oli POWA-5	250	06.14/ST	★★★★★						27x18x21
Sonos Play:1	170	01.14/FT	★★★★★						16x12x12
Sony RDP-XA700	285	03.13/GT	★★★★★						18x40x16
Sony SRS-X3	130	07.14/GT	★★★★★						7x19x7
Sony SRS-X9	600	06.14/FT	★★★★★						13x43x13
Sony SRS-BTM8	85	05.13/GT	★★★★★						19x25x9
Tangent Classic	400	08.14/GT	★★★★★						23x60x32
Ultimate Ears Boom	170	01.14/GT	★★★★★						16x6.5x6.5



Headphones

Ear tips _____ Most in-ears come with these. Experiment with size to get the best fit
In-line remote _____ Mostly for Apple devices, but Android-friendly units are increasing. Handy...

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
SoundMAGIC E10

"These are exceptional in-ears for the money, and the new affordable choice for those looking to upgrade those bundled buds."



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
AKG K451

"That character, combined with their excellent build and compact size, makes the K451s a must-audition pair of cans."



AWARD WINNER
Sennheiser Momentum

"They certainly aren't the cheapest, but their refreshingly balanced sound and great design makes them worth every penny."

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight (g)
Up to £70									
AKG K323XSi	50	08.14/FT	★★★★★	As good as you can reasonably expect at this price range	●	Closed			n/a
AKG K451	50	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears up to £100, Awards 2013. 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	49	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Fabulous iPod upgrade: these are unbeatable at the price	●	Open			85
Jays a-Jays Four	50	12.11/FT	★★★★★	The Jays combine looks and performance to alluring effect	●	Closed			14
Jays t-Jays Two	67	09.11/ST	★★★★★	A sure-fire winner for those who like their bass	●	Closed			8
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
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/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears up to £40, Awards 2013	●	Closed			11
SoundMagic PL30	30	01.10/GT	★★★★★	Great headphones that are held back by better value rivals	●	Closed			10
SoundMagic PL50	50	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Comfy and smooth-sounding; great all-rounders	●	Closed			8
Sony MDR-570LP	30	08.10/GT	★★★★★	Comfortable, all-round, on-ear headphones	●	Closed			110
Sony MDR-AS40EX	24	03.09/GT	★★★★★	Sporty headphones that sound weighty and clear	●	Closed			6
Sony MDR-EX500LP	45	09.10/GT	★★★★★	Display good solidity and weight – well worth an audition	●	Closed			7
Vivanco Airc. Studio Monitors	50	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Capable - but should be approached with caution	●	Closed			n/a
£70 and above									
AKG K3003i	1000	04.12/FT	★★★★★	The best, and priciest, in-ears we've seen	●	Closed			10
AKG K370	73	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Impressive for the money	●	Closed			4

HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		In-ear On-ear Type	Noise cancelling Wireless	Weight (g)
AKG K450/HA450	180	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Product of the Year Headphones, Awards 2011	● Closed		120
AKG K545	210	12.13/FT	★★★★★	Built to last but lacks refinement and likeability	● Closed		280
AKG K550	200	02.12/ST	★★★★★	Best home on-ear headphones £150+, Awards 2013	● Closed		305
AKG K551	230	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Smashing all-rounders that really sing	● Closed		305
AKG K845BT	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★	If you like your music clear and uncoloured, then these AKGs are definitely worth a listen	● Closed	●	292
AKG Q701	340	09.11/ST	★★★★★	A great, solid sounding set of cans	● Open		236
AKG Q460	140	02.11/GT	★★★★★	More pros than cons, but still not complete	● Closed		120
Audeze LCD-3	1725	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Very expensive, but there's little to complain about here. Even with that price	● Open		548
Audio Technica ATH-A500	140	02.10/GT	★★★★★	If you're after closed-back cans, give these a try	● Closed		290
Audio Technica ATH-AD700X	190	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Huge headphones that offer an airy, open sound	● Open		265
Audio Technica ATH-ANC1	80	06.10/FT	★★★★★	Their portability and noise-cancelling makes them a viable buy	● Closed	●	100
Audio Technica ATH-CKX9iS	75	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Easy on the ears and very comfortable, but they need a bit more refinement to be great	● Closed		10
Audio Technica ATH-ES55	90	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ear headphone up to £100, Awards 2010	● Closed		120
Audio Technica ATH-ES7	140	02.11/GT	★★★★★	Appearance apart, there's an awful lot to like here	● Closed		160
Audio Technica ATH-ES88	230	02.12/FT	★★★★★	Appealingly eccentric cans	● Closed		130
Audio Technica ATH-EW9	159	10.07/FT	★★★★★	Featherlight phones are awesomely detailed	● Closed		33
Audio Technica ATH-M50	130	02.13/GT	★★★★★	Immersive and refined: a great effort	● Closed		284
Audio Technica ATH-W1000	650	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Expensive, but offer magnificent hi-fi sound	● Closed		350
Audio Technica ATH-W1000X	650	07.10/FT	★★★★★	Best home on-ear headphones £500-£800, Awards 2010	● Closed		350
Audio Technica ATH-WS55i	89	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	An excellent pair of on-ears for the bass-loving iPhone-owner	● Closed		165
Beyerdynamic DTX102iE	75	08.14/FT	★★★★★	There's little to fault with a pair of in-ears that demand to be listened to	● Closed		11
Beyerdynamic Custom One Pro	170	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Accomplished and easy to listen to. We like them	● Closed		290
Beyerdynamic DT880	200	06.09/GT	★★★★★	Comfortable and the sound is impressive	● Open	●	340
Beyerdynamic DTX80	80	12.10/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ear headphones £50-£100, Awards 2010	● Closed		12
Beyerdynamic MMX 101iE	95	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Best in-ears £80-£150, Awards 2013	● Closed	●	11
Beyerdynamic T1	880	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Best home on-ear headphones £800+, Awards 2010	● Closed		350
Beyerdynamic T50P	230	02.12/ST	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears £200+, Awards 2012	● Closed		174
Beyerdynamic T51P	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A fine replacement for the T50Ps, superbly entertaining	● Closed		174
Beyerdynamic T70	456	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Undeniably capable, but don't quite feel worth the money	● Closed		330
Blackbox M10	90	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Good noise-cancellers, but sonically slack	● Open	●	180
Blackbox M10-RB	99	04.12/GT	★★★★★	Impressive, capable and clear-sounding	● Closed	●	180
Blackbox i10	80	12.10/GT	★★★★★	A great set of noise-cancellers, with a good sound to boot	● Closed	●	25
Bose AE2w	200	02.14/GT	★★★★★	No aptX Bluetooth onboard, but still a very listenable pair of cans	● Closed	●	150
Bose MIE2i	120	09.11/ST	★★★★★	A perfect headphone meets microphone solution	● Closed		19
Bose QuietComfort 15	280	04.12/GT	★★★★★	Best noise-cancelling headphones, Awards 2013	● Closed	●	227
B&W P3	170	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Stylish and sonically talented on-ear headphones	● Closed		130
B&W P5	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	They look fantastic and sound just as good	● Closed		195
B&W P7	330	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears, Awards 2013	● Closed		290
Denon AH-D600	200	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Open and spacious. A crisper presentation would make this a five-star product	● Closed		365
Etymotic Research HF2	180	08.09/FT	★★★★★	The same money buys punchier cans, but not ones that fit as well	● Closed	●	26
Etymotic Research HF3	134	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Serious hi-fi quality in a stylish little package	● Closed	●	11
Focal Spirit One	200	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Refined enough, but not the most exciting	● Closed		225
German Maestro GMP 8.35 D	150	10.12/ST	★★★★★	Virtually indestructible sonic goodness	● Closed		220
Goldring NS-1000	100	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Sweet, powerful sounding noise-cancellers	● Closed	●	183

"a discernible improvement in overall clarity... The PowerBar™ is an excellent quality product"

Hi-Fi Choice, May 2014

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HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Weight (g)
£70 and above								
Grado GR10	399	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Stunningly insightful and expressive	●	Closed		9
Grado GR8	300	04.10/GT	★★★★★	Precisely detailed and balanced, but they lack a certain richness	●	Open	●	9
Grado GS1000i	1000	10.09/GT	★★★★★	For sheer, sonic pleasure these cans are stunning	●	Open		312
Grado PS1000	1700	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Undoubtedly one of the finest headphones money can buy	●	Open		500
Grado SR325is	300	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Best home on-ear headphones £150+ Awards 2011	●	Open		330
Grado SR60i	80	02.10/GT	★★★★★	Hugely accomplished and built to last too	●	Closed		125
Grado SR80i	100	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Best home on-ear headphones up to £150, Awards 2013	●	Open		200
Grado iGi	90	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Classy and compact buds	●	Closed		12
Harman/Kardon CL	170	09.12/FT	★★★★★	An impressive headphone debut for Harman/Kardon	●	Closed		195
Jamo IN40i	90	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Chunky and enjoyable buds	●	Closed		11
Jamo wEAR IN20m	70	06.11/FT	★★★★★	These quiet Jamos aren't without charm	●	Closed		13
KEF M200	150	10.13/FT	★★★★★	They don't quite set the market alight, but they are worth an audition	●	Closed		12
KEF M500	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A smooth and refined effort from KEF. Needs a touch more excitement	●	Closed		208
Klipsch Image One	140	05.11/GT	★★★★★	Perfect for those who enjoy a lot of bass	●	Closed		138
Klipsch Image X7i	170	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Klipsch has gone for energy and warmth with the X7is, and it's an addictive combo	●	Closed		16
Klipsch Image X10i	219	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Best in-ears £140+, Awards 2011	●	Closed		320
Klipsch Mode M40	290	02.13/FT	★★★★★	Klipsch's first noise-cancelling headphones are excellent performers	●	Closed	●	356
Klipsch S4i	90	12.09/GT	★★★★★	These Klipschs are great all-rounders, with an exciting edge	●	Closed		12
Klipsch S5i	120	05.11/FT	★★★★★	In-ear buds that strain at the leash	●	Closed		12
Logitech UE 9000	300	03.13/GT	★★★★★	Could be more refined, but make up for this with bundles of energy		Closed	● ●	378
Lindy Premium Headphones	75	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Ideal for those unwilling to break the £100 barrier	●	Closed		225
Martin Logan Mikros 70	150	04.13/GT	★★★★★	If you like your music to be presented with a matter-of-fact approach, these are just the job	●	Closed		13
Monster Beats by Dr Dre	280	03.10/GT	★★★★★	Noise-cancelling cans that are seriously good	●	Closed	●	260
Monster Beats by Dre iBeats	80	03.11/GT	★★★★★	For smooth, bassy sounds they're ace	●	Closed		n/a
Monster Beats Pro by Dre	350	09.11/ST	★★★★★	Brilliant at what they do well	●	Closed		299
Monster Gratitude	199	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Celebrity hook-up cans sound good for the money	●	Open		453
NAD Viso HP50	250	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A promising pair of cans from NAD, but the design lets them down	●	Open		453
Nocs NS400 Titanium	80	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Still great, but there's better for the money	●	Closed		12
Onkyo ES-HF300	180	10.13/GT	★★★★★	A pleasant listen, laid-back and amiable	●	Closed		240
Oppo PM-1	1100	07.14/FT	★★★★★	Oppo's first pair of headphones are a resounding success	●	Open		395
Panasonic RP-HC101	82	04.12/GT	★★★★★	Nice enough sound but average noise cancelling	●	Closed	●	79
Parrot Zik	300	07.13/FT	★★★★★	High-tech headphones that deliver a good performance	●	Closed	● ●	352
Phonak Audeo PFE 022	80	03.11/GT	★★★★★	Pacey, detailed, insightful and recommended	●	Closed	●	14
Phiaton MS300	150	02.12/ST	★★★★★	These over ears deserve careful consideration	●	Closed		140
Philips Fidelio L1	230	05.12/FT	★★★★★	Easy going and comfortable	●	Closed		272
Philips Fidelio M1	125	10.13/GT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears £100-£200, Awards 2013	●	Closed		166
Philips Fidelio M1BT	250	02.14/GT	★★★★★	Best wireless headphones, Awards 2013	●	Closed	●	500
Philips Fidelio S1	70	01.14/GT	★★★★★	Smart and non-invasive earphones. We quite like them	●	Closed		14
Philips Fidelio X1	200	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Another great set of headphones from Philips	●	Open		430
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 558	130	04.14/GT	★★★★★	Other headphones are more skilled but these cans have a silky smooth sound	●	Open		260
Sennheiser HD 598	190	02.12/ST	★★★★★	Too well-mannered for our tastes	●	Open		270
Sennheiser 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 MM 70s	70	01.14/GT	★★★★★	An unassuming pair of earphones that are never less than engaging	●	Closed		13
Sennheiser Momentum	260	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Best portable on-ears £200-300, Awards 2013	●	Closed		190
Sennheiser Momentum 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 PXC310	200	02.11/GT	★★★★★	Perfect for a walk on the mild side	●	Closed	●	115
Sennheiser RS 160	115	05.10/GT	★★★★★	An exciting, affordable option but tiring over longer periods	●	Closed	●	226
Sennheiser RS 180	185	05.10/GT	★★★★★	These comfortable, wireless headphones justify their premium price	●	Open	●	204
Sennheiser RS 220	350	10.12/ST	★★★★★	A very neat wireless solution with great sound quality	●	Open	●	329

HEADPHONES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		In-ear On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling Wireless	Weight (g)
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 SE846	950	06.14/FT	★★★★★	The most capable in-ears we've heard	●	Closed		36
Shure SRH1840	500	06.12/FT	★★★★★	Not cheap, but worth every penny	●	Open		268
Sony MDR-EX650	60	08.14/FT	★★★★★	The EX650s are everything we would expect from a pair of in-earphones	●	Closed		9
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



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

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		CD	Streaming Internet Radio	DAB	FM	Analogue inputs	Digital inputs	Headphone out
Up to £500											
Denon CEOL Piccolo	260	03.13/FT	★★★★★	No matter what the source, the CEOL Piccolo will play all your music in superb style	●	●			●	●	●
Denon CEOL RCD-N8	350	02.14/FT	★★★★★	An attractive option if you're looking for a compact system that does a bit of everything	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Denon D-M39DAB	310	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Best music system up to £400, Awards 2013	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Onkyo CR-N755	300	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best networked micro system, Awards 2012	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Panasonic SC-HC55DB	240	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Great specs and a great sound too	●	●	●	●			●
Panasonic SC-PMX9DB	450	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Well-featured but its laid-back sound makes it a solid buy	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Pioneer X-HM70	350	03.12/GT	★★★★★	Not flawless, but gets much right	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Pioneer X-SMC5-K	300	02.12/FT	★★★★★	An excellent jack of all trades	●	●			●	●	●
Sony CMT-G1BiP	400	12.11/FT	★★★★★	Capable and fun to listen to	●		●	●	●	●	●
TEAC CR-H258i	230	08.10/GT	★★★★★	Big in heart and low in price	●		●	●	●	●	●
Teufel Impaq 40	299	08.10/GT	★★★★★	No frills but near-faultless sound for the money	●			●	●	●	●
Yamaha MCR-140	275	09.10/FT	★★★★★	Large portfolio of functions and it sounds good	●	●	●	●			●
Yamaha MCR-232	300	12.13/GT	★★★★★	Harsh treble docks it a star but it's an impressively compact micro system	●		●	●	●	●	●
Yamaha MCR-550	280	03.11/FT	★★★★★	Ditch the speakers, the CD/receiver is top-notch	●		●	●	●	●	●
Yamaha MCR-555	380	10.11/GT	★★★★★	Vastly improved over the original	●		●	●	●	●	●
£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	●	●		●			
HRT Stage	1200	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Limited inputs and a low-rent feel, but judged on sound alone and it's fantastic							●
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	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

STEREO SYSTEMS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	CD	Streaming	Internet Radio	DAB	FM	Analogue inputs	Digital inputs	Headphone out
£500 and above											
Pioneer P1DAB	550	07.13/FT	★★★★★	Great sound for a sensible price	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Ruark Audio R4i	599	07.11/FT	★★★★★	Best all-in-one music system, Awards 2012	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Sony CMT-G2BNiP	500	04.12/FT	★★★★★	A solid performer in every respect	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
TEAC CR-H700DAB	550	10.11/GT	★★★★★	Great - but not a total all-rounder	●	●	●	●	●	●	●



Surround systems

This category includes a wide variety of systems. Most include a disc drive and now tend to feature video and music streaming capabilities. The speakers supplied tend to either be small satellite designs, or towers that usually provide greater scale and sonic authority.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Blu-ray	3D Blu-ray	DVD	Streaming	Optical in	HDMI in	Channels
Up to £500										
LG HX906PA	425	07.11/GT	★★★★★	Talented enough to warrant an audition	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
Panasonic SC-BTT460	350	06.13/FT	★★★★★	No HDMI inputs but still a cracking system	●	●	●	1	0	5.1
Philips HTS5563	400	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A super budget solution	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
Pioneer BCS-SC626	400	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Great features, with tough competition	●	●	●	2	2	2.1
Q Acoustics Q-TV2	330	11.09/FT	★★★★★	A great way of boosting poor sound on your TV	●	●	●	1	0	2.1
Samsung HT-E5530	450	08.12/GT	★★★★★	Plenty of bang for your bucks	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
Sony BDV-E380	400	07.11/GT	★★★★★	A fine system for the money	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
Sony BDV-N590	400	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Best cinema system, Awards 2012	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
£500-£1000										
Harman-Kardon BDS-570	750	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Compact and ultimately convenient	●	●	●	2	3	5.1
LG BH8220B	600	08.12/GT	★★★★★	A bit pricey, but a good performer	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
LG BH9520TW	600	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Packed with features but a little pricey	●	●	●	1	2	9.1
Panasonic SC-BFT800	600	10.11/GT	★★★★★	A neat and well-priced all-in-one option	●	●	●	1	0	2.1
Panasonic SC-BT735	600	08.10/GT	★★★★★	Good Blu-ray system but lacks polish	●	●	●	2	0	5.1
Panasonic SC-BTT590	500	08.12/GT	★★★★★	An excellent all-in-one Blu-ray system	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
Sony BDV-N7100W	600	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Best cinema system, Awards 2013	●	●	●	1	2	5.1
£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

Before you buy... surround systems



Space matters

There is very little point in cramming a big speaker system into a small room. Instead, try to place your kit in the right areas. Doing so will make a big difference to the overall sound quality.

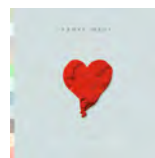
Socket to me

Most all-in-one systems have limited socket counts. If you have lots of sources you need to hook up, make sure you check your prospective buy will do everything you want it to.



Streaming

Streaming functionality is becoming an increasingly important component. Systems are now supporting Spotify, BBC iPlayer and Netflix, so there's a little something for everyone.



Try some music

Many buyers won't have room for both a hi-fi and home cinema system, but all-in-one kit tends not to sound great in stereo. Be sure to play some music on it before you pay.



Speaker stands

Small speakers rely on proper mounting and support just as much as large ones. The wall-mount option offered with some speakers is a good idea – or buy some stands.



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.

The shortlist



Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Disc/DV 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	★★★★★							13x110x18
Cambridge Audio Minix TV	200	02.14/FT	★★★★★							8x43x38
Canton DM 50	400	02.14/FT	★★★★★							6.5x54.5x30
Canton DM 90.2	1100	09.13/GT	★★★★★							15x90x30
Harman/Kardon SB30	800	07.12/FT	★★★★★							10x116x8
JBL Cinema SB200	200	03.14/ST	★★★★★							12x90x10
JBL Cinema SB400	450	06.13/ST	★★★★★							10x110x6
LG NB3520A	250	01.13/GT	★★★★★							8x100x5
LG NB3530A	190	03.14/ST	★★★★★							71x950x50
LG NB4530A	300	06.13/ST	★★★★★							8x104x4
Maxell MXSP-SB3000	220	02.14/FT	★★★★★							8x94x39
Monitor Audio ASB-2	800	11.13/FT	★★★★★							101x19x17
Orbitsound M9	300	06.13/ST	★★★★★							9x30x10
Philips HTL5120	250	03.14/ST	★★★★★							15x400x81
Philips HTL9100	600	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★							7x103x16
Pioneer SBXN700	350	05.14/GT	★★★★★							9x90x12
Q Acoustics Media 4	400	08.14/FT	★★★★★							11x141x100
Sandström S42SWLH13	150	03.14/ST	★★★★★							113x900x48
Samsung HW-E551	400	10.12/FT	★★★★★							10x45x5
Samsung HT-E8200	500	11.12/FT	★★★★★							10x104x13
Sonos Playbar	600	05.13/FT	★★★★★							9x90x14
Yamaha YAS-201	350	06.13/ST	★★★★★							14x43x35
Yamaha YSP-1400	400	05.14/GT	★★★★★							10x100x13
Yamaha YSP-2200	800	10.11/GT	★★★★★							9x89x12
Yamaha YSP-5100	1300	10.10/FT	★★★★★							21x120x9

What to look for... soundbars

Good for... features

One of the great assets of the Sonos Playbar lies in its streaming capabilities. You can send music directly from an iPhone, iPad or iPod Touch. You can connect to internet radio stations and impressively it supports a range of streaming services including Deezer, Last.fm and Spotify. If you're looking for a soundbar that does more than just give your TV audio a boost, then the Sonos Playbar is a great choice.

Good for... connections

An Award-winner from 2013, Monitor Audio's ASB-2 is a pricey unit. But for £1000 you get a soundbar that packs in a wealth of inputs including three HDMI inputs, one coaxial and optical input, a RCA connection and a HDMI out, not to forget DLNA compatibility. In the ASB-2 you have a versatile soundbar with a price that hovers around some excellent surround packages, but importantly saves space.

Good for... space

While some soundbars are small enough not to cause space issues, none can really sit under the TV. Enter the soundbase. Soundbases are still big units, but sitting under a TV's stand is, perhaps, slightly more convenient. Factor in a punchy, dynamic performance for a great deal less amount of money than some of the soundbars we've tested and you have an audio booster that's a steal.



Media servers

These have hard drives built in. Go for the largest storage possible as that leaves room for future expansion of your music and video library.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Hard drive capacity	HDMI out	Optical out	Coaxial out	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/kHz)	Video
Up to £3000														
Lacie Lacinema Classic HD	190	04.10/GT	★★★★★	As good as Apple TV, this needs to be auditioned	1TB	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	24/92	●
Microsoft Xbox 360 (250GB)	200	01.11/FT	★★★★★	Now an appealing media hub as well	250GB	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	16/48	●
Netgear EVA9000	190	04.10/GT	★★★★★	Needs better sound and Apple TV-like usability	500GB	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	24/92	●
Olive 4HD	2150	02.10/FT	★★★★★	This is 21st-century hi-fi at its best	2TB	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	24/192	●
Olive O3HD	900	12.10/FT	★★★★★	A great music server that's nearly excellent	500GB	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	24/192	●
Raumfeld 3Raumfeld	1680	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	A fabulous product to make Sonos sweat	160GB	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	24/96	●



Media streamers

These access the music or video files you have stored on your network. Check for file compatibility and decent control apps that improve usability.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	HDMI out	Optical out	Co-axial out	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/kHz)	Video
Up to £500													
Apple TV	100	06.12/GT	★★★★★	A limited but likeable streamer from Apple	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
Asus O!Play HD2	110	01.11/FT	★★★★★	A flexible streamer improved by a hard disk	1	1	1	0	0	0	3	20/48	●
Cambridge Audio NP30	430	05.12/ST	★★★★★	Still worthy, but there's better around	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	24/96	●
Denon DNP-720AE	250	02.12/GT	★★★★★	A bargain for its features	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	24/192	●
LG ST600	130	07.11/GT	★★★★★	With more apps it could be a class king	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	20/48	●
Marantz NA7004	430	05.12/ST	★★★★★	Unique, flexible and packed with dynamics	0	1	1	0	1	1	2	24/96	●
Netgear NeoTV 550	150	07.11/GT	★★★★★	Decent enough if you know what you're doing	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	24/192	●
Now TV	10	10.13/FT	★★★★★	Oodles of free and premium content makes this a great upgrade for a 'dumb' TV	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
Popcorn PopBox 3D	140	10.11/FT	★★★★★	A Swiss Army Knife of streaming	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	16/48	●
Pure Jonga T2	130	11.13/FT	★★★★★	Cheaper than Sonos but comes with a few niggles	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/48	●
QED uPlay Stream	150	03.14/FT	★★★★★	A handy device that boasts decent sound and good features	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24/196	●
Roku 2XS	100	06.12/GT	★★★★★	A family friendly streamer	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	16/48	●
Sonos Play 3	259	12.11/ST	★★★★★	A cracking little performer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/44.1	●
Sonos Play 5	349	12.11/ST	★★★★★	An ideal one-box network player	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16/44.1	●
Sony NSZ-GS7	180	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Good first Google TV device but needs more apps	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	24/48	●
Sony SMP-N100	120	07.11/GT	★★★★★	A fine mixture of paid-for and catch-up content	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	24/96	●
Sony SMP-N200	100	06.12/GT	★★★★★	A competent and easy to use device	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	24/192	●
ViewSonic VMP72	117	04.10/GT	★★★★★	A decent streamer at a good price	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	24/96	●

Wake up to streaming!



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STREAMERS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	HDMI out	Optical out	Coaxial out	HDMI in	Optical in	Co-axial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/Hz)	Video
£500-£1000													
Cambridge Audio MinXxi	600	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Easy to use, well built and sounds great. A terrific streamer	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	●	24/96
Camb. Audio Stream Magic 6	700	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £600-£1000, Awards 2013	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	●	24/96
Olive O2M	700	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Affordable, but a bit too refined for our tastes	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	●	24/96
Pioneer N-50	400	05.12/ST	★★★★★	Best streamer up to £600, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	●	24/192
Rotel RT-09	650	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Does a lot but not all of it to the standard we'd like	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	●	24/192
£1000 and above													
Bryston BDP-1	2350	06.11/FT	★★★★★	A true hi-fi media player	0	1	1	0	1	0	3	●	24/192
Cyrus Lyric 09	3000	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Controversial looks aside, the Lyric is a really strong sonic performer	0	0	0	0	2	2	3	●	24/192
Cyrus Stream XP	2000	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best streamer £1000-£2500, Awards 2011	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192
Cyrus Streamline	1600	08.11/GT	★★★★★	Best streaming system up to £2000, Awards 2011	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192
Cyrus Stream XP2-Qx	2300	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best streaming system £2000+, Awards 2013	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192
Linn Kiko	2500	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £1500+, Awards 2013	1	0	0	4	1	0	0	●	24/192
Linn Majik DS-I	2500	02.10/FT	★★★★★	Gives a glimpse of the music-streaming future	1	1	1	4	1	1	0	●	24/192
Naim NAC-N 172 XS	1650	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £1000-£2000, Awards 2013	0	2	0	0	2	2	1	●	24/192
Naim ND5 XS	1950	01.12/ST	★★★★★	A thrillingly musical music streamer	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	●	24/192
Naim NDS/555PS	12620	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Engaging sound, bags of detail and many features	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	●	24/192
Naim NDX	2995	07.11/FT	★★★★★	Best streamer £2500+, Awards 2011	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	●	24/192
Naim Uniti	2670	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Best streaming system £2000+, Awards 2011	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	●	24/192
Naim Uniti 2	2795	11.12/FT	★★★★★	Uniti continues to lead the market at this price	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	●	24/192
Naim UnitiLite	1650	12.12/FT	★★★★★	UnitiLite hits the streaming sweet spot	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	●	24/192
Naim UnitiQute	1600	12.11/ST	★★★★★	Systems Product of the Year, Awards 2010	0	0	1	0	2	2	1	●	24/192
Naim UnitiQute 2	1150	09.13/FT	★★★★★	Best music system £800-£1500, Awards 2013	0	0	1	0	2	2	1	●	32/192
Pixel Magic Lumin	5000	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A fine player that leads the field in terms of file compatibility	1	0	1	0	0	0	2	●	24/192
Sony HAP-Z1ES	2000	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A smartly designed, superb-sounding piece of hi-fi	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	●	24/192
T+A MP 1260R	2700	12.10/FT	★★★★★	Amazing – this is proper high-end hi-fi	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	●	24/192
Yamaha NP-S2000	1400	01.12/ST	★★★★★	Network streamer – a solid piece of hi-fi hardware	0	1	1	1	0	1	1	●	24/96

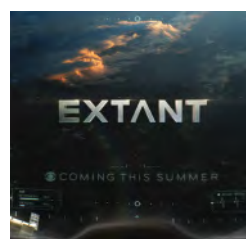
New to streaming

Check out the latest releases on video streaming sites with this look at what's coming to Amazon Prime Instant and Netflix



Archer, Season 4-5 Netflix

Netflix added the fourth and fifth seasons of hit FX series *Archer* to its library and it's here where things heat up. When the spy agency is shut down and left with nothing but a literal tonne of cocaine, they, naturally, all become drug dealers. Hilarity ensues.



Extant Amazon Instant Video

With Halle Berry in front of the camera and Steven Spielberg behind (as producer), *Extant* promises to marry the futurism of Spielberg's *A.I.* with the first contact story of *Close Encounters* in a mystery plot concerning Berry's pregnant astronaut.



Arrow, Season 1 Amazon Instant Video

Based on DC comics superhero *Green Arrow*, this tells the story of Oliver Queen, a billionaire playboy who goes missing and is presumed dead. Five years later he returns and becomes the vigilante called Arrow. Lots of potential with this show.



Orange is the New Black, Season 2 Netflix

Piper and co are back for more prison-themed drama. The second season keeps the deft blend of light humour and dark drama that made the first season so great but throws in some more origin stories, new characters and creepy security guards.



BoJack Horseman, Season 1 Netflix, 22nd August

BoJack Horseman is an adult-animated show about a horse with the voice of Will Arnett. BoJack used to be the star of the sitcom "Horsin' Around" but now just spends his time getting drunk around Hollywood with his friend (Aaron Paul).



Side Effects Amazon Instant Video

Steven Soderbergh retired from directing films last year but he went out on a high with *Side Effects*. With echoes of Hitchcock, this tale of deceit, drugs and murder is an effective thriller with a talented cast and a grey sense of morality.



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

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Freeview	Freesat	Sky	Virgin	YouView	Tuners	Hard drive capacity (GB)	HDMI out	Smart
Up to £500												
Equinix Tizi	150	03.11/FT	★★★★★	Wi-fi Freeview for your iPad, iPhone or iPod Touch	●				1	n/a	0	
Humax DTR-T1000	230	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Best Digital HD recorder, Awards 2012				●	2	500	1	
Humax DTR-T1010 (500GB)	230	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best Freeview HD recorder, Awards 2013				●	2	500	1	
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-FOX2	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	●

What to look for: TV services

As TV services evolve it's handy to know what's out there. Here's our refresher guide to getting free and paid-for TV services.



Humax DTR-T1010 (500GB), £230

Freeview

Probably the most well-known free TV service out there, Freeview has 50 digital TV channels (up to 13 in HD) and 24 radio stations. It's free from any kind of subscription and all you need is a TV or set-top box with a Freeview tuner and a TV aerial.

The strength of the Freeview signal dictates the number of channels you can watch. With a Freeview+ box you can pause and rewind live TV, as well as record a whole TV series that you can playback later.

How can you get it? All new TVs come with a built-in Freeview tuner. A standard Freeview box and a Freeview box with recording features are the other options.

Anything else? Channel 4 HD and 4Seven HD joined the service on July 1st. Good, if you're a fan of the comedy and documentaries.



Humax HDR-1000S (500GB), £220

Freesat

Freesat has a bigger library of TV and radio channels (it claims 200+). Not to be confused with Freesat from Sky, Freesat has 11 HD channels and to get them you need a satellite dish (a Sky dish will do), a TV with Freetime (Freesat's smart TV guide) or a Freesat box.

Not all TVs come with Freesat (far, far less than Freeview), but it boasts interactivity with its Freesat app (iOS only) and Freetime which features daily programme recommendations, on demand services (Demand 5) and catch-up services such as BBC's iPlayer.

How can you get it? A built-in tuner is one option or a Freesat box that with or without recording functionality are your other options.

Any other tidbits? You can only access on demand content through TVs/boxes that are Freetime enabled.



Sky+ HD 2TB, £250

Subscription

The more costly alternative but you won't be lacking for content with either Sky, Virgin or BT. Each has bundles you can purchase for a monthly fee, with the opportunity to upgrade to a bigger bundle or add on smaller packages (movies, sport) for an extra cost each month.

Each comes with a bevy of interactive services, on demand content, catch-up services and second screen (through your tablet or mobile) or multi-room functionality which will incur the cost of a second set-top box.

How can you get it? Purchasing the set-top box with a bundle is your best bet. You can get BT through a YouView box, too.

Anything else? If you're looking for a BT TV app you'll be disappointed. BT only has its online player and a BT Sports app (iOS/Android).



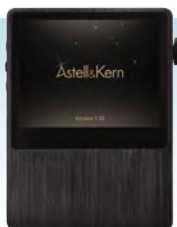
Music/video players

A category of products that has been put under increasing pressure by the rise of the ubiquitous smartphone. At the most basic level it will be a standard music player that can be use in the gym. Higher-end machines will add video, internet browsing and apps as well.

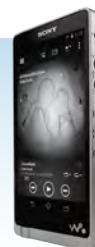
The shortlist



Apple iPod Touch



Astell & Kern AK100 MkII



Sony NWZ-NX1

Also consider

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Web browsing	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Up to £1000								
Astell & Kern AK100 MkII	700	04.14/GT	★★★★★	A few design issues mar a very talented performer	2.5	320x240	32	79x59x15
Apple iPod Classic 160GB	229	09.09/FT	★★★★★	Carry your entire music collection, uncompressed	2.5	320x240	160	60x100x14
Apple iPod Nano 16GB (2012)	130	01.13/FT	★★★★★	A simple, attractive, music-playing wonder	2.5	240x240	16	77x40x5
Apple iPod Shuffle 2GB	40	12.11/GT	★★★★★	Simple and brilliantly effective	n/a	n/a	2	30x30x10
Apple iPod Touch 64GB (2012)	330	12.12/FT	★★★★★	Best iPod Touch so far, but it's fast becoming niche	4	1136x640	64	123x59x6
Archos 5 Internet Tablet	280	03.10/GT	★★★★★	A desirable media player with the occasional flaw	4.8	800x480	32	80x130x13
Cowon X7	200	02.11/FT	★★★★★	A genuine rival to the monopoly of Apple	4.3	480x272	120	127x79x15
Cowon Z2	200	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	A great music player with good sound and flexible storage	3.7	800x480	16	116x63x12
Creative Zen Style M100 4GB	35	12.11/GT	★★★★★	An ultra-portable player with punch	1.45	128x128	4	55x44x13
FiiO X5	290	08.14/GT	★★★★★	A bulky design gives way to a strong, if not outstanding music player	2.4	400x360	n/a	114x68x16
iBasso DX50	200	08.14/GT	★★★★★	Enjoyable and affordable. However it's not the last word in sound quality	1	96x96	8	60x40x20
SanDisk Sansa Clip+ 8GB	40	12.11/GT	★★★★★	A worthy Apple alternative	2.4	320x240	8	10x64x17
Sony NWZ-F805 16GB	200	01.13/FT	★★★★★	This multimedia Walkman is a fine choice	3.5	800x400	16	115x57x9
Sony NWZ-F886	240	08.14/GT	★★★★★	An intuitive interface, good sound and battery make for a well-realised music player	4	854x480	32	116x59x8
Sony NWZ-ZX1	550	04.14/GT	★★★★★	A seriously impressive first attempt at a premium high-res audio player	4	854x480	128	123x61x16

Headphones... what to consider

Sound and comfort aren't the only things you need to consider when picking out headphones...

Controls

If you're going portable, look out for headphones that offer a 3.5mm cable with in-mic and controls to use with your smartphone.

Check if they offer the essential volume controls and how intuitive they are to use. The ability to skip tracks is a bonus but be aware, many brands have in-line controls that are only compatible with Apple devices.

Check to see if they work with Android devices (some do but in a limited way) or if an Android suitable cable has been released if Android is your platform of choice.



Some headphones feature playback controls on the earpad, which at least means you won't have to fiddle with the in-line mic or device

Not all in-line mics will work well with Android devices so check beforehand



Wireless

Wireless headphones aren't quite the match of their wired counterparts sound-wise, but they offer a convenient alternative.

Headphones that have the higher-quality aptX version of Bluetooth would get our vote but not all headphones feature it.

A headphone like AKG's K845BT has Bluetooth 3.0 + HS, but it also has NFC – a one-touch connection between two devices that enables wireless/Bluetooth streaming – good for quick, unfussy pairing of devices.

Wireless headphones tend to come with rechargeable batteries, good for eight to 10 hours of use and some have a USB connection, making them



AKG K845BT, £250



Bose AE2w has a wireless connector that you can detach

great travel partners if you have a laptop (or access to a USB port) to re-charge them with.



Tablets

Android	Offers great flexibility and innovation
Apple iOS	Fantastic ease of use; massive choice of quality apps
Windows	New kid on the block. Watch this space

Our recommendations

Our recommendations											
Product	£	Tested	Verdict		OS	NFC	3G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (hwd, mm)
Up to £600											
Amazon Kindle Fire HD 16GB	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	A great option for those looking for a user-friendly tablet	Android	●		7	1280x800	16/32	193x137x10
Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 7	200	01.14/FT	★★★★★	An excellent tablet but Android fans might find it a little restrictive	Android	●		7	1920x1200	16/32/64	186x128x9
Asus VivoTab ME400	400	04.13/GT	★★★★★	A convincing rival to the Microsoft Surface in the Windows 8 space	Windows 8	●		10.1	1366x768	32/64	263x171x10
Apple iPad Mini 64GB Wi-Fi	430	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Apple hits the bullseye. Again	iOS		●	7.9	1024x768	16/32/64	200x135x7
Apple iPad Mini/Retina display	320	01.14/ST	★★★★★	An absolutely superb tablet that shows its rivals how it's done	iOS 7		●	7.9	2048x1536	16/32/64	200x135x7
Apple iPad 4 16GB Wi-Fi	400	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Best tablet over 8in, Awards 2013	iOS		●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x190x9
Apple iPad Air	400	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Refined and improved, the iPad Air is a stunning piece of technology	iOS 7		●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x170x8
Asus Eee Pad Transformer	380	09.11/GT	★★★★★	A competitive tablet with a keyboard dock	Android		●	10.1	1280x800	16/32	271x177x13
Asus Eee Pad Transformer Prime	500	07.12/FT	★★★★★	A slim and smart tablet that we love	Android		●	10.1	1280x800	16/32	181x263x8
Asus Transformer Pad Infinity	600	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Avery capable iPad alternative and one of the best android tablets	Android			10.1	1900x1200	32/64	263x181x9
Blackberry PlayBook 16GB	400	09.11/GT	★★★★★	There's plenty on offer here, but lacks apps	QNX		●	7	1024x600	16/32/64	130x194x10
Dell XPS 10 32GB	340	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Not perfect but an appealing alternative to the usual suspects	Windows RT		●	10.1	1366x768	32/64	270x180x10
Google Nexus 7	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Best tablet up to £300, Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	Android	●	●	7	1280x800	16/32	199x120x11
Google Nexus 7 (2013)	200	01.14/ST	★★★★★	Best tablet up to 8in, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	Android	●	●	7	1920x1200	16/32	200x114x9
Google Nexus 10	319	01.13/FT	★★★★★	Great performance and price: a real iPad-botherer	Android	●		10	2560x1060	16/32	264x178x9
LG G Pad	260	01.14/ST	★★★★★	Looks the part but struggles against its price rivals	Android	●		8.3	1920x1200	16	216x127x8
Kobo Arc 16GB	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Not for music buffs but a great budget option nonetheless	Android			7	1280x800	16/32	190x120x10
Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1	450	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A great screen that's let down by a cluttered interface	Android		●	10.1	2500x1600	16/32/64	171x243x8
Samsung Galaxy Tab 2 7.0	160	04.13/GT	★★★★★	Find it for the right price and it's a capable all-rounder	Android		●	7	1024x600	8/16	190x120x10
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
Sony Xperia Tablet Z2	400	08.14/FT	★★★★★	Another solid effort, but doesn't do quite enough against the iPad	Android	●	●	10.1	1920x1200	16/32	172x266x64
Tesco Hudl	120	01.14/FT	★★★★★	Not flawless, but this is a superb budget tablet from Tesco	Android			7	1440x900	16	192x129x10

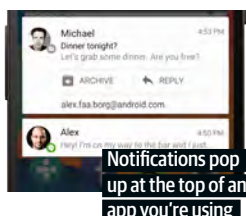
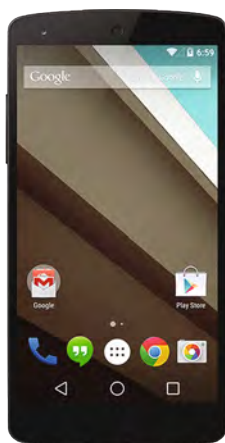
Android L vs. iOS 8

Android L

Recently Google held its I/O conference where it detailed its upcoming OS, Android L. Here are a few of the headline features from Google's presentation...

It seems Android is looking at Apple's most recent iOS refresh as it embraces a more colourful appearance that's filled with animations. The look – dubbed 'Material' – will retain the flat look of recent Android OSes, but added shadows and ripples are said to give the interface a more intuitive feel.

Notifications will be getting an overhaul. Users will be made aware of only the most relevant information (Google will learn over time), and they will appear at the top of the screen if you're within another app, leaving it up to you as to how you'll want to respond.



Notifications pop up at the top of any app you're using

This autumn sees the release of both Android's and Apple's new operating systems and both will undergo major revisions as mobile devices become more popular

iOS 8

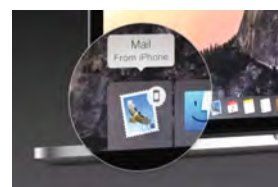
Tim Cook unveiled iOS 8 at this year's WWDC conference, an update that retains the bright visuals of iOS 7 and adds a host of features that will delight iOS users. Here are the highlights...

One of the biggest changes in this update is the addition of Healthkit. It works in similar manner to Passbook, compiling data from multiple health and fitness apps and giving you all your info in one place. This feature will no doubt come into its own when the much rumoured iWatch is released.



Apple are trying to unite Mac and iOS as one whole

Alongside iOS 8, Apple released a new version of OSX and announced a new feature called Handoff. What Handoff does is bridge the gap between the phone and your Mac. Anything you write on your device you can send to your Mac with the touch of a button.





Smartphones

Android	Offers great flexibility and innovation
Apple iOS	Fantastic ease of use; massive choice of quality apps
Windows	New kid on the block. Watch this space

The shortlist



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Apple iPhone 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."



NEW ENTRY

Sony Xperia Z2

"The Z2 is one of the best phones money can buy. Is it the best Android can offer? Possibly. The Xperia Z2 is the one to beat, doing everything right. It's magnificent."



NEW ENTRY

HTC One (M8)

"The HTC One (M8) is a resounding success, building on one of the best phones of last year and making it even better. We like this phone alot."

Also consider

Product	Tested	Verdict	OS	NFC	4G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (wxd, mm)
Apple iPhone 4S	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Former reigning smartphone, now replaced but still good	iOS		3.5	960x640	16/32/64	115x59x9
Apple iPhone 5S	Aw.13/FT	★★★★★	Best smartphone, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	iOS	●	4.0	1136x640	16/32/64	124x59x8
Google Nexus 4	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A top performer and a brilliant realisation of Android power	Android		4.7	1280x768	8/16	134x69x9
Google Nexus 5	07.14/GT	★★★★★	A decent all-rounder but new rivals have bettered it	Android	●	4.95	1920x1080	16/32	138x69x9
HTC One	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Sets the bar high for smartphones in 2013	Android	●	4.7	1080x1920	32	137x68x9
HTC One (M8)	07.14/GT	★★★★★	Improves considerably on its predecessor. Does very little wrong	Android	●	5	1920x1080	32	146x71x9
HTC One Max	05.14/ST	★★★★★	A fine performer but could make better use of its bigger screen	Android	●	5.9	1920x1080	16/32	165x82x10
HTC One X+	01.13/ST	★★★★★	Well worth considering: good for music and a joy to use	Android		4.7	1280x720	32/64	134x70x9
HTC One XL	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Great for mobile media fans but its poor battery life just takes the edge off it	Android	●	4.7	1280x720	32	135x70x9
HTC 8S	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Capable and fun, if feature-light	Windows	●	4.7	800x480	4	121x63x10
LG Optimus 4X HD	01.13/ST	★★★★★	Not outstanding, but a worthy alternative to the best	Android		4.7	1280x720	16	132x68x9
LG Optimus L5 II	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Not a thrilling phone but the user experience is good	Android		4.0	800x433	4	118x62x9
LG G2	07.14/GT	★★★★★	A little outdated but still a worthy contender	Android	●	5.2	1920x1080	16/32	139x71x9
LG G3	09.14/FT	★★★★★	Has everything we liked about the G2 and then some	Android	●	5.5	1440x2560	16/32	146x75x9
LG G Flex	05.14/FT	★★★★★	All the pros of the G2, but with a low-res screen	Android	●	6	1280x720	32	161x82x8
Nokia Lumia 920	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A promising start for Nokia's flagship	Windows	●	4.5	1280x768	32	130x71x11
Nokia Lumia 925	09.13/FT	★★★★★	The best Windows Phone yet	Windows	●	4.5	1280x768	16/32	129x71x9
Nokia Lumia 1520	05.14/ST	★★★★★	Apps still disappoint but this is the best Windows Phone yet	Windows	●	6	1920x1080	32	163x85x9
Oppo N1	05.14/ST	★★★★★	Quirky and flexible, this is a great effort from a promising brand	Android	●	5.9	1920x1080	16/32	171x83x9
Samsung Galaxy Nexus	07.12/ST	★★★★★	Great in many ways but pipped by rivals for audio	Android		4.65	1280x720	16/32	136x68x9
Samsung Galaxy Note	07.12/ST	★★★★★	A hybrid between a smart phone and a tablet	Android		5.29	1280x800	16/32	147x83x10
Samsung Galaxy Note II	01.13/ST	★★★★★	Massive screen, massive battery, very tempting	Android		5.55	1280x720	16/32/64	151x81x9
Samsung Galaxy Note III	05.14/ST	★★★★★	The original phablet, updated and still the best	Android	●	5.7	1920x1080	32	151x80x8
Samsung Galaxy S II	01.12/GT	★★★★★	Still great but upped by the new kids on the block	Android		4.3	800x480	16/32/64	125x66x8
Samsung Galaxy S III	08.12/FT	★★★★★	Best smartphone, Awards 2012	Android		4.8	1280x720	16/32	137x71x9
Samsung Galaxy S4	07.13/GT	★★★★★	Better than its predecessor but not as good as its rivals	Android	●	5.0	1920x1080	16/32/64	137x70x8
Samsung Galaxy S5	07.14/GT	★★★★★	An improvement on the S4, but not radical enough	Android	●	5.1	1920x1080	16/32	142x73x8
Sony Ericsson Xperia Arc S	01.12/GT	★★★★★	An excellent addition to the market	Android		4.2	854x480	1	125x63x9
Sony Xperia S	07.12/ST	★★★★★	A real rival to the iPhone	Android		4.3	1280x720	32	128x64x11
Sony Xperia T	01.13/ST	★★★★★	A strong all-rounder for music and movie lovers	Android		4.55	1280x720	16	129x67x9
Sony Xperia Z	07.13/GT	★★★★★	A triumph for Sony – one capable of taking the fight to Google	Android	●	5	1920x1080	16	139x71x8
Sony Xperia Z1	03.14/FT	★★★★★	Sony fans will love it, a speedy, sleek and impressive smartphone	Android	●	5	1920x1080	16	144x74x9
Sony Xperia Z2	07.14/GT	★★★★★	The phone to beat in 2014. Outstanding	Android	●	5.2	1920x1080	16	147x73x8

Subscriptions 0844 848 8813 email: whathifi@servicehelpline.co.uk



HDMI cables

Digital cables that carry both picture and sound. These carry control signals as well, so they can integrate the operation of components in your system.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Length as tested (m)	HDMI type
Up to £80					
Audioquest Pearl	23	06.11/FT	★★★★★	Best HDMI cable, Awards 2012	1 1.4
Cambridge Audio 500 (5m)	69	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A perfectly acceptable cable for the money	5 1.3a
Chord Company Supershield	50	10.10/GT	★★★★★	Still a class-leading cable, but now it's 1.4 too	1 1.3
Clearer Aud C-line HDMI (2m)	60	08.07/FT	★★★★★	Will improve even 1080p pictures, helping stability. Well worth the money	1 2
Kimber Kable HD-09	73	03.09/GT	★★★★★	Picture quality is up with the best and it creates a wide sound field	2 1.3
Philex Thor Flat HDMI	40	10.09/GT	★★★★★	A gutsy, well built HDMI cable.	1 1.3
Philex Thor HDMI/DVI kit	60	09.06/FT	★★★★★	A very decent cable for not much cash - you can't really go wrong	5 1.3
QED HDMI-P	50	11.08/FT	★★★★★	This award winning cable just got better	1 1.3
QED Performance HDMI	70	03.09/GT	★★★★★	Capable performer - finely balanced sound and a wonderfully rendered picture	3 1.3
QED Performance HDMI-e	35	03.11/FT	★★★★★	Perfectly good cable that just falls down in its pricing	1 1.4
QED Perf. HDMI-e S/speed	60	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Communicates a superb and natural colour balance and virtually noise-free images	2 1.4
QED Profile HDMI	25	01.12/FT	★★★★★	Now with 1.4 status, this is still a worthy cable	1 1.4
QED Qunex HDMI-P (5M)	75	09.08/GT	★★★★★	Fantastic picture quality mated with a dynamic and powerful sound	5 1.3
ThatCable HDMI	5	10.09/FT	★★★★★	Brilliant way to spend a fiver - will give rivals up to £20 something to think about	1.5 1.3
ThatCable HDMI (5m)	10	06.10/GT	★★★★★	A no-brainer for those on a tight budget	5 1.3a
Vivanco Powire	45	10.10/GT	★★★★★	A fine cable that's worth seeking out	1.5 1.3
Vivanco Sound and Image	30	11.09/GT	★★★★★	A respectable upgrade, it provides greater fidelity in sound and vision over budget cables	2 1.3

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WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2012

CABLES & ACCESSORIES
BEST HDMI CABLE
AUDIOQUEST PEARL



AudioQuest Pearl HDMI Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2013

ACCESSORIES
BEST ANALOGUE INTERCONNECT
ATLAS ELEMENT INTEGRA



Atlas Element Integra Audio Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2012

CABLES & ACCESSORIES
BEST OPTICAL DIGITAL CABLE
QED PERFORMANCE GRAPHITE



QED Performance Optical Cable

NEW



AudioQuest DragonFly V1.2

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?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2012

CABLES & ACCESSORIES
BEST COAXIAL DIGITAL CABLE
QED PERFORMANCE



QED Performance Digital Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2012

CABLES & ACCESSORIES
BEST USB 2.0 CABLE
SUPRA USB 2.0



Supra USB 2.0 Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
AWARDS 2010

CABLES
BEST HOUSEHOLD
MERLIN TARANTULA MK6



Merlin Tarantula MK6 Mains Cable

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HDMI CABLES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Length as tested (m)	HDMI type
Wireworld Chroma (Miami)	60	10.09/GT	★★★★★	1	1.3
Wireworld Chroma 6	60	Aw.10/FT	★★★★★	1	1.4
Wireworld Island 6	46	10.10/GT	★★★★★	1.4	2.0
£80 and above					
Audioquest Cinnamon	80	01.11/FT	★★★★★	2	1.4
Audioquest Forest	80	06.10/GT	★★★★★	5	1.4
Audioquest HDMI-1	180	09.08/GT	★★★★★	3	1.3
Audioquest HDMI-X	95	03.09/GT	★★★★★	3	1.3
Atlas HDMI	160	07.07/GT	★★★★★	7	1.3
Black Rhodium Coral HDMI	100	10.06/FT	★★★★★	4	1.3
Chord Company Active	115	10.09/GT	★★★★★	1.5	1.3
Chord Co. Active Silver + HDMI	95	01.11/FT	★★★★★	1	1.4
Chord Co. Supershield (5m)	90	06.10/GT	★★★★★	5	1.3a
Ecosse Picture Perfect Ultra	110	09.08/GT	★★★★★	5	1.3
Ecosse Picture Perfect Ultra +	169	09.08/GT	★★★★★	5	1.3
QED Qunex HDMI-P (7m)	85	07.07/GT	★★★★★	7	1.0
QED Reference	125	06.10/GT	★★★★★	5	1.3a
QED Signature HDMI	150	10.09/GT	★★★★★	1	1.3
Supra HF100 HDMI (8m)	112	08.06/GT	★★★★★	8	1.0
van den Hul Flat 180	90	10.09/GT	★★★★★	2	1.3b
van den Hul Flat HDMI (3m)	105	03.09/GT	★★★★★	3	1.3
van den Hul Ultimate	300	10.08/FT	★★★★★	1	1.3
Vivanco SHQ Ultra	80	06.10/FT	★★★★★	1.2	1.4
Wireworld Chroma 5 HDMI (7m)	109	07.07/GT	★★★★★	7	1.0

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Wireworld Chroma 7 HDMI Cable



QED Reference Optical Quartz



Oehlbach XXL i-Connect IP-5/U



QED Signature Audio 40 Cable



AudioQuest Irish Red Sub Cable



Wireworld Oasis 7 Audio Cable



AudioQuest Cinnamon RJ/E Cable



2014 FIFA World Cup Offer
SAVE up to £15.00 on all QED HDMI cables

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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

Our recommendations

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
Wireworld Nova 6	40	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Optical	1
Wireworld Ultraviolet 5	40	04.07/GT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
£50 and above					
Audioquest Cinnamon	60	11.12/FT	★★★★★	USB	1.5
Atlas Equator Optical	50	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Optical	1
Chord Company Optichord	51	11.12/GT	★★★★★	Optical	1
Chord Company Prodac	80	09.09/GT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
Chord Co. Prodac Pro Digital	70	05.11/FT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
Clearer Audio Copper-line 75	97	Aw.08/FT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
Clearer Aud. Silverline Optimus	185	09.09/GT	★★★★★	Co-axial	0.5
Ecosse The Director SE	89	09.09/GT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
Furutech Formula 2	55	Aw.11/FT	★★★★★	USB	1.2
Kimber USB	52	11.12/GT	★★★★★	USB	1
QED Qunex 75 Signature	80	09.09/FT	★★★★★	Co-axial	1
QED U Play (Bluetooth)	65	05.10/FT	★★★★★	Bluetooth	10
Vertere Pulse D-Fi	70	Aw.12/FT	★★★★★	USB	1
Wireworld Ultraviolet 5 USB	50	08.09/FT	★★★★★	USB	2



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	★★★★★	●	1
Belkin Mini-Stereo Cable	13	12.08/GT	★★★★★		1.8
Black Rhodium Twist	36	06.14/GT	★★★★★	●	1
Clear. Aud. C-line Alpha One	30	12.11/FT	★★★★★	●	1
Ecosse Conductor CA1.2	49	06.11/GT	★★★★★	●	1
Ecosse The Composer	37	09.12/GT	★★★★★	●	0.8
Griffin Aux Audio Cable 3011	15	12.08/GT	★★★★★		1.8
Ixos XHA516-100 (1m)	40	09.07/FT	★★★★★	●	1
Merlin Mozart	40	09.12/GT	★★★★★	●	1
QED Audio 1	25	09.07/GT	★★★★★	●	1
QED Performance Audio 2	40	09.12/GT	★★★★★	●	1
QED Profile	18	06.11/GT	★★★★★	●	1
Wireworld Luna	37	09.12/GT	★★★★★	●	1

ANALOGUE INTERCONNECTS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		RCA phono 3.5mm-to-RCA XLR (balanced) Length tested (m)
Wireworld Luna 6	36	12.09/GT	★★★★★	Looks strange, but delivers a great refined sound	● 1
Wireworld Luna 7	40	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Delivers a confident and likable sound. A great option at this price	● 1
£50 and above					
Atlas Equator Integra	75	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A recommended second-upgrade cable	● ● 1
AudioQuest Red River	85	06.14/GT	★★★★★	What it lacks in smoothness and subtlety, it makes up for in scale and dynamics	● 1
Black Rhodium Prelude	80	09.07/FT	★★★★★	Very good cable - sound is crisp and detailed, but still with lovely, chunky bass	● ● 1
Chord Co. Chameleon Plus	125	11.11/FT	★★★★★	New plugs make these even more essential	● 1
Chord Company Cobra VEE 3	95	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Clear and detailed, this cable brings a very driven and focused feel to music	● 1
Chord Company iChord	50	12.08/GT	★★★★★	Expensive, but definitely worth it	1
Chord Company Indigo Plus	995	05.09/FT	★★★★★	It's genius in an interconnect - but you need the right system	● 1
Chord Crimson Vee3	50	11.13/GT	★★★★★	A nice, easy-going cable that's a little too restrained	1
Clear. Aud.C-line Alpha	85	09.08/FT	★★★★★	Entry-level – solid construction and a smooth sound. Not for sonic thrill seekers	● ● 1.8
Ecosse Maestro MA2	177	05.08/FT	★★★★★	The Maestro MA2 may be getting on years, but it remains appealing	● 0.8
Ecosse Nu Diva	140	09.05/FT	★★★★★	Not cheap, but they will take your listening experience to a new level	● 0.8
Ecosse The Baton Mk II	104	08.08/GT	★★★★★	Although there's much to admire, the Baton Mk II can struggle to gel sounds	● ● 0.8
Ecosse The Symphony	225	03.05/FT	★★★★★	Authoritative and detailed, a real all-rounder, but it is 10 percent too pricey	● ● 0.8
Furutech Alpha Line-1	80	03.11/FT	★★★★★	A cable for owners of midrange systems to get very excited by - very good indeed	● 1
QED J2P	50	12.09/FT	★★★★★	Fast and agile 3.5mm-RCA cable	● 1.5
QED Reference Audio 40	85	06.14/GT	★★★★★	Reassuring build quality from a cable that brings fantastic depth and dimension	● 1
QED Reference Audio J2P	50	12.09/FT	★★★★★	Clean sounding and packed with detail	● 1.5
Russ Andrews GQ-24 UltPlate	73	12.08/GT	★★★★★	Best iPod cable, Awards 2010. Punchy cable for iPod or iPhone owners	1
QED Signature Audio S	190	09.09/FT	★★★★★	QED's new flagship interconnect offers great dynamics and punch	● 1
van den Hul The Bay C5	85	06.14/GT	★★★★★	For bright-sounding systems The Bay could be the antidote	● 1
van den Hul The Name	60	09.12/GT	★★★★★	Energy and fun trump ultimate precision	● 0.8
van den Hul The Wave	100	01.09/FT	★★★★★	The Wave has a formidable array of talents and is one of the best cables at this kind of money	● 1
van den Hul The Well	100	06.11/GT	★★★★★	An ideal booster for thin sounding kit	● ● 1
Wireworld Oasis 6	130	06.11/GT	★★★★★	A truly splendid cable for kit worth £800-£1000	● ● 1



Mains products

IEC _____ Usually a three-pin connector used in most hi-fi (and kettles)

Figure of 8 _____ Small, two-pin connector. Tends to be used on lower-priced products

Blocks and conditioners _____ Multi-plug units, some of which attempt to filter noise out of the mains

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict		Cable Block Conditioner Figure of 8 (2-pin) IEC (3-pin) Number of sockets
Up to £100					
Clear. Aud. C-Line Alpha One	25	11.10/FT	★★★★★	A fine first stage mains cable upgrade	● ● n/a
Clear.Aud.C-L Alpha P/HUB	90	04.11/FT	★★★★★	Makes a noticeable difference, but not the last word in cohesion	● ● ● 6
Ecosse Big Orange MK2+	60	04.10/FT	★★★★★	Provides worthwhile gains in performance – and plenty of them	● ● n/a
Lindy 6-way	40	12.08/FT	★★★★★	For just £40, this conditioner is a bona fide system booster	● ● ● 6
Merlin Tarantula Figure '8'	40	01.11/GT	★★★★★	Incredible bang for your buck from Merlin	● ● n/a
Merlin Tarantula MK6	40	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Best mains cable, Awards 2010. A good tweak for a hi-fi or AV system	● ● n/a
Russ Andrews Powerkord-8	75	01.11/GT	★★★★★	An ideal choice for a simple upgrade	● ● n/a
Tacima CS929	40	08.06/FT	★★★★★	Explicitly illustrates the gains a modest outlay can achieve	● ● ● 6
£100 and above					
Audioquest NRG 1.5	100	01.11/GT	★★★★★	A lively and precise cable that does much right	● ● n/a
Atlas Eos	147	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Well-balanced, delivering impressive depth and scale	● ● n/a
Clearer Audio Silver-line	150	07.06/FT	★★★★★	Capable of truly astonishing improvements	● ● n/a
Furutech G-320AG	165	02.11/GT	★★★★★	A pricy but worthwhile addition to your set-up	● ● n/a
R Andrews Ref P/Kord W350i	232	05.09/GT	★★★★★	If you have components costing £2000 upwards, consider this cable	● ● n/a
R Andrews Sig P/Kord W350i	275	11.06/GT	★★★★★	Top mains cable that will really get a system purring	● ● n/a
Russ Andrews X2	200	11.11/FT	★★★★★	Effective but suffers from a lack of sockets	● ● ● 2
Supra MD-06	150	07.08/FT	★★★★★	It adds clarity, but some might not like the leaner sound	● ● 6
van den Hul M/Server Hybrid	150	05.09/GT	★★★★★	Not boring or dull, but it's just too relaxed and safe sounding	● ● n/a
Wireworld Stratus 52	100	08.10/FT	★★★★★	One of the best mains cables for this money	● ● n/a



Speaker cables

These carry the audio signal from your amplifier to your speakers. Bi-wiring uses two runs of cables per speaker and can lead to improvements in the speakers' performance.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	
Up to £10/m				
Audioquest FLX-SLiP 14/4	5.80	11.13/GT	★★★★★	Best Speaker Cable, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Audioquest G4	4.50	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Loses out when it comes to the weight and solidity of its sound. Exciting and articulate nonetheless
Audioquest X2	5	07.11/GT	★★★★★	A perfectly smooth and even-handed sounding performer
Atlas Equator 2.0 OFC	6	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Allows for an impressive sense of weight and power, but doesn't quite match its rivals
Chord Co. Carnival Silv. Screen	6	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Slightly overtaken by newer rivals, but still a mighty fine choice
Cl. Audio C-line Alpha Shield	5	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Restrained dynamics hold this otherwise good cable back from the full five stars
Ecosse CS 2.3	5	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Balanced, nuanced and an easy listen, but a little subdued
Ecosse CS 4.2	3	02.12/FT	★★★★★	A decent cable that needs a touch more punch
QED Ruby Anniversary	6	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Rich and detailed but lacking in rhythm and dynamics
QED Ruby Anniversary Evolution	6	03.14/GT	★★★★★	Rich, detailed, energetic and clean. A great cable
QED Silver Anniversary XT	5	07.08/GT	★★★★★	Our budget cable Best Buy for three years on the trot
QED X-TC	4	09.10/FT	★★★★★	A great budget cable that's able to hold its own
QED XT Evolution	6	10.09/FT	★★★★★	QED is now a twin threat in the sub-£10/m speaker cable market
Talk Electronics Talk 3	4	07.11/GT	★★★★★	An essential first cable upgrade
Wireworld Luna 7	6.50	03.14/GT	★★★★★	The all-round ability of this cable means it should sit well with a wide range of systems
Wireworld The Stream 16/2	5	10.12/GT	★★★★★	Still a cracking cable, but losing out to better competition
Wireworld Stream 7	6	11.13/GT	★★★★★	If you're a fan of detail then you should definitely consider the Stream 7

Biwire

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WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
July 2008



QED Silver Anniversary XT

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
March 2014



Wireworld Luna 7 Speaker Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
March 2014



Van Den Hul The Clearwater

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
July 2008



Atlas Hyper 2.0 Speaker Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
ACCESSORIES
AUDIOQUEST FLX-SLiP 14/4



AudioQuest FLX-SLiP 14/4 Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
AWARDS 2011
CABLES & ACCESSORIES
BEST OVERALL
CHORD COMPANY
CARNIVAL SILVERSCREEN



Chord Carnival Silverscreen Cable

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
March 2014



QED Ruby Anniversary Evolution

FutureShop
Recommended



Tellurium Q Black Speaker Cable

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SPEAKER CABLES continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Biwire
£10/m and above				
Atlas Hyper 2.0	15	07.08/GT	★★★★★	If your system warrants this kind of cable, you won't be disappointed
Atlas Mavros (5m)	2290	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Pair with an extravagant system and get excellent performance
Chord Company Signature	125	01.07/GT	★★★★★	One of the most effective upgrades you will ever hear if you own expensive kit
Ecosse MS2.4	50	01.08/FT	★★★★★	A massively detailed cable that reveals subtleties with refinement
Kimber 4VS	12	04.10/GT	★★★★★	An accomplished performer with an expressive sound
QED Revelation	15	04.10/GT	★★★★★	A fine cable that should be on your audition list
QED Silver Anniv. XT Biwire	10	10.06/GT	★★★★★	A clear class-leader with exceptional sonic transparency on display
van den Hul CS122	17	04.10/GT	★★★★★	Still great with subtleties, but rivals have caught up
van den Hul The Clearwater	10	03.14/GT	★★★★★	A cable with an impressive level of detail and clarity



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.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Fillable	Finishes
Up to £5000						
Apollo A3/6	80	07.10/GT	★★★★★	Spacious and well-focused fillable stands	60x23x26	2
Atacama HMS2	200	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Retain detail and cohesion with these solid stands	60x31x31	1
Custom rc60 Deluxe	125	10.07/FT	★★★★★	This bespoke service has made a fine pair stands	60x20x25	5
Custom Design FS104 Sig.	200	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Best speaker stands, Awards 2013	62x16x18	4
Custom Design RS300	90	03.07/GT	★★★★★	Minimal design, a thoroughly appealing listen	61x22x26	2
Custom Design RS302	120	11.06/FT	★★★★★	Plenty of detail & clarity especially with vocals	61x22x26	3
Hi Fi Racks Podium T5 IV	150	09.11/GT	★★★★★	Ideal for those with forward sounding speakers	50x24x30	2
Mission Stance	100	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Will do a fine job with £200-£400 speakers	58x21x28	3
Partington ANSA 60	150	09.11/GT	★★★★★	They remain fine stands - but no longer outstanding value	60x23x28	1
Part. D'nought Broadside	300	08.08/FT	★★★★★	Deliver wide ranging improvements to sound	60x23x28	1
Partington Heavi	399	03.07/FT	★★★★★	If you demand the best, buy these	60x30x21	1
Part. Super Dreadnought	180	03.07/GT	★★★★★	Best £100+ speaker stands in Awards 2007	60x16x17	1
Soundstyle Z2	70	11.08/FT	★★★★★	Best sub-£100 speaker stand in Awards 2007	57x17x23	2



AV & hi-fi racks

Many racks are built to be expanded. Several manufacturers offer you a number of shelving options for ready-made products, but what if you want to get more kit in a few years? We like having the option to build upwards at a later date.

Our recommendations

Our recommendations					Modular Shelves	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Finishes
Product	£	Tested	Verdict				
Up to £500							
Alphason Finewood 1100	300	03.13/FT	★★★★★	Looks great and provides sturdy support for your kit	3	51x110x45	1
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
Atacama Eris Eco 5.0	460	04.12/FT	★★★★★	Best equipment support, Awards 2013	● 4	70x59x56	4
Audiophile Base Stratabase	360	01.08/FT	★★★★★	It isn't cheap but justifies the cost	● 1	0.4x43x36	2
Custom Design Concept AV	350	04.07/GT	★★★★★	Looks and sounds excellent, plus four colour options	3	60x101x40	4

"The house-proud will be happy to know the frame comes in a variety of finishes, too. Add fine build and easy construction to the list of plus points and there's much to admire with the Atacama Eris Eco 5.0"

April 2012

RACKS continued

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	Modular Shelves	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Finishes
Up to £500						
Custom Design Icon Sig.	330	10.06/FT	★★★★★		A great rack for an upgrade to tame unruly systems	4 42x75x66 11
Custom Design Milan 4	470	11.09/GT	★★★★★	●	Small and well made, but lacks subtlety	4 59x57x40 5
Custom Design Milan LCD3	350	09.08/FT	★★★★★	●	A stylish addition to Custom Design's catalogue	3 42x77x40 4
Custom Design Tokyo Hi-Fi 4	430	08.11/GT	★★★★★	●	A lightweight rack with immense potential	4 64x58x40 3
Hi Fi Racks Podium	460	08.11/GT	★★★★★	●	Best equipment support, Awards 2011	3 62x60x40 1
Hi Fi Racks Podium Slimline	350	03.13/FT	★★★★★		A simple rack design with pretty decent results	4 Variablex55x40 1
Quadraspire Q4evo	380	11.09/GT	★★★★★		A solid, cohesive and supremely affordable rack	4 Variablex59x39.5 8
Sonorous PL2200	280	09.08/FT	★★★★★		Classy looks and features	2 82x95x44 6
Target CL470	299	06.10/GT	★★★★★		For pure performance, this is a winner at this price	4 82x50x55 2
Techlink Ovid	200	04.07/GT	★★★★★		Perfect for a minimalist system in a trendy flat	3 32x95x40 4
£500-£1000						
Atacama Elite Eco 12.0	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	●	Offers solid performance and flexibility	5 Variablex115x32 1
BDI Valera 9724	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★		Complicated to assemble but the results make it worthwhile	3 54x112x52 3
Hi Fi Racks Akomer XL	930	09.12/FT	★★★★★	●	A corner-friendly alternative to the Podium	3 45x110x40 6
Optimum Avion 8925	999	06.10/GT	★★★★★		Heavyweight, but likeable and good with sonics	3 57x127x56 3
Quadraspire Q4 Bamboo	500	03.13/FT	★★★★★	●	An all round performer. Easy to set up and excellent results	4 Variablex59x40 1
Quadraspire QAVM (Oak)	540	04.07/GT	★★★★★	●	Solid and rigid, delivers a fine performance	3 50x109x50 8
Quadraspire QAVX	560	12.07/FT	★★★★★	●	Supports a great big telly and expansive system	2 Variablex163x52 8
Quadraspire Sunoko Vent T	800	11.09/GT	★★★★★	●	A first-rate rack, that highlights subtleties	4 Variablex59x47 6
£1000 and more						
Audiophile Base StarBase	1180	12.06/GT	★★★★★	●	Exceptional, spectacular results with high end hi-fi	3 65x59x52 3
Hi Fi Racks Podium XL	1050	06.10/GT	★★★★★	●	A great performer: plenty of weight and dynamics	3 53x140x40 1
Spectral Closed CL1050	1100	07.07/FT	★★★★★		Fantastic build and style, plus numerous options	2 31x101x53 17
Spectral Closed CL1552	1800	07.07/GT	★★★★★		Awesome style and decent abilities - a great rack	6 VariablexVariablex53 16

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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"



Headphone amps

The headphone outputs on most products are usually afterthoughts and have had little care taken in trying to make them sound good. A dedicated headphone amp is a must if you want the best headphone sound.

Our recommendations

Our recommendations					Line level in Outputs
Product	£	Tested	Verdict		
Up to £1500					
Beyerdynamic A1	975	11.10/FT	★★★★★	Best headphone amplifier £500+, Awards 2010. A formidable combo when partnered with T1 headphones	2 1
Chord Electronics Toucan	800	10.10/FT	★★★★★	A headphone amp with built in DAC that's worth a punt	2 2
Creek OBH-21SE	280	04.09/GT	★★★★★	Perfectly pleasant but it could do with more bite	2 2
Edwards Audio HA1	280	09.12/FT	★★★★★	Packs a punch but not that refined	2 1
FIIO E7	65	03.11/FT	★★★★★	One of the most cost-effective ways to improve headphone sound from a computer	1 2
Lehmann Black Cube Linear	750	07.09/FT	★★★★★	Deeply impressive device given the right system	1 1
Lehmann Rhineland	400	04.09/GT	★★★★★	Best headphone amplifier £300-£500, Awards 2010. Its user-friendly sound makes this a very wise buy	2 2
Meridian Prime	1200	02.14/FT	★★★★★	A top-class headphone amp and a talented preamp to boot	2 4
Musical Fidelity V-CAN II	120	10.12/FT	★★★★★	Does enough right to be worth serious consideration	1 3
Pathos Aurium	850	08.13/FT	★★★★★	This amplifier is a top class choice	4 2



Phono amps

Dedicated units tend to sound better than the circuits integrated into amplifiers. Higher priced options usually allow for electrical optimisation for your cartridge, thus producing better results.

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	MM	MC	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Up to £3000							
Cambridge Audio 651P	120	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	1	2.5x8x11
Creek Audio OBH-15	240	02.09/GT	★★★★★	●	●	1	6x10x15
Graham Slee Gr- Amp 2 Comm.	160	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	1	7x10x25
Leema Elements	495	03.10/FT	★★★★★	●	●	2	5x11x10
Lehmann Black Cube	325	02.09/GT	★★★★★	●	●	1	5x11x11
Pro-Ject Phono Box S	120	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	2	7x10x14
Musical Fidelity V-LPS II	160	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	1	5x11x11
Rega Fono Mini A2D	85	03.12/FT	★★★★★	●	●	1	6x18x25
Rega Fono MM MK2	200	06.13/GT	★★★★★	●	●	2	7x43x33



Cartridges

Moving magnet (MM) These produce a higher output, giving your phono stage an easier time
Moving coil (MC) Can produce more detail, but is more demanding of your phono stage

Our recommendations

Product	£	Tested	Verdict	MM/MC	Tracking weight (g)
Up to £500					
Goldring 2100	92	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.7
Goldring 2500	224	03.09/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.7
Grado Prestige Silver	115	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.5
Nagaoka MP110	89	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.8
Ortofon 2M Black	460	04.11/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.5
Ortofon 2M Bronze	275	03.09/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.5
Ortofon 2M Red	80	05.10/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.8
Rega Exact	195	03.09/GT	★★★★★	MM	1.75
Roksan Corus Silver	400	01.11/FT	★★★★★	MM	1.9



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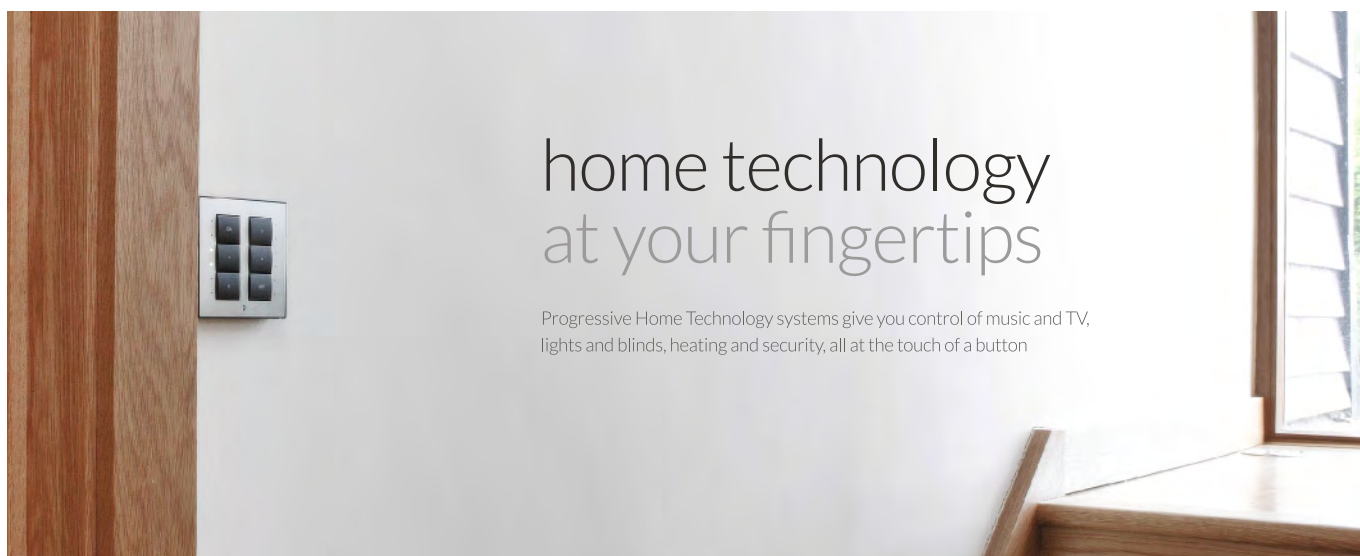


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OUR TOP-SELLING SURROUND SOUND PACKAGES

Q ACOUSTICS Q7000i
BLACK | WHITE

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AWARDS 2013
★★★★★
NOV 2013



0%
FINANCE
AVAILABLE

DALI ZENSOR 5 AV 5.1
BLACK | WHITE | WALNUT

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AWARDS 2011
★★★★★
NOV 2011



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TANNOY MERCURY
V4i AV 5.1 NEW
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TRADITIONAL STYLE
PURE PERFORMANCE

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HOUSE YOUR KIT WITH CLASS

JUST RACKS JRL-1101
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ROOM FOR
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ALPHASON FINETWOODS
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ANY COLOUR YOU LIKE!



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SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
OCT 2013



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**AUDIOLAB 8200 CD,
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BLACK | SILVER



0%
FINANCE
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**MARANTZ 6005
CD & AMPLIFIER**
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WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
MAY 2014



WHAT HI-FI?
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★★★★★
DEC 2011

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BLACK | SILVER



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AWARDS 2010

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NOV 2012

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JAN 2011

**WIREWORLD
STARLIGHT**
HDMI CABLE



HI-FI SPEAKERS

THE LATEST AND GREATEST PAIRS OF LOUDSPEAKERS

**Q ACOUSTICS
CONCEPT 40** NEW
BLACK | WHITE

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
MAY 2014

AWARD-WINNING
'CONCEPT'
DESIGN



**MONITOR AUDIO
SILVER 10** NEW
2 GLOSS
4 VENEER FINISHES

BEST FOR
LARGE ROOMS

**WHARFEDALE
DIAMOND 121**
3 FINISHES

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SOUND AND VISION
★★★★★
OCT 2013



DALI ZENSOR 1
3 FINISHES

WHAT HI-FI?
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★★★★★
AUGUST 2011

WIRELESS SPEAKERS

NO COMPLICATION, UTTERLY SIMPLE TO ENJOY

DALI KUBIK NEW
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Q ACOUSTICS BT-3 NEW
RED | WHITE | BLACK



MONITOR AUDIO S300
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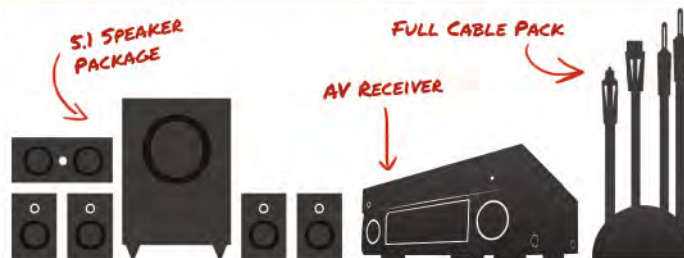
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THAT WAS THEN

Sony TA-VA8ES A Pro-Logic powerhouse

combining excellent Dolby Pro-Logic processing with all the DSP (digital sound processing) options, audio and video inputs you could ever need. Three independent power supplies



Exhilarating Sony has it all

★★★★★
Sony TA-VA8ES
Pro-Logic amplifier
£700

Built like the QE2, Sony's TA-VA8ES is a massive powerhouse of an amp, combining excellent Dolby Pro-Logic processing with all the DSP (digital sound processing) options, audio and video inputs you could ever need. Three independent power supplies feed a hefty 120W into each front and centre speaker, and 50W to each rear speaker, making big speakers a doddle to drive. As well as Pro-Logic, the Sony has circuitry and inputs for upgrading to Dolby Digital via the addition of a separate decoder.

and crunchingly accurate steering of effects. Play the opening sequence of *Johnny Mnemonic*, and the detail and atmosphere as Johnny hurtles through the Internet create a truly exhilarating experience. Meanwhile, dialogue-heavy films like *The Hunt for Red October* benefit from the clear and powerful centre channel, and action films thrive on the Sony's hard and fast delivery. For example, the barrage of bombs and bullets in *Desperado* seem to tear the room apart.

The Sony also sounds exciting and punchy with music, playing straight stereo through the front speakers or all five channels in surround mode.

A jog-shuttle dial on the fascia, linked to a clear, informative display, makes setting up and choosing sound modes simple, and with 24 DSP effects there's no shortage of variations. To the rear are five video inputs with video switching, four S-VHS inputs, five audio inputs and a plethora of outputs. There's no flimsy spring clips either, just solid binding posts.

The only grumble we have is the lack of on-screen graphics. In all other respects, this beautifully-built and fully-equipped amp performs with the best. Sony has realised that a good AV amp needs everything and the TA-VA8ES has got it all.

speakers

Back in October 1996, Sony's TA-VA8ES was the height of desirability as far as £700 home cinema amplifiers were concerned.

That not-inconsiderable sum bought you a beautifully built product with five channels of amplification and cutting-edge processing technology in the form of Dolby's original version of Pro-Logic.

Those five channels weren't evenly specified - the front three were driven by 120W each while the surrounds made do with just 50W per side. A big plus-point was the option to upgrade to full Dolby Digital decoding with the addition (and extra cost) of a separate module.

At the time we were impressed by the range of digital signal processing modes on offer, but less pleased with the lack of on-screen graphics.

Fast forward to this month's group test (p52) winner, the STR-DN1050, and we're struck by just how little the AV

amp's form has changed, but taken with just how much this latest crop of home cinema amplifiers does for the money.

For just £500 you get an amplifier that decodes all current movie sound formats, streams high-resolution music and boasts a mass of varied connections. To top it all you get great movie sound and a capable performance with stereo music. Compare the two generations of products and it's hard to believe Sony can deliver so much for so relatively little.



This month's winner:
a similar look but way
more under the skin

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION

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AK120 II

AK100 II



Volume Wheel

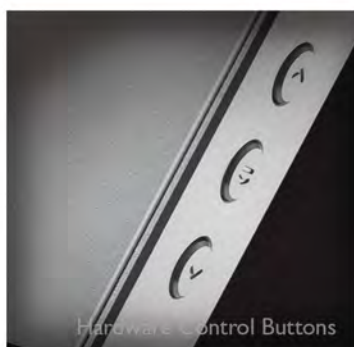


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