

WHAT HI FI? SOUND AND VISION

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AWARDS 2014

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This magazine contains 130 pages including both covers.

Hello/12/14



Assembling a satisfactory home-theatre is an arduous task which daunts even the veterans. But there is one trick that aims to take the sweat out of the situation. You are holding it in your hands. The **What Hi-Fi Awards(p36)** issue is the definitive source of information when it comes

to selecting AV gear that doesn't break the bank, yet gives you the chills and thrills that you expect from a 5-star rated product. A classic blend of performance and value for money, our unique perspective on the world of hi-fi gives a real-world analysis of the best-in-class components. From **Arcam** to **Yamaha (p59)**, there is nary a corner that we have left unpolished.

It's not just international brands stealing the show though. Homegrown entrepreneurs have made success stories too. **Vu** and **Sonodyne (p97)** being prime examples. One's a potential giant slayer with its range of feature-packed smart televisions while the other is making waves with their studio-quality speakers. We have both as exclusive reviews in this issue and while they might have their own paths to improvement charted out, there is no denying in the massive effort and sense of pride they infuse in us. It's time to celebrate the finest and hail the rising stars.

Nishant Padhiar, Editor



Why we're No.1!

Experience and heritage

In the AV universe our deep rooted heritage and experience helps us share a wealth of information, helping you make a sound decision

Dedicated test facilities

Our bleeding edge test facilities are stocked with the top of the line reference systems to put incoming products through their paces

We spot big trends first

Don't blame us for breaking the best stories, it is a habit that ensures you get to learn about tomorrow, today

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"Move up the frequency range and the good news continues. Vocals are expressive and packed with subtlety."

PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

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Our products of the year



Apple iPhone 6
First test p25

"Everything it lacks in spec-list grunt, the iPhone 6 makes up for with a performance and user experience that's hard to argue with"



Pioneer SC-LX58
First test p12

"Pioneer has taken last year's champ and made it even better"



B&W 685 S2 p18

"The soundstage is wide and deep, enveloping you in a richly detailed, subtly dynamic and cohesive performance"



Chord Hugo p57

"Class-leading sound wrapped in a compact case with aptX Bluetooth. What more could you ask for?"

THE NEWEST PRODUCTS
REVIEWED AND RATED

500 TEST VERDICTS BUYING GUIDE



Pioneer SC-LX58 p12

"It's not all about muscle, of course. The Pioneer is capable of musical nuance as well"



Apple iPhone 6 p25

"It's easily the best iPhone yet, but it's also one of the finest smartphones of 2014"

Q Acoustics Media 4 p44

"Dialogues come through with clarity and expression"



Shure SRH1540 p75

"Play anything upbeat and they're fanatical. Bass lines are distinct."

Chord Hugo p57

"The Hugo's desire for detail and natural tone really brings the vocal to the fore"



Our ratings explained

WHAT HI-FI?
SOUND AND VISION
TEST WINNER

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

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

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

**MORE
FIRST TESTS**

EXCLUSIVE

Wharfedale finishes the job

Wharfedale Diamond 220 | Stereo speakers | ₹23,000



Nokia Lumia 930
₹38,649 **Page 15**
The best ever Windows Phone to come to town



Apple iPhone 6
₹53,500 **Page 25**
It's the one most of us, if not all of us, have been waiting for

Want to know the best-sounding budget speakers on the market? Easy, it's Wharfedale's brand new Diamond 220s. They're the largest standmounter in the company's new entry-level Diamond 200 series, and we wouldn't be surprised if they turned out to be the pick of the bunch if history is anything to go by.

These are the replacement for the hugely talented I21s, but while they look quite similar there are some important changes. They're neatly finished for starters. This might sound like a small point, but it was the older speaker's big weakness.

Chipboard of the old block

At its heart, this shortcoming had as much to do with Wharfedale's ambition to make the I21s sonic class-leaders as it did with the factory's quality control. In a bid to improve performance, Wharfedale's engineers used cabinet walls made of a layered construction that mixed chipboard and MDF. It was felt that using MDF alone - as on most speakers - led to an undesirable level of cabinet coloration.

The chipboard side was on the outside in contact with the (rather thin) vinyl covering. The result? An uneven surface that made the speakers look poorly finished. It didn't help that the factory seemed to have a rather lax attitude to the neat application of the vinyl wrap, particularly at the cabinet corners. We also had issues with the front baffle which, once again, looked uneven in appearance.

Creating a splash instead of ripples

We're glad to report the Diamond 220s are much better in all respects. While still not the classiest speakers we've seen around this price (Q Acoustics and Monitor Audio set the standard), they're good enough to avoid criticism.

Wharfedale has kept the layered cabinet construction, though - in this case two thin layers of MDF sandwich the chipboard section - and glue the vinyl onto the smoother MDF surfaces. Goodbye ripples, hello better finish. Now that the finish issues are sorted, the advantages of these composite panels come to the fore. The combination of chipboard and MDF helps

to damp resonances, preventing the cabinet from contributing too much to the overall sound. Quite simply, you hear more of the drive units and less of the cabinet.

But there's more than just better finish involved in the move to the new model. There's a bigger magnet on the 13cm woven Kevlar mid/bass driver. This makes the speakers easier to drive and improves its responsiveness.

Slot right in

The unusual slot-loaded port arrangement first seen on the 100 series makes a reappearance here too, and it has been tweaked to reduce distortion. Such a design is claimed to be more efficient than a conventional port (see panel). The proof, as ever, is in the listening.

The tweeter remains unchanged. It still sits in a deeply dished waveguide, which helps efficiency (particularly through the crossover region). A ferrite magnet is used in the unit's motor system rather than the more usual neodymium: not only is Ferrite cheaper - always a consideration with products at this price level - but the engineers feel it produces a smoother sound too. Wharfedale has also tweaked the crossover to improve integration.

When it comes to sound quality the Diamond 220s needn't fear any rival. Give

Low-end theory

Wharfedale's engineers haven't taken the easy route with the Diamond 220's bass tuning. Instead of going down the usual route of rear- or front-firing reflex port, they've decided to fire the port downwards into a small air gap between base of the cabinet and the plinth below. This arrangement has been further refined from that seen on the earlier I21s.

Not only does this technique help with port efficiency and the reduction of chuffing noise, it makes the speaker less fussy about placement. Judging by the low-frequency output of the 220s this arrangement seems to work really well, giving low-end weight and authority.





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In detail...

1 Good-quality biwire terminals mean it is worth experimenting, as definition and openness can improve.

2 The 220's dome tweeter is surrounded by a deeply dished waveguide. This is claimed to improve integration and dispersion.

3 A pretty pattern on Kevlar mid/bass isn't just for show. It helps to control resonance and improve rigidity.

them a good, solid pair of stands such as Atacama Moseco 6s and they will sparkle. In our test room these speakers sound best when placed close to a rear wall. A little bit of toe-in towards the listening position helps to firm up the stereo image.

Miniature but meaty

Used this way these speakers deliver a surprisingly meaty bass that has far more power and punch than we'd expect from speakers that stand just 50cm high. That slot-loaded port arrangement really seems to work - low frequencies are agile and tuneful, making the distinctive bassline from Van Morrison's *Moondance* a pleasure. While there's a good amount of bass it's all in proportion, giving foundation to the rest of the frequency range without dominating.

Move up the frequency range and the good news continues. Morrison's vocals are expressive and packed with subtlety. The 220's high frequencies please too,

combining bite, insight and refinement superbly. These standmounters pile on the plus points when we switch to Holst's *Jupiter*. We're impressed by the speaker's balanced tonality and their ability to deliver larger-scale dynamic shifts with enthusiasm. There's scale here with a degree of authority and substance that no rival we've heard can better. Stereo imaging is good too, nicely projected and layered.

While these speakers aren't unduly fussy about partnering kit you'll only get out what you put in. They work well as an upgrade to the speakers that come with Denon's D-M39 micro but will only really start to shine when used with something like Marantz's PM6005 amplifier. How do they compare to the older 121s? The character is similar but the newer speakers are a little better in most respects.

These are the speakers we wanted Wharfedale to make all along - one of the best budget speakers around.

Move up the frequency range and the good news continues. Van Morrison's vocals are expressive and packed with subtlety. The Wharfedale 220's high frequencies please too



SYSTEM BUILDER

Three partners that will help make sure you hear the Wharfedales at their best...



CD player

Marantz CD6005 ₹41,900 ★★★★★
This is a terrific CD player for the money. The CD6005 has it all: refinement, detail and dynamics. Its build is quality, too.



Amplifier

Marantz PM6005 ₹41,900 ★★★★★
The Marantz PM6005 is an excellent budget amp that goes well with both the CD6005 and the Wharfedales.



Turntable

Pro-Ject Essential II ₹24,000 ★★★★★
A perfect budget turntable, the Essential II will work perfectly with the other excellent budget components.

Total build ₹1,32,800

TECH SPECS

Dimensions (hwd, cm) 50 x 32 x 41 •
Floorstander No • **Sensitivity (db/w/m)** 86
• **Finishes** 4 • **Impedance (ohms)** 8 •
Max power handling (watts) 100 •
Biwireable Yes •

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Wonderfully balanced and informative sound; expressive dynamics; fine integration; unfussy nature

AGAINST Nothing of note

VERDICT Now that finish issues are sorted, we're left with a terrific pair of speakers

REVIEWER'S NOTES... GETTING TO KNOW THE WHARFEDALE DIAMOND 220

1 The Wharfedale 220s still aren't the smartest speaker around but build and finish is now good enough to avoid any serious complaint.

2 We experiment with positioning and find the 220s sound best close to a rear wall, with a small degree of angle pointing at the main listening position.

3 Give the 220s a couple of days to run in and they continue to improve. We're struck by their well-judged tonal balance and bass authority.

4 We try a whole range of electronics from micro-systems up to our multi-thousand pound reference kit. The 220s sound stunning each time.

5 The listening room is packed with pricier alternatives, but it's a measure of the 220s talents that we feel no need to move to something better.

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iPad Air 2 | Tablet | From ₹35,900

Thinner Air is most intoxicating

We weren't sure it was possible, but Apple has done it. Apple has taken the best tablet ever made and made it even better.

We're well aware that opinion isn't going to sit well with some people, but the fact is that when it comes to creating the best tablet experience on the market, the Apple iPad Air 2 delivers in every single way.

Of course when your predecessor is as good as the iPad Air 1, a tablet that was awarded our Product of the Year in the *What Hi-Fi?* Awards 2014, it's all about refinement rather than revolution.

First, let's look at the design. No, the iPad Air 2 didn't need to be made any slimmer than the slender Air 1, but Apple went and did it anyway and, at just 6.1mm thin, the result is stunning.

A lighter touch

Not only is it beautiful to look at, but it's lighter too, a fact that's noticeably different in the hand and makes the Air 2 easier to hold over long periods.

Its build quality is as good as ever, and its newfound slenderness brings no feeling of weakness or fragility.

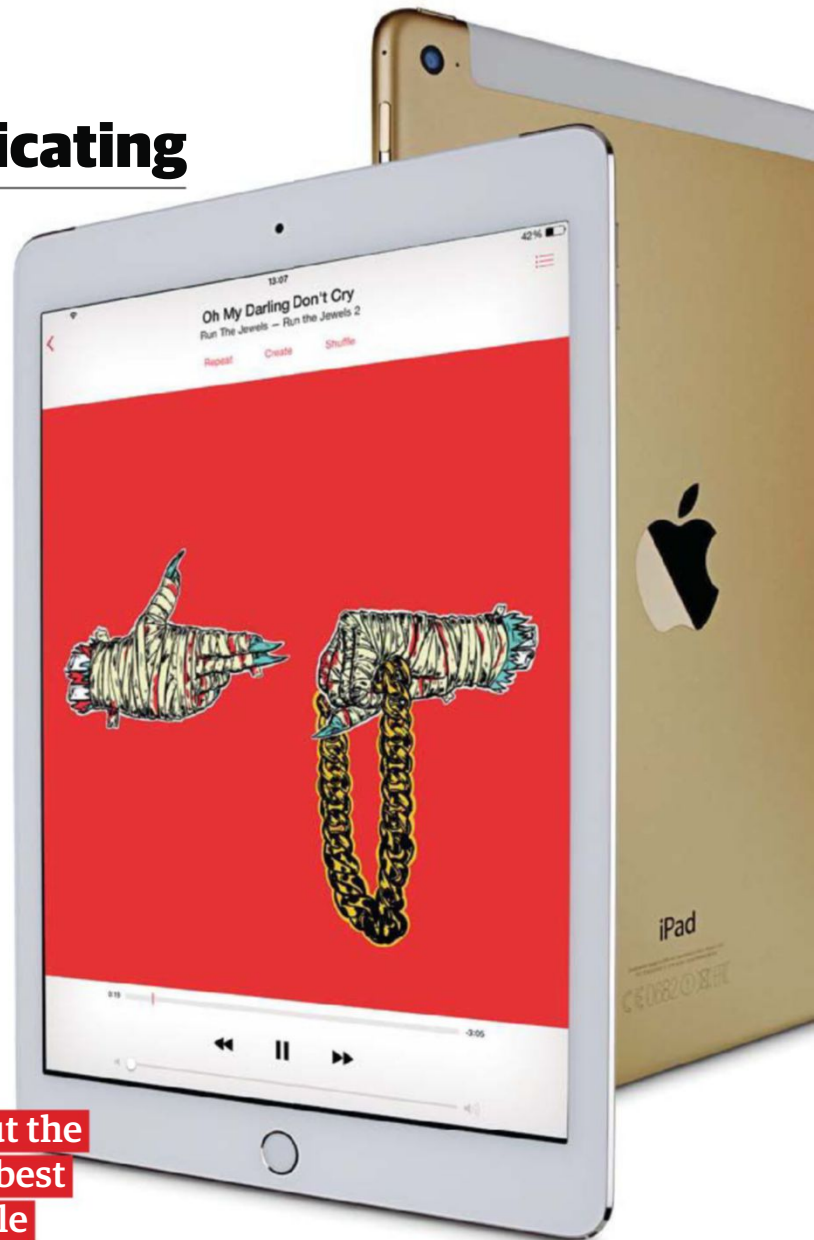
At the heart of the iPad Air 2 is Apple's new A8X processor, which promises to offer 40 per cent faster performance and 2.5x faster graphics. It absolutely delivers. Never

closer to your finger and movies are that little bit more immersive. Colours are improved too, richer in a vibrant yet subtle way. Video looks superb, and we'd say there's even a touch more sharpness, no doubt thanks to the new screen technology. All this is topped off with a new anti-reflective coating that reduces glare on the screen by 56 per cent.

Audio performance is as strong as on its predecessor, and the Air 2 continues to lead the way for sound quality on a tablet. It's an exciting listen, crisp and precise, with real drive and dynamism behind it. Voices are direct and expressive, and there's even a touch more detail here as well.

Sound upgrade

Away from headphones, the speaker sound has been improved too, with more clarity on offer, making it great for movies when you've



It might not sit well with some people, but the fact is that when it comes to creating the best tablet experience on the market, the Apple iPad Air 2 delivers in every single way

when using the iPad Air 1 did we feel like it was slow or lagging, but using the iPad Air 2 you realise that there was more to be had.

Swipes feel that little bit more immediate, taps a touch more responsive. Play a game and the better graphics performance is evident - we download the stunning Epic Zen Garden graphical environment from the App Store and the camera pans are silky smooth; we noticed the odd stutter on the Air 1.

New screen construction

There have been improvements to the screen too. While it remains the same resolution - a pin-sharp 2048 x 1536 - and the same size at 9.7in, it's the actual make-up of the display that's been improved. The three separate components that make it up, namely the cover glass, the touch sensor and the LCD itself, are now fused into one, eliminating any air between them.

Why does this matter? With the LCD layer nearer the cover glass, everything feels that little bit closer to you. Icons feel

got no headphones. We would, though, still love to see front facing speakers, like those on the forthcoming Nexus 9.

When it comes to cameras on tablets, we're still not sold. But more and more people are doing it, and so Apple is investing in it.

The camera on the rear has been upped to 8MP, with pictures more detailed and exposure better handled as a result. It now comes with Slo-Mo mode. The front-facing FaceTime camera has seen improvements too, including a better sensor that will take in 81 per cent more light.

If you're an iPhone or Mac (with OS X Yosemite) user, you'll get added functionality from the new iPad, thanks to the new Continuity features. This means you can start doing things on any one of them and pick up where you left off on another. You can now also control calls and messages through your iPad.

Yes, the Air 2's unexpandable nature does make it a little pricier, gigabyte for gigabyte, than competitors that allow you



USE IT WITH
Philips Fidelio M1 MKII

Award-winning for a reason, these 'phones offer an exciting listen that will make the most of the iPad's fine audio performance.

to expand via microSD, but the 64GB version costs close to what the 32GB cost last year. It's something.

Invest in the right storage for your needs (we would suggest 64GB or more), and you'll never be disappointed by the iPad Air 2. It offers stunning performance, an excellent screen and an unrivalled user experience.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Faster performance; improved screen; greater contrast; smoother graphics; build

AGAINST Speaker could be better; unexpandable storage

VERDICT You can't get better than this. If you want a tablet, the iPad Air 2 is the one to buy

Also consider

iPad Air 1
₹28,900 ★★★★★

Our Award winner is still an excellent tablet, and it's now available at a better price than ever.



Pioneer SC-LX58 | AV receiver | ₹1,10,990

Reigning champion gets even better

Another year, another round of AV receivers and like clockwork, Pioneer has come up with the SC-LX58. It follows last year's SC-LX57, which was very successful.

The LX57 won our 2013 Award for mid-premium surround amps and is the benchmark against which we judge all similarly-priced rivals. So is this heir apparent a worthy successor, or merely a pretender in similar clothing?

We're going to go with 'worthy successor'. Pioneer has pulled out all the stops, building on everything we loved about the LX57. It's packed with the latest features, and the sound is better than ever.

Captain courageous

Our test disc is *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* on Blu-ray. It's a veritable assault course full of shattered glass, crunching

It's clear that the SC-LX58 has plenty of power under the hood. We're very impressed with the scale of the sound, which is tall and wide enough to fill our largest testing room. We enjoyed Pioneer's weighty sound previously, but this time it feels more muscular. Gunshots command attention - they're punchy and authoritative.

It's not all about the muscle, of course. Despite being a powerhouse, the Pioneer is capable of musical nuance. We switch to a Blu-ray of Michael Jackson's *This Is It* and the amp succeeds in highlighting the subtleties of the evolving key changes of a practice session. The Pioneer also demonstrates a nicely balanced presentation, with a lively sense of rhythm. The bit where MJ finally gets round to doing *Thriller* is, frankly, thrilling.



The design of the SC-LX58 will not turn heads, but it is solid and well made

Despite being a powerhouse, the SC-LX58 is capable of nuance too. We switch to a Blu-ray of Michael Jackson's *This Is It* and it highlights the evolving key changes of a practice session

metal and armour-piercing bullets, topped with a caffeinated score. This DTS-HD Master Audio 7.1 soundtrack is a workout for any system, but the Pioneer SC-LX58 breezes through it. It's a thoroughly immersive sound, with surround effects steered through the room with agility and precision.

We've always been impressed with Pioneer's powers of resolution, and the detail definition here is exquisite. Everything that pings off Captain America's shield is clearly identified; when he throws it at somebody's face, there's weight. That detail extends throughout the frequency range. The low-end rumble of our hero's motorbike is properly expressed. Explosions are surrounded by reverberations and it's rare to find bass so deep and articulate. At the top end, it's nicely rounded. We had no complaints about last year's SC-LX57 treble performance, but now it seems to lack refinement next to the LX58.

There are plenty of surround modes with the SC-LX58 and it's worth playing with these to suit your taste and listening environment. But we prefer keeping it in Pure Direct mode for music, which yields the most accurate results.

But how about the rest? Take a glance at the exterior and the LX58 looks virtually identical to its predecessor.

Heavy metal is the order

The design isn't going to turn heads. It's a heavy black or silver box, built like a tank. Mostly metal, with a flap at the front. It's well made: buttons are nice, the dials satisfying. Of course, we're more concerned about what it can do. The LX58 is a 9.2-channel AV receiver with Class D amplification. It packs a powerful 190W-per-channel into 6ohms (claimed), and has an extensive list of connections.

It has eight HDMI 2.0 inputs and three outputs; 3D playback is supported, as is 4K 60p pass-through and upscaling. There is

also an array of analogue connections, including dedicated dual subwoofer outputs, with independent calibration.

Well-connected and compatible

Digital connections include coaxial and optical inputs (two each). There are also two USB ports - one for powering devices, the other for USB drives and Apple devices.

As for networking, there's an ethernet socket for wired internet, but you get a wireless LAN adapter in the box. Finally, the SC-LX58 has built-in aptX Bluetooth, while Apple owners will be pleased to find AirPlay compatibility, which can stream iTunes libraries.

You also have use of internet radio and HTC Connect. DLNA means the amp can play content off a list of compatible network devices.

Over a network or via USB, the amp can handle quite a few formats: AIFF, Apple Lossless, WAV, FLAC, MP3, WMA, AAC and DSD. It's also happy with high-res audio

System builder Total build ₹5,25,980

Projector

BenQ W1400 ★★★★★ ₹1,50,000

Has subtle and punchy picture quality with deep black levels and smooth motion. Engrossing.



Blu-ray player

Sony BDP-54200 ★★★★★ ₹13,990

If you're looking for an affordable Blu-ray player to match your impressive home cinema system, then this is the one.



Stereo package

KEF R100 5.1 ★★★★★ ₹2,51,000

With powerful dynamics, incredible detail and gorgeous looks, this KEF R100 5.1 is a great-sounding speaker package.





Evolution not revolution

The SC-LX58 might look almost identical to the LX57, but the remote control has been updated and is nice to use. There is also the useful iControlAV app to download too.

In detail

1 A stable wire

This amp doesn't have built-in wi-fi, but does come with a wireless LAN adapter in the box. That USB port can be used for power. We'd recommend sticking with a wired connection, which is more stable and reliable.

2 Plenty of ports to dock in

There are eleven HDMI ports here, and eight of those are inputs. That's one less than the Pioneer SC-LX57 had, but it's unlikely you'll be stuck. They're HDMI 2.0, too, with 4K/60p passthrough.



files (up to 24-bit/192kHz) as long as they are in AIFF, WAV and FLAC.

Last, but not least, is support for Dolby Atmos, surround sound tech that expands on current 5.1 and 7.1 set-ups. In cinemas, that means up to 64 speakers, with some in the ceiling. For the home, Dolby's hardware partners will produce side speakers and speaker-top modules to emulate the sensation of overhead sound.

Back to the feature

Sadly we've not yet been able to test this until the amp receives an update, expected

before the year's end. We can't wait, but for now this is still an impressively equipped beast. Installation is an easy process. Well, it is once you've plugged everything in. The MCACC Pro (Multi-Channel Acoustic Calibration) makes set-up a breeze. Hook up the bundled microphone and your system will blurt out a series of test tones for the amplifier to work out the distance and size of speakers.

This takes only a couple of minutes. It's worth going into the settings to fine tune the adjustments, but we found the automatic calibration to be accurate

enough. Lastly, we should mention the updated remote, which is nicely laid out and not intimidating. If that doesn't take your fancy, try the new (and free) iControlAV5 app. Its slick, colourful interface makes operation easier and more intuitive than the standard remote.

To sum up, we love the Pioneer SC-LX58. What's not to like? Pioneer has taken last year's champ and made it even better. Admittedly, it's not a massive leap over the SC-LX57, whose owners shouldn't feel the need to upgrade straight away. But if you're making the jump from an entry-level multichannel amp, prepare to be astonished. This is a terrific piece of kit.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Superb detail; clear, precise sound; good dynamic range; large sense of scale; punchy and weighty; sheer number of features

AGAINST Nothing, really

VERDICT The best we've reviewed just got better. Another success story for Pioneer

Also consider

Pioneer SC-LX57

₹1,10,990 ★★★★★



Now beaten by its successor, but you might be able to get a good deal on this.



AVENTAGE



THE MOST MOVING
SOUND EXPERIENCE

RX-A2040*/RX-A3040*



*Firmware upgrade available soon



Yamaha Music India Pvt. Ltd.

Nokia Lumia 930 | Smartphone | ₹38,649

Nokia is back in the frame

Nokia is in transition. After four years of being the champion of Microsoft's Windows Phone operating system, Microsoft recently bought the hardware division of the business. But with its name emblazoned on its colourful back panel, the Lumia 930 is still very much a Nokia phone, and it could be the best Windows Phone yet.

In a market filled with increasingly slimmer phones, the Lumia 930 feels chunky. At 9.8mm thick, it's added over a millimetre in bulk from the Lumia 925, and it's pretty heavy too. But in true Nokia style, the build quality is solid. The back panel is plastic, but feels nice next to the metallic trim, which has well-placed buttons for volume, power and camera shutter. Our sample was a striking lime green, but there's also orange, black, or white, as well.

The Lumia 930 is capable of wireless charging - which is nothing new, the LG G3

The 5in 1080p OLED screen is a delight, with 441ppi that puts it up there as one of the sharpest screens on the market. This shows in its video performance, which is packed with fine detail that gives a tangible feeling of depth to images. Blacks are as deep and inky as we'd expect from an OLED display and whites punchy, with colours reproduced vividly and with strong contrast. They can verge on looking a little overdone at times, but it doesn't take away from a largely superb viewing experience.

Music to go

Music performance isn't quite as strong, but still perfectly listenable on the go. It doesn't have the rhythmic drive of the Xperia Z2 or the iPhone 5s, but it's still punchy and engaging. It's a well-balanced presentation, with a deep bass and controlled treble, and plenty of detail.

The camera on the Lumia 930 is as good as you expect from a Nokia, with a 20-MP sensor, wide f/2.4 aperture and Carl Zeiss optics. Focus is rapid, while colour and picture are balanced

can do the same - but unfortunately, India-spec boxes of the Nokia Lumia 930 don't include the wireless charger.

The Lumia 930 packs Windows Phone 8.1, the most recent update to the operating system. It brings new features that feel somewhat borrowed from the likes of Android and iOS. The biggest, and handiest, addition is the swipe-down notification pane, which holds toggles for things like wi-fi and Bluetooth, plus details on missed calls, messages and emails. There's also a more customisable homescreen.

It looks as good as any Windows Phone, with live tiles constantly changing with information updates. But its biggest problem still remains its app selection.

Play catch-up

Microsoft has managed to play catch-up to some degree and now most of the main apps you'd want are available, though some of them are lesser versions of those you can get on Android and iOS. For example, you may not get all the features on Whatsapp that you get on the other platforms, because of the limitations of Windows.

Games suffer too, and if you're a *Candy Crush Saga* fan, you'll have to go cold turkey if you want to go Windows Phone, not to mention deal with older versions of games that have been out on iOS and Android for months. That aside, the Lumia 930 is a lovely phone to use, and dips in and out of apps with all the speed you need.

Our biggest problem with the Lumia 930 is file compatibility - we are unable to load our collection of CD rips in WAV and FLAC.

The camera on the Lumia 930 is as good as you expect from a Nokia device, with a 20-MP sensor, wide f/2.4 aperture and Carl Zeiss optics. Focus is rapid, pictures are crisp and colours well balanced, with a good handle on contrast, for the most part. There's no HDR mode in the default camera app though, which can make snaps in direct sunlight a little washed out.

In low light we noticed a bit of grain starting to creep in, but the dual flash can help with that, and there are plenty of manual options for white balance, shutter speed, ISO and exposure compensation if you want to fiddle around with the settings. Video is captured in 1080p with a range of shutter speeds, with four microphones



USE IT WITH
Sound-Magic E10S

Superb budget buds that will give your music-on-the-go an instant lift.

built in to help improve sound, while there is excellent image stabilisation too.

The Lumia 930 is easily the best Windows Phone we've seen, with a gorgeous screen, great camera and video performance that easily competes with the best Android phones out there.

However, we still want more from the apps side of things, and its file compatibility is restricted. That's still too much for us to consider it for the full five stars.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Good build; great screen; strong video performance; great camera

AGAINST A little chunky; apps still need work; restrictive file compatibility

VERDICT The best Windows Phone we've seen to date, but not quite the full monty

Also consider

LG G3

₹52,000 ★★★★★

One of our favourite phones of this year. Offers a great design, 2K screen and high-res music support.



Our review sample is a bright green, while the alternatives are black, white, and orange

#1
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with 25% Market Share
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Bose QC25 | Noise Cancelling Headphones | ₹21,263

The new king is here

For four years, the Bose QuietComfort 15s have dominated the noise-cancelling headphones category of our Awards. But now their time has ended, having been replaced by the QuietComfort 25s. Are they any good? You better believe it. Whether it's design, aesthetics, performance or noise cancellation, nearly every aspect of the QC25s is stronger than the QC15s.

Good lookers

Bose has mixed in a few materials to give a more luxurious feel to the QC25s. The dome of the earcups are metal. The headband features fabric: a woven material on the outside and pseudo-suede on the inside. Construction feels very solid, so you can commute with confidence. These headphones sit closer to the head than their predecessors, but they're just as comfortable. They sit closer to the head than their predecessors, but they're just as comfortable. The clamp force is perfectly judged; they grip but never squeeze. The perforations on the inside ensure heat won't build up. As with the QC15s, one of the earcups has a hidden flap, which opens to take a single AAA battery. Quoted battery life for a standard battery is 35 hours. And when that runs out? Well, the QC15s couldn't be used without power but, thankfully, the QC25s can run passively. You don't need power to listen if you're happy to make do without the noise cancellation and the built-in amp.

The sound is fine, but quite obviously quieter and less insightful.



Make sure you use them with the power on. They work without power, but it's not ideal



The QC25s offer a balanced presentation - much like the QC15 - and never lean too hard towards any part of the frequency range. The low end is hefty enough too

No more noise

The noise cancellation works really well. Astonishingly well, actually. The old QC15s were already great in this department, at times giving the impression of actively pushing silence into your head, yet the QC25s take it further. Office hubbub is dramatically reduced. The hum of air conditioning is eradicated. Voices aren't erased entirely, but we'll challenge anyone to pick out any part of a conversation while music is playing at an enjoyable level.

As with every pair of noise-cancelling headphones we've tried, the effect is more powerful when it comes to deeper, consistent sounds: so no longer will you have to crank up the sound (and risk tinnitus) on a flight, for example.

Frequency balancing act

So you're sitting comfortably. Noise has been cancelled. It's just you and your playlist. But what about audio performance? The QC25s offer a balanced presentation - much like the QC15 - and never lean too hard towards any part of the frequency range. The low end is hefty enough, but stops short of being distracting or overwhelming. The midrange is smooth and open, while the top is crisp. The frequencies are nicely integrated, and work in unison. As for detail, there's a good deal of it. You'll find plenty of nuances in guitar picking and vocals. It's a clear sound, offering more insight than the QC15s. There's a good degree of precision to the way notes start and stop, but the QC25s never sound overly analytical.

There's plenty of drive and attack: punchy dynamics and a surefooted sense of rhythm provide a thoroughly engaging listen.

You will find better-sounding headphones for the money in the market in terms of outright sound quality. But if it's silence you're after, you can trust Bose to provide with aplomb.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Astonishingly good noise cancellation, clear, balanced sound, comfortable to wear

AGAINST They are not cheap

VERDICT These are the best noise cancellation headphones by which all others should be judged

Also consider

PSB M4U2
₹26,500 ★★★★★

With substantial punch, weight and texture, these are a close rival



Denon Envaya DSB200 | **Wireless speaker** | ₹20,000 (estimated)

A weighty business



Solid construction, good ease of use and attractive design (it's also available in black)

Thin treble and non-existent bass. These are two criticisms that often come into play when assessing the merits of portable Bluetooth speakers. Well, the good news is that the Denon Envaya doesn't suffer from either of these problems.

In fact, you spend the first few minutes of life with the Envaya reeling from just how much bass it produces. Play Rudimental's *Waiting All Night* and bassheads will be pleased with the way the speaker powers through the song, bringing a solid sense of weight and depth to the pounding bassline. There's a good sense of scale and authority. The bad news is that these low frequencies have a tendency to sound overblown and overbearing. As well as becoming distracting over time, the amount of bass produced by the Denon upsets the balance of the speaker and robs the music of some of its clarity.

On the plus side, highs sound anything but bright. They're actually smooth and rounded, which helps them gloss over the jagged edges of poorer-quality recordings. Even so, there's still enough life and vibrancy in the percussion and piano during Tom Odell's *Sirens* to spark your interest. But even here, the edges of bass notes tend to butt in when they're not needed. The more you listen, the more you think the Denon could show a little more care with delicate, demanding music.

It's a shame, because the Denon's an attractive design and a nice thing to use. Solidly built, the Envaya is available in black or white. The metal grille unclips, and you can switch the fabric cover beneath for one of four different colours that come with the speaker. We think charging extra for an carry case is a little unnecessary, though.

Designed for (an easy) life

The Envaya isn't short of other useful design quirks and features. Squeeze the rear edge of the speaker and a kick-stand pops out. It's neatly integrated and the angle is such that it helps keep the speaker firmly planted.

A line-up of large, chunky buttons on top gives you all the basic controls - hold down the button with the Bluetooth symbol to start the pairing process or tap an NFC-enabled device onto the NFC logo on top of the speaker to speed things up. The Denon is aptX compatible too, so you can

USE IT WITH

HTC One (M8)

The HTC's NFC connectivity means a quick tap on top of the Denon and you're ready to stream music using aptX Bluetooth.



take advantage of higher-quality Bluetooth streams from compatible smartphones such as the HTC One M8 and Samsung Galaxy S5.

Charge in, charge out

A full charge takes around two and a half hours (there's a small indicator on top of the speaker) and this is good for around 10 hours of playback. If your smartphone's running low on juice you can use the USB socket on the side of the speaker to draw on the internal battery and help top it up.

Out of the box, the Denon really makes its mark: this is one of the most powerful-sounding portable speakers we've heard at the money. But we'd sacrifice some of that bass weight for a more balanced delivery.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Meaty, powerful sound for a portable speaker; bass weight; rounded highs

AGAINST Overwhelming bass upsets the balance and clarity; carry case costs extra

VERDICT A hefty, weighty sound, but that overcooked bass spoils the show

Also consider

UE Boom ₹20,000*

★★★★★

This smart, cylindrical, wireless speaker doesn't have the weight and authority of the Denon but does boast precision and a fine sense of rhythm.



In detail



Clear controls The aux selector, Bluetooth initiator, NFC sensor and volume buttons sit above an 'on' light around the Denon logo

Apple iPhone 6 | Smartphone | From ₹53,500

Slim 6 is fitter than ever

Apple's new iPhone 6 is bound to have its detractors. With specs that read like an Android phone of yesteryear - no full HD screen, no 20MP camera and no high-res music support - there's a lot to think you're missing out on.

Pick it up and use it, however, and you won't think that once. For everything it lacks in spec-list grunt, the iPhone 6 makes good with a performance and user experience that's hard to argue with. It's easily the best iPhone yet, and it's also one of the finest smartphones of 2014.

Doing the rounds

For the first time in four years the iPhone has had a significant makeover, ditching the squared edges and moving back to a more rounded design. Its smooth aluminium framework melts seamlessly into its newly sized screen (more on that later), curving around in a supremely tactile way.

Everything it lacks in spec-list grunt, the iPhone 6 makes up for with a performance and user experience that's hard to argue with. It's one of the finest smartphones of 2014

It feels surprisingly slim too, shaving off 0.7mm from its predecessor to get it down to 6.9mm thin - its tapered edges making it feel slimmer still. It's a masterclass in premium smartphone design, with the HTC One (M8) the only other handset we've seen that comes close.

The power button shifts to the right-hand side to make locking and unlocking the phone easier, but everything else remains much the same - the volume buttons and silent switch on the left, the headphone jack and speaker along the bottom.

While the rest of smartphone world has been pushing up screen sizes in recent years, Apple had remained resolute at the 4in mark since the launch of the iPhone 5, which was dwarfed by the likes of the LG G3 and Samsung Galaxy S5.

Bigger screen

The iPhone 6 sees a respectable screen boost, but at 4.7in it remains below the 5in mark. Of course its larger sibling, the 5.5in iPhone 6 Plus, answers the calls for a larger Apple handset. We think the size works well - including for video and gaming - and the increase is noticeable.

This year, Apple has finally gone Full HD, but only on the screen of the iPhone 6 Plus, leaving the iPhone 6 with a resolution of 1334 x 750 (up from 1136 x 640). The smaller model still fares well against its Full HD competition, offering a sharp image

with a rich yet natural colour palette, strong contrast, an outdoor-friendly brightness and a wide tonal spread.

Text looks sharp and is easy to read when browsing the internet using Safari, though some apps at the time of testing are yet to be optimised for the new resolution.

Apple's audio has always been one of our favourites on a smartphone, but with a few handsets offering high-resolution music in 2014, is that still the case? In short: absolutely. That rich, full-bodied character remains but with a touch more clarity, meaning it's more detailed and dynamic than ever. No, there's no high-res music support, but with a standard-resolution sound this good it's hard to be mad about that.

The iPhone is still bundled with Apple's Earpods and, though they're

better than the original white buds, we'd still recommend an upgrade to something a bit better.

As we've come to expect from yearly iPhone updates, the iPhone 6 features a boosted processor in the shape of Apple's own A8 chip. Apple never confirms specifics, but it would appear that it's a dual-core chip supported by around 1GB RAM.

Bespoke processor

On paper, it might seem underpowered compared to some of Android's powerhouses, but in use it's up there with the best. Why? Because Apple designs its own chip for its own requirements, while many Android phones use jack-of-all-trades third-party chips. It's a hugely smooth, lag-free experience. Flicking between browser windows and different apps serves up no problems whatsoever.

The battery life on the iPhone 6 has been improved, if only rather humbly. We're seeing an extra few hours from heavy use compared with the iPhone 5. Lighter users will manage a full day without issue.

Storage options have had a tweak, the 6 offering 16GB, 64GB and the new 128GB, doing away with 32GB completely. The good news is the 64GB version is similarly priced to what the 32GB iPhone 5s was this time last year.

The iPhone 6 comes with iOS 8 running out of the box, not looking a whole lot



Unmistakably Apple, and the slimmer, more rounded design feels great in the hand

different to iOS7 but bringing with it a number of usability tweaks, including the ability to change keyboards, to make the iPhone experience better than ever.

It's fair to say we're quite taken with the iPhone 6. While it might not break any new ground when it comes to specification, the evolution of its performance and user experience are hard to fault.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Premium design and superb finish; lively, audio performance; sharp, well balanced picture; strong graphics performance

AGAINST No expandable storage

VERDICT Apple has done it again - this iPhone takes the fight to its Android competitors

Also consider

iPhone 5s
₹42,500 ★★★★★

Last year's Award winner is still available, offering iOS 8 at a cut price.



*** Pioneer HDJ-500**

Essentially aimed at amateur DJs and audiophiles that prefer a solid low end, the ₹8590 headphones come equipped with a swivelling ear cup and replaceable cord.



2014: The year in tech

We look back at the emerging trends and fading lights of the past 12 months

And with a single blink of an LED indicator, it's almost time to power down for 2014. From CES in Las Vegas to IFA in Berlin to the *What Hi-Fi?* Awards in London, it's been quite a year - and now is as good a time as any to take a look back at what the past 12 months in tech have brought us (before we get round to going round again).

Multi-room mania

If 2013 was the year in which hi-fi threw off its wired shackles as the digital music revolution took root, then 2014 has been all about the multi-room music market. Sonos had long been our go-to system of choice for 'wireless hi-fi', but 2014 now has us spoiled for choice.

Nowhere was it more evident than at IFA 2014, with both Harman Kardon and Monster adding to the multi-room ranks that now include HEOS by Denon, systems from LG and Samsung, not to mention a Product of the Year from Bluesound.

The introduction of new players also brings features not previously available in a multi-room system - including Bluetooth streaming alongside wi-fi to name just one.

And with the market becoming more crowded and competitive, it will come as little surprise to hear that things appear to be getting a little heated - the news that Sonos has accused Denon of infringing patents being a case in point.

Upping the resolution ante

One of the features that helped the Bluesound system to claim top honours at our Awards was its high-resolution audio capabilities.

High-res audio may not exactly be a new arrival in 2014, but it has started to build up a head of steam in recent months - the Consumer Electronic Association has gone as

A GOOD YEAR FOR...

Multi-room systems, lossless audio and vinyl



A BAD YEAR FOR...

Plasma TV, the "Nokia smartphone" and the iPod Classic



* Asus Xonar U5

This tiny, 5.1-channel USB sound card and headphone amp supports 192KHz / 24 bit HD sound files and offers a 104dB signal to noise ratio. Now available for ₹4999.



There is the sense that we might be getting somewhere [with 4K TV]; the World Cup and Commonwealth Games serving as testbeds for live 4K broadcasting during the summer

far as to take the wraps off a formal definition for the format.

That definition wasn't without its contentions, but it does mean it should be easier for consumers to know more about their purchases.

And if streaming is your thing, Qobuz and Tidal offer millions of tracks in lossless CD quality.

Small screen, big definition

From hi-fi to home cinema, and 4K Ultra HD. It has moved forward in 2014 - yet the availability of 4K content still remains a bugbear.

But there is the sense that we might be getting somewhere; the World Cup and Commonwealth Games served as testbeds for live 4K broadcasting, while Japan is also making progress with its tests.

It's not just about your home cinema picture. Dolby Atmos has arrived in 2014 with the promise of cinema-quality sound at home.

Onkyo, Yamaha, Denon and Pioneer are among the companies to have either announced or released Dolby Atmos-enabled kit, and it's very much a trend to keep tabs on in 2015.

The spinner takes it all

Not new, but an honourable mention nevertheless to the

humble record player, which has kept up its resurgence with 2015 now looming.

April saw another successful Record Store Day celebrate the vinyl format, and it looks as though vinyl sales are set to pass one million in 2014 for the first time since the mid-1990s.

But it's not all good news...

In with the new, and out with the old. We can't escape 2014 without having to say goodbye to some technology titans - most notably the all-conquering iPod Classic.

The long-running rumours of plasma television's demise also came to fruition this year, with LG, the last major plasma maker, calling time on the TV technology.

And we will no longer see Nokia's name on smartphones, following the sale of its mobile division to Microsoft - the end of an era with the end of an iconic mobile brand.

Back to the future

So, what comes next? Will OLED TV hopes be realised? Will bigger smartphones steal the tablet's thunder? And will "wireless hi-fi" reach new heights? We shall see.



TOP 5 New launches

Amazon Fire TV, B&O wireless speaker, Elan controller, Dynaudio, and Datasat

Timeline

2014 review: Tech year in headlines

Take a trip down memory lane (well, 12 months worth) with our look back at some of 2014's highlights in the world of consumer tech.

January

- **Naim** introduces its Statement amplifiers
- **Focal** unveils its Dimension soundbar and soundbase

February

- **B&W's** new 600 speaker series is launched
- **Q Acoustics's** Concept 40 speakers revealed

March

- **Neil Young** debuts PonoMusic via Kickstarter
- **Google's** Chromecast arrives
- **Sonus Faber's** Extrema marks the company's 30th birthday

April

- **Microsoft** finally completes purchase of Nokia's mobile arm
- **Naim** announces it is entering the wireless speaker market with the Mu-so
- **Netflix** brings 4K streaming to U.K. and Europe

May

- **Apple** buys Beats in \$3bn deal
- **Beyerdynamic** celebrates 90 years with special-edition T90 headphones
- **Dali's** new Rubicon speaker range is unveiled

June

- **Bluesound** enters the multi-room music market
- **LG** reveals the "world's first" curved 4K OLED TVs
- **Gibson** snaps up Philips's AV business
- **Primare** unveils Reference 60 series amplifiers

July

- **Germany** win football's World Cup - in 4K Ultra HD
- **BBC** showcases 4G TV at the Commonwealth Games

August

- **Qobuz** launches high-res download store
- **LG** unveils Music Flow multi-room system
- **B&W** launches new CM S2 series speakers

September

- **Apple** heralds the "best iPhone yet" with the 6 and 6 Plus, but kills off the iPod Classic
- **Pioneer** sells its DJ and AV businesses to Onkyo
- **Technics** returns to the high-end hi-fi market

October

- **LG** confirms it will be ending plasma TV production
- **Dynaudio** taken over by China-based GoerTek





*** ENRG Speaker LED Bulb**

This LED Bulb fits into a standard or CFL socket, but doubles up as a Bluetooth speaker that pairs with compatible devices. Available for ₹2590.

These two portable, Bluetooth compatible speakers also charge devices on-the-go

JBL UPS PORTABLE SPEAKER LINEUP

New models see interesting and useful upgrades on previously popular series

JBL seems to be doubling down on its plans for the portable speaker segment with the launch of the Charge 2 and Horizon. The Charge 2 is a stereo speaker system with a list price of ₹11,990, and packs a 6000mAh battery which gives it around 12 hours of usage. Dual drivers and twin passive radiators provide rich sound and good low-end. The Charge 2's USB port also lets you charge other devices with it, making it quite handy for the frequent traveller and a much desired feature in today's world. Other features include a hands-free speakerphone with noise and echo-cancellation technology, along

with a Bluetooth Social Mode that allows up to three people to connect and take turns playing music.

Giving the Charge 2 company is the JBL Horizon, a portable stereo speaker that can play for about 12 hours. The Horizon features touch controls, that include a built-in alarm clock where you can set two alarms with snooze/light control facility, and FM radio with preset options. The multi-sensory ambient LED lighting aides in a gradual awakening from sleep. The dual USB ports on board provide quick charging for up to two devices at a time. It's priced at ₹9990.

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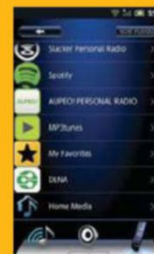
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*** Onkyo Remote 3**

This new iOS app is compatible with most recent Onkyo AV receivers and allows for advanced control and configuration along with a new, flat-design scheme.



'BONJOUR INDIA' - DAVIS ACOUSTICS

Reputed French hi-fidelity speakers touches Indian shores via Decibel Audio

Davis Acoustics, the high-fidelity brand known for its true, life-like sound reproducing loudspeakers from the Champaign region of Troyes, France has been a respectable name to in the audio world for decades. With humble beginnings as an OEM driver supplier for famous brands like Avantgarde Acoustics, MBL, Goldmund and Rey Audio Kinoshita, they switched to making turnkey loudspeakers for Thorens and Jadis in the past. Today, they have successfully transitioned into a wide range of speaker models, maintaining complete control of production and manufacture of products at the factory in Troyes.

Experience quality

Courtesy of Mangalore based distributor, Decibel Audio (decibelsaudio.com), Davis Acoustic loudspeakers are now available for Indian audiophiles. It's signature sound can also be experienced in their AV room that houses various series like Olympia, Karla and MV One with many other brands.

Davis Acoustics Series available:

- Dream Series**
- Karla (pictured right)
- MV One
- Olympia Series**
- Olympia One, 2 and 3
- Power Series**
- Monitor 1
- Stentaure LE and Stentaure LE C
- Clint
- Basson 150 Power
- Easy Series**
- Maya
- Integration Series**
- Sophia
- Inwall
- Integration Series**
- Centrale HD
- Matisse HD
- Vinci HD



The Karla is the Flagship of Davis, courtesy of the wide frequency response that allows for accurate highs and lows

INSIDER



*Sennheiser MM30G

Designed specifically for the Samsung Galaxy series, the MM30G (₹3990) in-ear headset features in-line controls, bass-driven sound and replaceable ear buds and is available in black and white.



ASUS's Transformer series offers portability and ease of use, courtesy of the design that allows it to 'transform' itself

ASUS unveils new Transformers

Asus has announced three new additions to its Transformer series of portable devices - the Transformer Flip Book (from ₹47,999), Transformer T200 (₹35,999), and the Transformer Pad TF103 (₹19,999). Powered by Intel i3 and i5 processors and kitted out with NVidia GeForce NV820M graphics, the Flip Book features a unique hinge that lets you 'flip' out the screen, converting this 15.6in Windows 8.1 laptop into a large screen tablet. Asus claims its SonicMaster technology gives the new Flip Book best-in-class audio performance. Also the new Transformer Book T200, an 11.6in, Windows 8.1, is ultraportable with a detachable keyboard.

It uses Intel's Z3775 processor, and has built-in cameras. Other features include Miracast technology with USB 3.0 connectivity and 11 hours of battery life, making it perfect for on-the-go work. Lastly, the Transformer Pad TF103 is a 10.1in, Intel Atom-powered tablet with a 1280x800 display that supports 10-point multitouch. Other highlights include twin cameras, 8GB onboard storage with up to 64GB of expandable storage and the Asus ZenUI, a customised UI that offers enhancements over the standard Android system. The Transformer products are also compatible with the Asus WebStorage cloud service that offers easy syncing.

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*** Uranus Pico Pocket Projector**

The Pico throws out an 80in image at 20 Lumens and comes with a small stand. The inbuilt battery gives it around 2 hours of usage time. It's priced at ₹21,000 and available on snapdeal.com.

**Origin brings FiiO's extensive range of headphone amps and DACs to India**

FiiO, the world's largest maker of headphone amplifiers, has tied up with Origin Marketing to bring their range of products to India. Getting you entry into the FiiO club is the E06. Priced at ₹2199, the E06 pumps out 100mW and has a 100dB SNR. At the other end is the E18 amp and DAC. The E18 is priced at ₹12,499, features a 300mW output and a 106dB SNR. Small, sturdy and very portable.

**Little Nap recliners introduce 'Bluetooth chair control' customisable accessory**

Our favourite recliners are now controlled with a paired Bluetooth device. It's an accessory actually, meaning it can be implied onto any motorised recliner model, along with a host of add-on options. Pictured is the 'Millor' (₹61,500) that has been fit with the 'Bluetooth chair control' option. Visit littlenap.in for more details.

**Sennheiser opens first-ever Professional Audio Experience Zone in Mumbai**

India's first-ever Sennheiser Professional Audio Experience Zone, has been set-up and inaugurated in partnership with Mumbai-based AV retail chain, Vardhaman Mega Tech. The new experience zone will showcase Sennheiser's range of pro audio solutions, including their latest headsets and microphones.

**Audio-Technica debuts in-ear monitors, named ATH-IM series**

You'll be spoilt for choice with Audio-Technica's new range of in-ear monitoring headphones. The baby of the range is the ATH-IM50, priced at ₹5499 and featuring 'dual symphonic drivers', a detachable cord and premium foam earbuds, while the top-of-the-line ATH-IM04, priced at ₹41,199, offers 'quad-balanced armature drivers' that distribute the signal for more accurate sound, and comes with detachable cables, along with silicon and foam earbuds. Other products in this line include the ATH-IM70 (₹7799), ATH-IM01 (₹14,999), ATH-IM02 (₹23,199), and the ATH-IM03 (₹31,799). The IM range has been engineered for accurate sound reproduction and offers a fit that blocks out ambient noise.

**Pioneer's 2015 range connects to your car's steering controls**

Pioneer's 2015 in-car entertainment range includes A/V players, CD and USB players, speakers, and subwoofers. Also introduced is App Radio Live, an in-car interface that lets you use your smartphone's apps on a simplified UI that's safe to use while driving. The ability to assign customisable functions from the steering controls helps to avoid leaving the steering wheel during operation. The new Todoroki EQ tech gives you curves suited to Indian music (designed by engineers that actually listened to about a thousand Indian songs) while the TS-C600IN component speakers offer improved heat resistance. Topping range is the AVIC-F60BT A/V player that costs ₹49,990.

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* Non-Local App (free/ iOS)

An app for meditation against the backdrop of 'Healing the Heart Meditations', an album about Rumi's poetry, narrated by Deepak Chopra. It's recorded in HeadphoneX technology for an immersive feel.

Expert Speak

DOLBY VOWS TO IMPROVE SOUND

A whole new sense of optimism has permeated the world of commercial and residential surround sound and Dolby Atmos is at the heart of it. We understand from Glenn Kiser, the importance of training in new formats.



Dir. of the Dolby Institute - Glenn Kiser

INDIA may be the biggest producer of movies in the world but we still have a long way to go when it comes to the understanding of sound mixing.

With the advent of Atmos surround sound, Dolby is on the run to educate engineers and influencers alike on the new height and object-based format. We catch up with the man behind this meaningful mission.

What is the primary objective of the Dolby Institute?

We created the Dolby Institute to reach out to content creators—writers, directors, producers—working in a variety of different media with education and inspiration about how to use picture and sound more creatively to tell story.

Does the introduction of Dolby Atmos mean re-learning how to use the

surround channels for engineers?

Dolby Atmos allows the mixers and engineers to move away from channel-based mixing and towards object-based mixing, so it can involve a period of learning and exploring with the new system. But one common approach that we've seen mixers take is to introduce themselves to the new technology by adding in a layer of discrete objects into an existing 5.1 or 7.1 channel mix as they learn the capabilities of the new system and the creative possibilities that are now open to them.

Is there an input by Dolby in big-budget Hollywood movie mixes or does there need to be?

We've always thought of ourselves as a partner to the artist and storyteller, right alongside them as they use our technologies to tell their stories. Sometimes it might be appropriate for us to make

We'd like to see more Hindi movies make use of Dolby Atmos system

a technical suggestion about how to accomplish a particular effect the storyteller needs, but we would never impose a creative vision. The final decisions are always up to the artists.

Did your visit to India yield any benefits for future Hindi movie mixes using Dolby Atmos?

Of course we'd like to see more Hindi movies make use of the Dolby Atmos system, and we hope that our visit and our workshops encourage Indian artists in the film and broadcast space to consider creative uses of sound to help them tell their stories.

Arcam's new blitzkrieg line up

Reputed British brand Arcam, unveils a new line of products for India, in December through their Indian Distributor, Audio One (audio-one.in). Counting on their 40 years of building audio amplifiers and about 30 years of CD players, the new batch of products includes pre-amplifiers, integrated amplifiers and power amplifiers, DACs, SACD/CD players, Blu-ray players, AV receivers, sound bars and woofers. Wired and wireless, Airplay compatible, USB and headphone amplifiers, SPDIF (coaxial and optical), portable and mini Bluetooth plus portable DACs are the variety of DACs that will be part of the new product line-up. Most of the products are aimed at the home theatre segment, such as the FMJ CDS-27 (₹1,23,00)



Wireless and wired connection options are available for pairing the Solo Bar and Solo Sub together

that is an SACD/CD player that offers network streaming with audiophile grade playback. The FMJ UDP-411 (₹1,56,000) is a Blu-ray player with 4K upscaling features amongst others.

One of the most notable performers on the line up is the soundbar, Arcam Solo Bar (₹1,23,000). Offering in-built decoding of all current HD audio formats, it ensures compatibility with all major surround sound formats. Six drive units and 100 watts of amplification offer room-filling output. It can also be coupled with the Solo Sub (₹66,000) which has a 10in downward firing woofer, for optimum output. Extremely rigid materials and high quality construction has been carried out so as to help prevent and dispel resonance, which colours and distorts sound.



*** Guvera Music**

The music streaming service has made its Indian debut. Use on the web or through the free app (iOs and Adroid) to get access to over 12 million tracks, bollywood included, from it's library.



B&O 's reinnovation: The BeoVision Avant

Hi-end television, redefined in 55in and 85in

Innovation based on the user's needs and thereby merging design and craftsmanship for a product of lasting value, has always been B&O's approach. The company's latest flagship entertainment centre, the BeoVision Avant television series stands testament to this. An impressive 89 years of ingenuity have brought forth this successor to their most popular TV series to-date, the Avant series, The BeoVision Avant is here to subtly impress.

Available in 55in and 85in display sizes, the Ultra HD (4K) Tv redefines performance via a range of indigenous in-built features. The customisable wall, floor and table mounting options aid for seamless integration. Rich audio output is courtesy of the sound panel that drops down when the TV is switched on, and has an integrated 7.1 surround sound decoder that allows for wired or wireless connectivity with external speakers for surround sound. A bass optimization feature constantly calculates distance from the walls and self-adjusts accordingly. Dual light sensors adjust for optimum brightness. All these features allow for an intuitive and smooth operation of a product that humbly stands a class apart. Priced at ₹8,75,00 (55in) and ₹28,00,000 (85in), vist gms.in for more details.



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* Creative T50 Speakers

NFC pairing and Bluetooth compatible, this three-driver, midrange-tweeter-midrange stereo system can also be connected via a 3.5mm line-in. It's priced at ₹17,999.

1 Amazon Fire TV ₹10,546

The Amazon Fire TV is finally available in India. If you want a set-top box for apps and services but don't want to partake in Apple or Chromecast's offerings, it could be the one for you. It provides access to a host of online streaming services as well as Amazon Instant Video. It's also said to have three times the processing grunt of the Apple TV and can be controlled via voice too. 1080p video playback and Advanced Streaming and Prediction (ASAP) technology also feature.



TOP 5 New launches

2

B&O BeoPlay A2 ₹22,990 Just as B&W has released its first portable wireless speaker, B&O has done the same with the BeoPlay A2. It supports aptX Bluetooth for wireless streaming and also features 180W of power with True360 omni-directional dispersion, plus a claimed 24-hour battery life.

Datsat LS10 ₹POR Part of Datsat's new Luxury Series, the LS10 offers a 10-band EQ for each of the 15 channels it supports, 13.1 sound with stereo subwoofers, Auro-3D decoding and upmix for immersive 3D sound, high and low pass filters, advanced bass management, 8 HDMI inputs, support for DTS NeoX and Dolby Pro Logic IIz, along with tablet and smartphone apps. Visit thesoundsmiths.com for details.

3



4 Dynaudio Focus XD ₹TBA

The Focus XD range of digitally active speakers comprises the 200 standmounts, and 400 and 600 floorstanders. 24-bit/192kHz high-resolution audio is supported and this can be streamed wirelessly via the Dynaudio Hub. Bass response and high frequencies can be adjusted according to room acoustics using a speaker position EQ. Each speaker, hand-made in Denmark, benefits from Esotec+ woofers and tweeters.



5 Elan G1 System Controller from ₹73,500

Get started on home automation properly with Elan's new G1 System Controller. Wi-Fi connectivity, an HDMI output, a bidirectional RS-232 port, an IR sensor and 3 IR transmitters together make the G1 capable of controlling your locks, surveillance cameras, lighting, climate control, and other home automation systems. Use the bundled remote and the in-built OSD or install the iOS apps for on-the-go control.

5



18 Categories **68** winners

AWARDS 2014

STREAMERS • DACs • TVs • TABLETS • SPEAKERS • HEADPHONES

It's the one night of the year *What Hi-Fi?* (as a brand) scrubs up, dresses up and invites the electronics and home entertainment industries out for a drink to explain exactly what it's been up to for the past 12 months. In all honestly, the past year has been much like all the others: we've been testing, comparing, evaluating and judging the most popular, most interesting and most exciting consumer electronics around. Over the next few pages we reveal the 68 products we think are the best you can currently buy - and you, lucky reader, don't even have to put on your best clothes to find out what they are.



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Helpful suggestions

The S Recommendation feature on the Samsung 'learns' your viewing preferences so it can offer programme suggestions

Televisions

Far from one small step, it's been one giant leap for TV-kind this past year. You want the moon? Today's best tellies suggest you can now have it

Best 46-52in TV

Samsung UA48H6400 ₹1,03,900

An oddly sized TV, from somewhere near the dead centre of its manufacturer's extensive model range, doesn't automatically strike us as a potential Product of the Year. A high-performance, smart-as-you-like TV, on the other hand, does. The Samsung UA48H6400 is both of the above-mentioned things and, despite arriving in a year that's seen TV brands both big and small really up their game, it's one of the most obviously outstanding value-for-money propositions in this entire magazine.

Styling is of the 'decent but hardly heart-stopping' school, while specification (in terms of socketry, smart functionality, choice of remote controls, 3D functionality, you name it) is extensive. While most rivals tend to pick and choose from the range of catch-up services, this Samsung packs in the usual lot. And there's no arguing with that amount of screen for this amount of money.

Picture brilliance across the board

Aside from those attractions, the Samsung is the outstanding TV of the past 12 months for one, fairly straightforward, reason: the quality of image it delivers from any and all sources.

Offering a balanced, clean and brilliantly stable picture with the best - by which we mean high-def - sources, the Samsung's colour palette is convincing and its facility with skin-tones exemplary. This, plus great contrast and minimal picture noise, also helps make the Samsung's Active 3D reproduction enjoyable and low-fatigue. We just wish there were more than two pairs of 3D glasses in the box. Switch down the resolution levels to DVD or standard-def TV broadcasts and the UA48H6400 is pretty heroic: picture noise is controlled well and motion hardly suffers at all. Like the best sportspeople, the Samsung has an all-round game.

Add in passable sound (by no means a given on TVs of any price) together with a predictably slick and logical ergonomic user experience, and the Samsung UA48H6400 is nigh-on impossible to fault. Make sure you see it for yourself.



*The smart-as-you-like **Samsung UA48H6400** is simply one of the most obviously outstanding value-for-money propositions in this entire magazine*

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*Warranty: Main Projector Unit - 3 years from the date of purchase
Light source unit - 5 years or 10,000 hours, whichever comes first from the date of purchase.

Best 22-39in TV

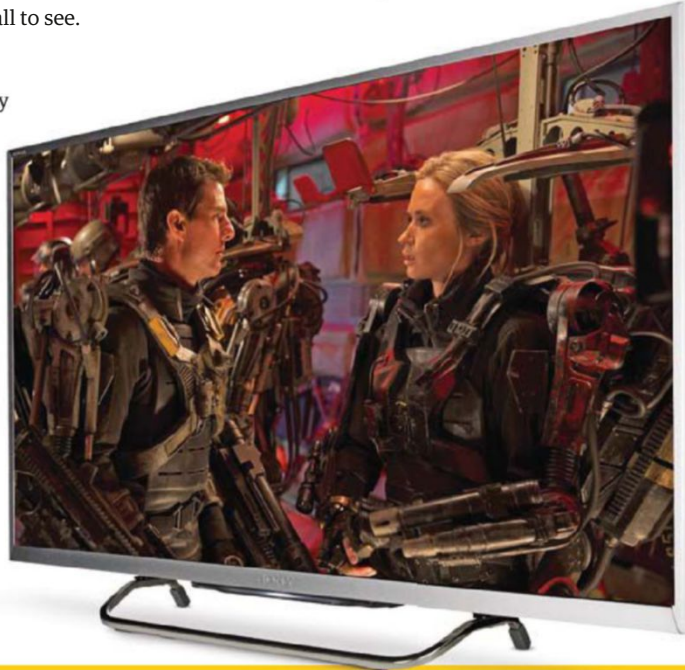
Sony KDL-32W700B ₹44,900

There are many reasons this Sony is our Best Buy at this screen size, of course, but resolution is as good a place as any to start. Many manufacturers seem to think there's no need to fit a Full HD 1920 x 1080 resolution panel to a 32-in TV. Sony doesn't agree, and the benefits of its stance are obvious for all to see.

Natural balance

The Sony's a tremendously well-balanced watch. Colours are natural, whether they're skin-tones, brightly punchy primaries or subtly drab. Contrasts are strong too, and there's ample detail to the brightest white or inkiest black scenes.

Detail levels are good, and the benefits of a native Full HD panel become obvious when you study the Sony's confident and secure handling of on-screen motion.



Ergonomically, this is everything you expect from a Sony - especially the SideView app, which is a colourful, logical and useful feature - and it's built and styled to match. Connections are numerous, Sony's online Entertainment Network covers all the smart

That's Entertainment

As well as catch-up TV, Sony's Entertainment Network also has a hefty catalogue of rentable movies on offer

content, catch-up TV, video on-demand and what-have-you in some style... even the sound is a cut above the usual flatscreen flatness.

2014 has been a weirdly hit-and-miss year for Sony TVs - there's been more variance across model ranges and screen sizes than we would expect. But with the KDL-32W700B (and the KDL-40W600B below) the company has comprehensively hit the bull's-eye. At ₹45k this Sony represents prodigious value for money, and for those who want a screen this size it's something of a no-brainer.

*Ergonomically, the **Sony KDL-32W700B** is everything you expect from the marque, especially the SideView app, a colourful, logical, useful feature*

Best 40-46in TV

Sony KDL-40W600B ₹67,900

The handsome, eminently affordable Sony KDL-40W600B emerged with five stars from its *First Test* in the previous issues, and by the October issue had made off with a seven-way Supertest win too. So it's not the biggest surprise to see it grasp the accolade of the best 40-46in TV we've seen this year - although its price-tag still has the capacity to make us double-take.

Detail under any circumstances

Subtle and punchy in equal measure, the Sony can offer detail in even the inkiest, most uniformly black scenes and variation in the most glaringly bright. The colour balance - rich and vivid, but unarguably natural too - is well judged, with skin-tones appearing especially convincing. Motion is dealt with confidently and edges are crisply drawn. What's more, all of

the above is equally true for upscaled content as it is for native 1080p stuff. Sound is nothing special - it's as thin as the TV itself, and as bright as the pictures it produces - but at this price we're not going to get sniffy about it.

At any money the 600's connectivity and ergonomics would be admirable, so at this pared-back price they're deeply impressive. Four HDMI's, a pair of USB's, integrated wi-fi and the HD tuner take care of your inputs, with the network connection opening up Sony's excellent Music and Video Unlimited portal to general services like YouTube and dozens more. The remote control is brief and logical, the on-screen menus simple and thorough. And Sony's TV SideView control app is an object lesson in concise, neat and in-depth usability.



*The colour balance on the **Sony KDL-40W600B** - rich and vivid, but unarguably natural too - is well judged, with skin-tones appearing especially convincing*

So it seems you can have it all. Performance, functionality, usability, looks and unarguable build quality in one great-value product. If this is the sort of screen-size you're interested in, you positively must give the Sony KDL-40W600B a viewing.

Hearing is Believing!

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Best 52-60in TV

Samsung UA55HU7200 ₹2,51,900

Anyone with eyes to see wants to get in on the 4K ultra-high-def action, but sensible folk aren't about to pay through the nose for the privilege. And that's where the truly outstanding UA55HU7200 comes in.

At 55 inches it's big-but-not-too-big, and at ₹2,51,900 it's even more affordable than it was when we gave it the full five stars in our previous issues. But what sets it apart, and what set it up on its Awards pedestal, is its prodigious combination of picture quality, build quality, on-line functionality, design and ergonomics. In

every area the UA55HU7200 is right on the money.

The best treatment for the best material

This screen is at its best with 4K material, naturally, and with some native content streamed in the Samsung looks superb. Every important component of picture creation - colour, contrast, detail, edge definition, you name it - is beyond reproach. And with excellent motion-handling added to the equation, the UA55HU7200 is a staggeringly immersive watch.

4K TVs have plenty to do when it comes to upscaling Full HD or (heaven forbid) standard-def material, but the Samsung stays composed and convincing when it's dealing with the lower-res stuff. 1080p Blu-ray images are a match for the best native

Full HD screens, and even standard-definition TV broadcasts aren't the dog's dinner that the amount of scaling required might suggest.

As befits a TV at this sort of money, the UA55HU7200 is thoroughly specified. 3D (with a couple of pairs of active-shutter glasses thrown in), four HDMI's, 3 USB's and some legacy connections, a smooth five-page smart interface, satellite and HD tuners... everything you might require, basically.

Like most flatscreen TVs, regardless of price, the Samsung doesn't produce the most exciting or full-bodied sound you ever heard. But that's a problem that can be overcome; spending this sort of money on a state-of-the-art TV suggests/demands you spend again on some sound equipment (soundbar/soundbase/5.1 system) that will do justice to the pictures. And believe us, these pictures are worth that extra expense.

*Every important component of picture creation - colour, contrast, detail, edge definition, you name it - is beyond reproach on the **Samsung UA55HU7200***



Best 60in+ TV

Samsung UA65HU8500 ₹3,83,500

What with the trend in TVs - especially cutting-edge, top-of-the-range TVs - being towards the massive, the first 2014 Samsung 4K UHD TV we tested this year was this one. Now, 65 inches is a big telly in anyone's language, and ₹3,83,500 is a big price tag, but if it's big-screen, no-compromise, full-on 4K action you crave, then the UA65HU8500 is the TV for you.

More of the same

As the model number suggests, this is a bigger, pricier version of the screen we've just eulogised (above). So it will come as no surprise to find the UA65HU8500 is, on paper, pretty much identical to its littler sibling in all but screen-size. You have the same all-encompassing suite of socketry, multiple control options (remote, little remote, app), superbly wide-ranging smart interface and active 3D (including glasses). And,

of course, a similarly bravura performance when it comes to delivering detailed, subtle, vivid, utterly believable pictures.

One of the real pleasures of a 4K TV is how easily you can ignore your Mum's advice about sitting too close. Such is the sharpness, the smoothness, the prodigious detail of the images the Samsung delivers, all the advice regarding viewing distances (as they relate to Full HD TVs) goes out of the window. You can sit good and close to this 65in monster safe from eye-strain or fatigue for at least the first half of an HBO box set. And throughout, you can thrill to the amazing motion fidelity, tremendous colour balance and staggering amount of detail up there on the screen.

But what makes the Samsung much more than just a great 4K TV is the work it does when



dealing with high-and standard-definition resolutions. Full HD pictures via Blu-ray, 576p DVD images and even the real poverty-level stuff from standard-def TV broadcasts is sympathetically upscaled onto that huge panel. That's one of the reasons the UA65HU8500 is among the best TVs we've seen this year.

*What makes the **Samsung UA65HU8500** much more than just a great 4K TV is the work it does when dealing with high- and standard-definition resolutions*

Soundbars & soundbases



Best soundbar ₹30,000-₹60,000

Q Acoustics Media 4 ₹45,000

When we first reviewed Q Acoustics' first soundbar, we'd have happily bet it would end up in the final showdown for an Award. Now here it is claiming a Product of the Year accolade.

It's little wonder: the QM4 (the company's official abbreviation) is a huge step up from conventional flatscreen sound - mirroring the insightful, full-bodied and even-handed character we've come to expect from the company's successful stereo speakers.

Play *Fast & Furious 6* and it conveys a real sense of excitement and drama as cars race and high-paced pursuits unfold with the storyline. There's no doubting the part the internal subwoofer plays; reinforcing roaring engines and earth-shattering explosions with admirable weight and control.

For the sake of clarity

Dialogue comes through with clarity and expression - and highs are never overbearing. Even as car windows shatter on impact, the sound stays poised and avoids coming across as harsh.

This Award was a close call between the QM4 and Yamaha YSP-1400. Although you get a greater sense of sound effects panning around you with the Yamaha, the QM4 delivers unmatched solidity and detail. Unlike

other soundbars at this price, the QM4 is missing any optional sound or surround modes, but we'll excuse that: we don't feel we're missing out with the one-sound suits-all setting. Suitable for 40in TVs and bigger, the QM4 looks reasonably compact from the front, but the trapezoidal cabinet actually extends back - around 14cm - to house a large elliptical subwoofer. Twin 65mm BMR drivers (Balanced Mode Radiators) are the final pieces in this 2.1 soundbar.

Input needed

The relatively simple, unfussy design is apparent in the features and functionality on offer, too. Although there's an optical input, a pair of analogue RCA inputs and a single 3.5mm socket, some of you may be disappointed by the absence of HDMI inputs.

You do get aptX Bluetooth support, though, as well as the convenience of near-field communication (NFC) pairing with your compatible smartphones and tablets.

When a manufacturer tries its hand at something different, the results could go either way. Thankfully for Q Acoustics, its unexpected entrance into the realm of soundbars has paid off - the QM4 is a leading light in its very impressive product range.

Best soundbase up to ₹30,000

Cambridge Audio TV2 ₹19,500 (Approx.)

Another Awards issue, another new product category. Soundbases essentially fight the same cause as soundbars: to boost the weedy sound of televisions. But unlike their TV-boosting sidekick, they have a more traditional chassis (or 'base', if you like) and are designed for you to place your TV on top of it.

The Cambridge Audio TV2 is the cheapest of our two new Best Buys and the successor to Cambridge Audio's much-loved Minx TV - which was en route to securing this spot before the TV2's recent arrival.

Packing a punch

Rich, dynamic and balanced, the TV2 doesn't just give you a leg up in volume. Coming from a typical telly's speaker, punching and bone-shattering sound effects in *The Raid 2* are thin and hollow. Out of the TV2, they sound dense

The Cambridge Audio TV2 is not just a leg up in volume. Effects in The Raid 2 are dense and defined, while dialogue pulls through with expression



and defined. The TV2 handles the oscillating dynamics of the film score too, and when the action is sidelined, dialogue is solid and expressive.

Of the four EQ settings, we like 'Music' best for its well-judged, even-handed delivery. Play music over Bluetooth (it supports aptX and has a 10m range) and its musical delivery has a good grasp of timing - obviously a wired connection brings improvements in clarity and balance.

While the TV2 should cater for most 40-odd inch TVs, you should check that your model is a suitable fit. The manual states it must have a base no wider than 55cm and no deeper than 30cm. And it should weigh no more than 30kg.

Conforming to the conventional rectangular body, the TV2 has a smart matt finish and cloth-grille front. An LED light shines through

clearly to indicate commands. Peeling away the removable front panel uncovers the two Balanced Mode Radiator speakers (the down-firing bass driver is located on the unit's underside), and a control panel for setting up the TV2 to learn your Tata Sky remote controls.

Socket to them

The supplied remote is tall, curved and easy to hold, with clearly laid-out buttons. Get past the absence of an HDMI input, and the optical input, pair of analogue plugs and 3.5mm mini-jack make for a fairly good list of connections. The rear-facing sockets are easy to use, too.

The Cambridge Audio TV2 has all the criteria: full-bodied, insightful sound and a practical build. For ₹19,500, what more could you ask?

Best soundbar ₹60,000+

Yamaha YSP-2500 ₹1,09,990

After missing out on a soundbar Award last year, Yamaha returns to this page in style, proving once again that you don't need a bulky speaker package for surround sound.

The successor to the 2012 Award-winning YSP-2200, the YSP-2500 is a paragon of the company's successful sound projection technology - delivering a big 5.1 surround sound experience from just a slim bar and discreet wireless subwoofer.

Surrounded by magic

The magic lies in the way it uses delay control to direct sound beams from the bar's 16 speakers (each driven by 2-watts of amplification) to bounce off the walls and reflect sound around the room - thus creating an enveloping virtual 5.1 surround field. An IntelliBeam function further optimises sound to match your specific room (like auto-calibration on an AV receiver).

The result is staggering. Play *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* and its expansive soundfield mimics a 5.1 surround system. Spidey's web shooter pans around you convincingly, and there's a good sense of dimension to the sound as he

swings across the screen. For the ultimate surround sound experience, its '5beam' setting is the best of the playback and 'beam' modes.

There's more than enough detail to keep us engrossed with the action on screen too, and the film's sound effects are placed with startling

The Yamaha YSP-2500's magic lies in the way it uses delay control to direct sound beams to bounce off the walls and reflect sound around the room



accuracy and impact. Thanks to the Yamaha's expressive dynamics, the pounding track that scores the chase scene is full of tension.

The Focal Dimension was in the running for this Award after impressing with a slightly fuller midrange. But its bulkier build is less practical and it can't surround like the Yamaha YSP-2500.

For songs streamed over Bluetooth, we switch to the 'Stereo' mode for tighter, more musical rhythms. This is an open, authoritative delivery capable of solid vocals and melodic tunes.

Practical too, the bar sits low enough to be placed in front of most TVs without obstructing the screen, while the wireless sub can be tucked away in a corner. The bright display is clear, while the remote has a premium feel and layout. The Home Theatre Controller app (free on iOS and Android) is a superb substitute too.

The '2500 has plenty of connections as well: three HDMI, two optical and single coaxial inputs; a pair of RCA plugs and 3.5mm mini-jack.

If you don't want the clutter and complexity of a traditional 5.1 speaker package and AV receiver, the Yamaha YSP-2500 is the most appealing solution out there.

Stereo

amplifiers

Get your choice of amp right and your whole system will bristle with energy and realism. If that sounds tempting, try one of these four



Serious body armour

The 'FMJ' in the Arcam's name stands for Full Metal Jacket and refers to the amp's steel-and-aluminium casework

Best stereo amplifier ₹40,000-₹80,000

Arcam FMJ A19 ₹72,000

Arcam wins the stereo amplifier Product of the Year title for the second year, and deservedly so. We haven't come across any alternative that betters this integrated's combination of build, features and sound quality.

The A19 is happy in a wide range of systems, getting more out of Wharfedale's Diamond 220s than most people would believe possible, but also driving something more premium - say PMC's Twenty 22s - with considerable skill. This amp is impressively faithful to source components; the better they are the better it will sound.

Beefy delivery, inclusive attitude

Once it's up and running, the first thing you'll notice about this amplifier is its sonic scale - it fills up our largish main listening room with clean and open sound. This Arcam isn't fussy about musical genre either, sounding equally at home with the likes of Jay Z as it is playing a Mahler Symphony.

We love the A19's sense of control and its composure when pushed hard. This isn't the kind of product that grabs the attention on a short demo - it sounds smooth and pleasant rather than overtly exciting on

initial acquaintance. But give this Arcam a little time and you'll realise that it's a terrific all-rounder; it has punch, power and a wonderfully fluid way with dynamics that belies its 50 watts per channel power rating.

Listen to *15 Step* from Radiohead's *In Rainbows* set and the A19 takes it all in stride. This is a complex track layered with intricate rhythms and can easily sound messy if the system isn't talented enough. There's no such problem with the A19. It punches hard and with precision, delivering bass notes with real grip and power while ably rendering the complexity.

There's a lovely sense of refinement here and the kind of full-bodied tonal balance that will make the most of aggressive recordings and sources, while tempering the behaviour of bright-sounding speakers.

Move away from sound and this Arcam continues to impress. It's solid, well made and beautifully finished. There's a sensible range of inputs too, including a decent phono stage. We're equally taken with the headphone output, which mirrors the amplifier's excellent sound into speakers.

The Arcam A19 remains a top-class amplifier for the money, and fully deserves all the accolades it gets. Buy it with confidence.

Best stereo amplifier up to ₹45,000

Marantz PM6005 ₹41,900

Marantz is something of a master at producing class-leading budget kit and the PM6005 is further evidence of that talent. Along with its partnering CD player - the CD6005 - this amplifier sets the standard for entry-level hi-fi.

What makes it special? As with all our Award winners, it's a combination of factors that makes the PM6005 such a good buy. It's beautifully made for starters. Entry-level hi-fi doesn't have to feel cheap, and this amplifier is proof of that. The casework is nice and solid while the quality of finish wouldn't be embarrassed by comparison to kit that costs twice as much.

Equipped for the task

It's well equipped too, with a decent number of line-level inputs (four), tone controls, headphone output and a surprisingly capable phono stage. It's not a backward-looking design either, as the provision of optical and coaxial digital inputs shows. And the inclusion of a digital-to-analogue converter shows that Marantz has recognised the changing habits in how people listen to music. We do wish Marantz had gone just one step further, though, and included a USB input for a more straightforward connection to laptops. Still, the lack of such a connection is no deal-breaker.

Previous generations of Marantz's budget amplifiers sacrificed attack and timing precision for refinement. Not this one. It's still one of the most listenable amplifiers around - both revealing and forgiving - but it matches these qualities with a newly found rhythmic thrust no rival can better.

Play Michael Jackson's *Bad* on vinyl and the PM6005 marshals the intricate and complex arrangements into a cohesive, rhythmic performance of tight drumbeats and melodious harmonies. There's plenty of detail and it's well organised and layered. We're equally taken with the soundfield - spacious, nicely focused and stable, even when things become demanding.

The Marantz PM6005 marshals the intricate, complex arrangements into a cohesive performance of tight drumbeats and melodious harmonies



**Low cost,
high resolution**

The PM6005 might be a budget amp, but its built-in DAC supports high-res audio files of up to 24-bit/192kHz

With The Dead Weather's *Horebound* (both on CD and streamed) the Marantz delivers an attitude-laden performance full of drama, the open top end managing to sound smooth without losing any bite. Basslines are deep and taut, string plucks are tactile.

There's plenty to sing about with this Marantz amp. The digital inputs broaden its appeal to a wider audience than previous incarnations and give it an edge over most traditional rivals, but it's that wonderfully lively and detailed sound quality that seals the deal. You'll love it.

Best stereo amplifier ₹80,000-₹1,50,000

Rega Elex-R ₹87,000



It takes a supremely talented amplifier to knock the terrific Naim Nait 5si off its perch, and that's what the Rega Elex-R is.

By using the much-admired Brio-R amp as a base and adding circuit elements from the unquestionably talented Elicit-R into the mix, Rega has created one of the most talented sub-₹1 Lac amplifiers we've heard.

One of the family

Anyone familiar with Rega's current amplifier range will recognise the Elex-R's sonic character. It delivers a fast, agile sound that's as rhythmically surefooted as we've heard at this level. Play a piece of music such as alt-J's *Breezblocks* and the Rega is right at home. It's happy to deliver that thickly layered bassline with power and has no trouble rendering

dynamic shifts and changes of pace with enthusiasm. There's an addictive sense of liveliness and energy, something rivals tend to tone down in the search for greater refinement.

Tonally the Rega edges towards leanness, though if partnered with care (avoiding sources and speakers that err too far towards brightness) all will be fine. We used a range of speakers from Dali's lively Zensor 3s and B&W's 685s right the

Play alt-J's Breezblocks and the Rega Elex-R is right at home. It has no trouble rendering dynamic shifts and changes of pace with enthusiasm

way to PMC's mighty Twenty 26s, and at no point did the Rega fail to shine.

Of course, a power output of around 70W-per-channel isn't enough to make the floor shake in really large rooms, but we think this Rega is capable of decent levels in most set-ups.

Switching to Tchaikovsky's *Marché Slave Op.31* shows that this amplifier can keep track of complex instrumental arrangements and deliver scale with authority. We're pleased with the resolution on offer too.

Traditional approach

Move away from sound and the Rega remains on sure ground, as long as all you want is a traditional stereo amplifier. There are no digital inputs, though we think Rega would direct you to its talented DAC for number-crunching duties. Instead, you get a good-quality MM phono stage, one that's talented enough to make the most of turntable packages such as Rega's own RP6 (that's a surprise).

We ended our *First Test* of the Elex-R by suggesting rival products from class leaders such as Naim, Cyrus and Roksan would have plenty of worry about from this unassuming compact amplifier. It turns out we were right.

Stereo speakers

Speakers old and new alike claim their titles in a range of worthy winners of various shapes, sizes and prices. Which one is right for you?



To cap it off

We're happy to see B&W has covered the fragile dome-tweeter with a protective grille mesh. It's intended to help with sound dispersion as well.

Best standmounter ₹40,000-₹80,000

B&W 685 S2 ₹65,000

Bowers & Wilkins' revised 600 range has been a spectacular success. These 685 S2s take our overall Product of the Year title, and the floorstanding 683s have also won their class with ease. It's quite some achievement from the 685 S2s, especially when you consider how much we love last year's Best Buy at this price, KEF's marvellous LS50s.

So what makes these speakers so great? Well there's a fair bit of technical improvement over the original 600 range. The tweeter assembly, for example, is suspended in a ring of soft gel. This keeps it isolated from any cabinet vibrations caused by the midbass driver. This new 600 range marks the first time B&W has used such mechanical decoupling when mounting a tweeter inside the cabinet.

The 16.5cm mid/bass driver remains mostly the same. The bullet-shaped phase plug of the previous generation is replaced with a mushroom-shaped 'dust cap' derived from the high-end B&W PM1 speakers, which further damps the driver down at certain frequencies. The new shape, and foam material, also lessen unwanted resonance and aims for a smoother driver-response in the upper frequencies.

Technical tweekery is all very well - but how do they sound? In a word: brilliant. Right from the start, these B&W 685s burst to life with a powerful, clear and agile sound. These are hugely talented and enjoyable speakers, and a definite step up from their predecessors. The sense of scale is massive, especially coming from relatively compact standmounters. The soundstage is wide and deep, enveloping you in a richly detailed, subtly dynamic and cohesive performance whether you're playing Aerosmith, Lorde or a Hans Zimmer soundtrack.

Whole lotta bass

The deep and taut bass is particularly impressive. Play Led Zeppelin's *Whole Lotta Love* and the bass notes are so rich and muscular it's hard to believe they're coming from such a compact cabinet. These speakers can also go extremely loud with little obvious distortion, too.

The 685 S2s are hugely entertaining. They're the speakers we'd put on to get our friends into hi-fi and we can't think of a better reason to give the new B&W 685s our Product of the Year title.

Best stereo speakers up to ₹25,000

Wharfedale Diamond 220 ₹23,000

Looking for the most talented budget speakers on the market? Look no further. Wharfedale's Diamond 220s have managed to dislodge the excellent Q Acoustics 2020s in the process, which is no mean feat.

Wharfedale's engineers have used composite cabinet walls made with two thin MDF layers sandwiching a chipboard filling. It works really well, producing a sturdy cabinet that's controlled in terms of resonance. This means you'll hear far more of what the drive units are doing rather than the cabinet. And what does that mean for you, the listener? A clearer, more detailed sound.

Diamond designing

Changes from the last generation of Diamond standmounter include a bigger magnet on the 13cm woven-Kevlar mid/bass driver in an attempt to make the speakers a little easier to drive and improve responsiveness. The unusual slot-loaded port arrangement first seen on the 100 series makes a reappearance here too, and it has been tweaked to reduce distortion. It's claimed to be more efficient than a conventional port but, as always, the proof is in the listening.

The tweeter remains unchanged. It still sits in a deeply dished waveguide, which helps

efficiency, particularly through the crossover region.

When it comes to sound quality, the Diamond 220s are excellent. These speakers deliver a meaty bass with more power and punch than we expect from boxes that stand just 50cm high. Lows are also articulate, able to track fast-moving basslines with ease. Move up the frequency range and the good news continues. Midrange quality is terrific, pointing to quality drive units and a well-designed crossover network. Listen to Adele's *21* set and it's hard not to be taken in by the emotion in her delivery.



The Wharfedale Diamond 220s sound excellent. They deliver a surprisingly meaty bass with far more power than we expect from a 50cm box

Switching to Holst's *Jupiter*, we're impressed by the balanced tonality and the 220s' ability to deliver large-scale dynamic shifts with enthusiasm. Stereo imaging is good too.

Put it all together and you have a top-class pair of budget speakers. Well done Wharfedale.

Best standmounter ₹80,000-₹1,50,000

ATC SCM11 ₹1,45,000

ATC's SCM11s have made this category their own down the years. Few products have dominated their price point so completely. If rivals hoped ATC was going to slip up with a range revamp, they've been sorely disappointed. The new generation SCM11s continue where their predecessors left off - and have taken performance levels to a new level.

There have been some notable changes: while the mid/bass driver remains unchanged, it's now housed in a smarter, curved cabinet and partnered to a new in-house tweeter design.

The new tweeter really is a big deal. Most companies the size of ATC buy drive units from large OEM drive unit suppliers and simply integrate them into their speakers. Never a company to take the easy route, ATC has spent years developing this 25mm soft dome and manufactures it itself. One listen proves its worth.

The SCM11s' sound is remarkably clean and more transparent than ever. Combine that with a high level of detail and you get superb insight into recordings such as Van Morrison's *Moondance*. Vocals are given air and plenty of emotion. The song's distinctive walking bassline is rendered with tautness and enthusiasm, while dynamic shifts are delivered in a pleasingly expressive way.

In keeping with ATC tradition, these SCM11s are a sealed-box design. That means the low frequencies aren't delivered in quite the generous quantities of some ported rivals. What you do get is impressive bass texture, tonality and detail. We reckon a slight hit in outright quantity is worth it for the excellent control on hand. In fact, the whole frequency range is superbly controlled. Nothing we do can wrong-foot these speakers, which remain composed no matter how hard we push. We go from Atoms for Peace to Massive Attack, via a spot of Eminem: at every turn the ATCs demonstrate an extraordinary level of precision.

That precision extends to the focused stereo image as we switch to *Jupiter* from Holst's *The Planets* suite. These ATCs make it easy to place parts of the orchestra on the wide soundstage.

The trait we like the most about the original SCM11s - their natural, balanced sound - is here, too. Whatever we feed the speakers, the sound comes out uncoloured and uncorrupted. That makes them hugely versatile, and an easy listen.

The SCM11s continue to set the standards at this price. Given a suitably talented system they bring music to life in a way no rival can match.



The ATC SCM11's new tweeter really is a big deal. ATC has spent years developing this new 25mm soft dome and they produce it, too. One listen proves its worth

Best standmounter ₹1,50,000+

PMC Twenty 22 ₹2,20,000 (Approx.)



The PMC Twenty 22s do it all. They have the scale and power to do justice to Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture in full flow, and deliver Bon Iver's music with finesse too

PMC Twenty 22s hold onto their Best Buy title for yet another year - the third in succession, which is impressive. It takes an especially talented product to achieve this, but as our *Group Test* of premium standmounters in the November 2014 issue shows, there still isn't an alternative that delivers a better all-round sonic performance.

There's plenty to admire technically. The tweeter, a 27mm Sonolex dome, is designed to deliver high levels of detail with wide dispersion; the paper-coned mid/bass driver (PMC likes paper's light weight, rigidity and resonance behaviour) is specifically designed for use with a transmission line.

The inclusion of a transmission line makes PMC speakers different from most rivals. The idea is that the rearward output of the mid/bass driver is forced through an internal folded path and exits through the rectangular grille at the front of the speakers. This path is lined with specially chosen damping material that absorbs all but the lowest frequencies in the sound. As these very low frequencies exit the transmission line, they augment the forward output of the driver.

PMC thinks this is the best way to get high-quality, low-distortion bass.

The cabinet remains a sturdy affair. Its sloped-back appearance may look a little odd at first (and necessitates the use of dedicated stands to look balanced) but it gives a good foundation for the drive units to work from.

Stand and deliver

These Twenty 22 standmounters are immensely fast and precise. Their detail levels are excellent, and they deliver the sound with breathtaking agility. You can add wide dispersion and a focused soundstage to the list of plus points.

Tonally, the speakers sound even and immensely taut. Some may prefer a more relaxing presentation, but it would be very hard to find such leading-edge definition and speed any other way.

These PMC speakers do it all. They have the scale and power to do justice to Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* in full flow and the tonal balance to render individual instruments convincingly. They'll also deliver intimate music such as Bon Iver's *Michicant* with a pleasing amount of finesse. The 22s' detail resolution and way with low-level dynamics is as good as anything we've heard at this price.

Best floorstander up to ₹70,000

Q Acoustics 2050i ₹66,400

The Q Acoustics 2050i floorstanders won their first Award in 2012. Two years on, our opinion hasn't changed: we still think they're superb.

Let's start with the design. At 100x27x32cm, they're on the chunky side for floorstanders at this level. But bigger doesn't mean boxier - their combination of straight and rounded edges has a more elegant feel than fully rectangular rivals.

They're built really well - nice and solid with the kind of finish that wouldn't disgrace a product at twice the price. Hidden speaker connections - tucked under the integrated steel plinth - keep cables tidy. This leaves the back clean of clutter, aside from a flared reflex port large enough to lose a pet hamster in.

Smooth and full-bodied

The driver complement looks formidable: there are two 16.5cm midrange/bass drivers

Biwiring the Q Acoustics 2050is gives a little more detail, with greater articulation and power, while angling them in slightly helps tighten the stereo image

accompanying a 25mm soft-dome tweeter. The tweeter is compliantly mounted to minimise distortion caused by vibrations generated by the twin mid/bass units. Such touches demonstrate an impressive attention to detail.

In use, the 2050is perform very much like other Q Acoustics speakers we've heard. Sound is full-bodied and smooth, and more forgiving to recordings of lower quality. There's a good amount of detail at the top end, while vocals are clear and engaging. Move down the frequency and there's plenty of punch, as we'd expect from speakers of this size. Lows are nicely controlled: put on Red Hot Chili Peppers' *Give It Away* and the funky bassline is taut and precise.

Biwiring the 2050is will give you a little more detail, with greater articulation and power, while angling them in slightly will help tighten the stereo image. And make sure to keep them away from walls in order to keep that bass controlled. These speakers also fill a large room with ease - they have great dynamic ability, there's heft and the stereo imaging is good. They even stay composed when things get loud.

There's no shortage of affordable floorstanders but there is a shortage of quality options. Except for the 2050is that is, with a build, finish and sound no rival can better.



Best floorstander ₹80,000-₹1,80,000

B&W 683 S2 ₹1,59,000



We're really taken with Bowers & Wilkins' new 600 range. These floorstanders are just as impressive as the smaller 685 S2s and it's hardly surprising to say these speakers sound big - physically the 683 S2s are larger than many of their peers. But the sense of scale they produce is massive. The soundstage is wide and tall, and instruments have room to breathe.

Of course, the electronic partners have to be talented: we'd be looking at Cyrus's CDi CD player and Arcam's A19 amplifier to even begin to show what these speakers can really do.

Making the right overtures

And what the 683 S2s can do is deliver superb clarity. They reveal plenty of detail and deliver it in an organised and stable way. Play Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* and they respond with enthusiasm, thumping out huge dynamic swings yet still keeping a track on low-level instrumental strands. Their presentation is sharp and precise. Tonally, they're well balanced and well integrated, with an impressive low end that is deep and authoritative enough to make you briefly wonder if there's a subwoofer hidden somewhere.

And yet nothing gets drowned out by the bass. This is the kind of low-end heft we like:

powerful, but nuanced enough not to compromise the rest of the frequency range.

There's a surprising level of finesse here, too - the 683 S2s can sound as refined as P.G. Wodehouse's Jeeves. We're not entirely sure just how B&W has managed to achieve this, but it's surely down to clever engineering.

There's a new tweeter: an aluminium dome reinforced by an aluminium ring for rigidity. It sits in its own gel-filled cavity, to minimise the impact of unwanted vibrations from the other drivers. It also has a protective grille (and waveguide) these days, so it's slightly safer from fingers. Elsewhere, the twin bass cones have been reinforced with aluminium rings, and the FST Kevlar midrange driver has a new spider.

We're very impressed by the mix of power, scale and delicacy on offer from the 683 S2s. If you have the space, you won't be disappointed.

We should really mention the B&W 683 S2s' impressive low end. Deep and authoritative, it's enough to make you wonder if a subwoofer is hidden somewhere

Best floorstander ₹1,80,000+

Spendor A6R ₹2,25,000



It's easy to be unimpressed by the Spendor A6R. They cost quite a lot of money and look fairly ordinary in a neat kind of way. Yet in some ways these speakers are extraordinary.

They're an update on a previous favourite, the A6 - but there are big changes, including a new mid/bass drive unit and a re-engineered crossover. You'd never know it to look at them though, as they keep the same compact, understated design as their predecessors.

Charm offensive

Characteristically, there's a lot of the A6 charm in these new speakers. The excellent musicality is still there, and the A6Rs show a keen interest in making any music you throw at them feel right at home.

This is down to a superb performance across the frequency range, showcasing a deep and

punchy low end alongside an expressive midrange and a detailed, refined treble. Each feels like a well-judged part of a whole, slotting together perfectly to produce a well balanced, coherent listen.

Detail levels are second-to-none and there is layer upon layer of fine detail to grasp. Notes have depth and dimension, oft-lost nuances are picked up in all their glory and vocals are conveyed with all their reality and emotion.

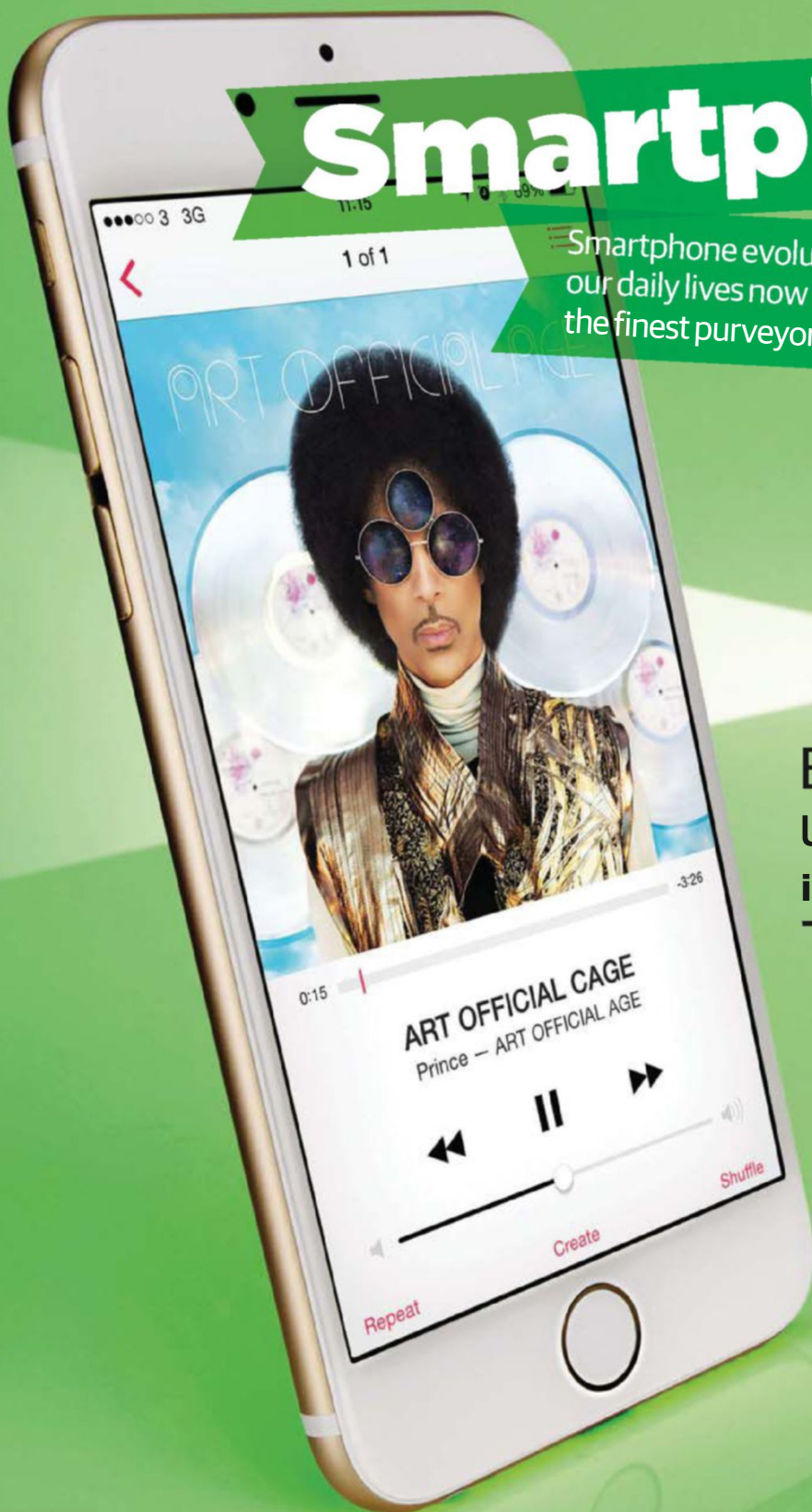
Dynamically, the A6 was never a slouch, but the A6Rs show another level of dynamic attack that outshines even last year's Award-winning PMC Twenty 23s. It keeps a strong grip on bouncing basslines, with a low end that's both punchy and agile enough to keep up with other energy found in the frequency range.

As a rather upfront pair of speakers, they do require some consideration when it comes to pairing them. The treble stays just on the right side of bright and aggressive when we test them but, matched with an amp of similar character, could tip the scale into hardness - something worth considering should you be looking at building a system around them. But get it right and these are as talented a pair of speakers as we've heard for the price. The A6Rs truly are a stunning achievement.

The Spendor A6R shows a level of dynamic attack that outshines even last year's Award-winning PMC Twenty 23. It keeps a strong grip on bouncing basslines

Smartphones

Smartphone evolution means they are integral to our daily lives now and we have chosen two of the finest purveyors of the power in our pockets



Best smartphone under 5in

iPhone 6 from ₹53,500

There was a time when Apple's iPhone commanded the smartphone marketplace. Talk of 'iPhone killers' was rife, but largely unsubstantiated, leaving the Apple handset without any real concerns about the competition for a number of years.

Of course, that is far from the case in today's market, with some seriously good handsets coming from all sides to challenge Apple - and with impressive specs as well.

2K screens, 20-megapixel+ cameras, high-res music support and octo-core processors are just some of the buzzwords we've heard from this year's big launches. The iPhone 6 has none of those, so why are we giving it the Product of the Year gong?

Impeccable performer

For everything it lacks in spec-list grunt, the iPhone 6 makes up for with a performance and user experience that's very hard to argue with. Quite simply, compare it with its Android competition in the key areas of video and music, and it comes out on top.

With its new 4.7in screen and increased resolution of 1334 x 750, the iPhone has never looked better.

It might not be full HD but it's as crisp and sharp as they come, with edges accurately drawn and fine detail picked out well.

For everything it lacks in spec-list grunt, the **Apple iPhone 6** makes up for with a performance and user experience that's very hard to argue with

Best smartphone 5in+

Sony Xperia Z3 ₹50,990

It can be a little hard keeping up with Sony's smartphone line-up. It's been less than two years since the first Xperia Z handset launched, and already we've arrived at the fourth iteration - the Xperia Z3. The good news is this version finally feels like the Xperia handset we've really been waiting for, bringing together a superb performance with a truly stylish design.

The first thing to notice is that the rather harsh, angular edges of its predecessors are gone, replaced by a more curved design which makes it easier and more comfortable to hold.

The colour of the edges match the phone now too, making it look more premium, while its ports and buttons have also seen some tweaking to fall in line with this softer approach.

Attention seeker

We love the new look, which finally feels like it matches the attention to detail Sony places in other parts of the phone.

Its 5.2in full HD screen remains the same size as in the Z2, which feels like a good choice, and it packs much of Sony's TV technology into its display. The result is a wonderfully sharp and accurate picture, which excels with fine detail. Colours are rich and punchy, if on the more vibrant side of neutral, and motion is well handled once a few settings are slightly tweaked.

When it comes to music, the Xperia Z3 has followed in the footsteps of the rest of the company by adding in high-resolution music playback to its offering.

We still lean towards standard-res as the main benchmark for quality though, and the Z3 wins out here as well. It's a leaner presentation than the iPhone,

but it's just as engaging, with strong dynamics and plenty of detail to go at.

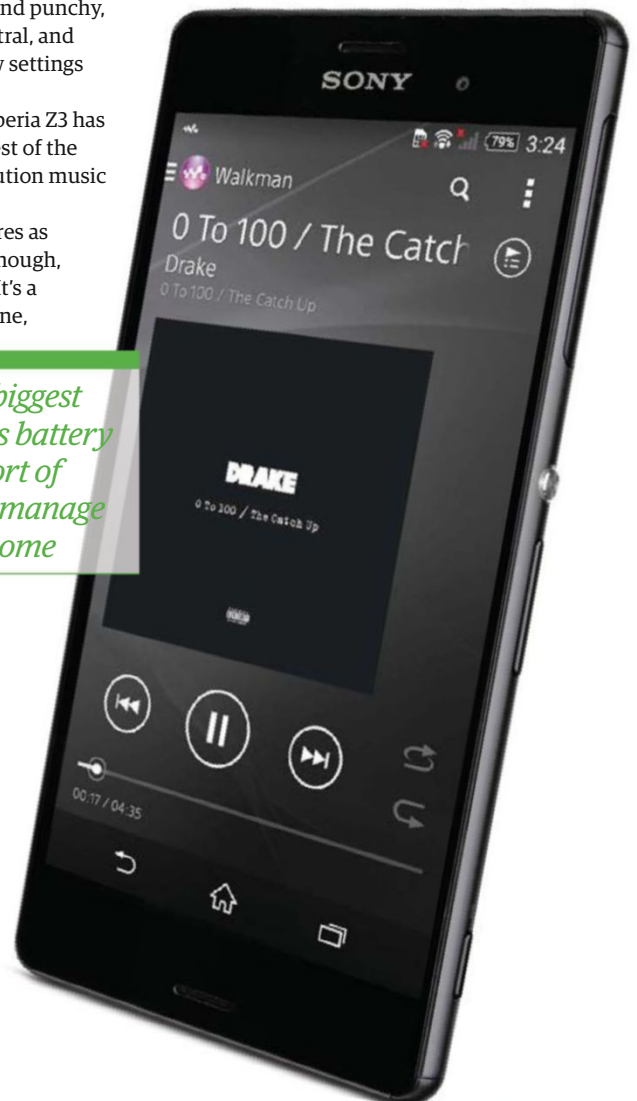
When it comes to high-res playback, it's the best, most entertaining performance we've heard on a smartphone yet - with the added detail, subtlety and transparency you'd expect from better resolution music combined with excellent timing and precision.

Content contentment

The Xperia Z3's on-board storage helps you make the most of this, with 16GB as standard, expandable via microSD card - making it a lot cheaper to be a content hoarder than, say, on the Apple iPhone.

Despite all of this, one of the Z3's biggest achievements is its battery life, which is nothing short of excellent. You will easily manage an entire day and then some with reasonably heavy use, which is no mean feat by current standards.

If you're looking for the best Android phone of 2014, this is most certainly it, and while it misses out on our Product of the Year gong this year, with Sony now apparently in its stride, we can't wait to see what they do next.



The Sony Xperia Z3's biggest achievement has to be its battery life, which is nothing short of excellent and will easily manage an entire day and then some

Colours are on the cool side of neutral, but look believable rather than washed out, and contrast is strong, with deep detailed blacks offset by strong, controlled whites.

We've always loved the way the iPhone sounds, and the iPhone 6 is the best-sounding yet. The rich, full-bodied character that makes it so listenable remains, but with a touch more clarity compared to the iPhone 5S, meaning it's more detailed and dynamic than ever.

No, there's no high-res music support here, but with a standard resolution sound this good it's hard to be disappointed, particularly when this is the level the majority of people will be listening at.

Win by design

Add to that a brand new design that's impossibly slim and more desirable than ever, a faster processor complete with updated graphics for console-style gaming on the go, and the well-considered usability tweaks introduced with iOS 8, and we don't think there's a more deserving winner of our smartphone Product of the Year.

The iPhone 6 is going to have its detractors, but our guess is, they haven't even tried it. We can't recommend strongly enough that they do so.

In-ear headphones

The market for these little marvels has exploded of late, so don't settle for those bundled buds - you can do much better, regardless of budget

Extras and bonus features

As well as sounding great, the Sonys come with an inline mic remote, carrying pouch and cord length adjuster.

Best in-ears ₹35,000+ Sennheiser IE 800 ₹54,990

Expensive in-ear headphones tend to have a tough time convincing people of their worth. It's all about perceived value - they're only tiny little things, but you want how much?

Yes, the IE 800s are eye-wateringly expensive, but they also sound astonishingly good. Once you've had a listen to these buds, the scope of their abilities becomes apparent.

No matter what you throw at them, the Sennheisers remain entirely unfazed. Their authority and control are unquestionable. Low-frequency stuff is delivered with speed, definition and superb tonal variation.

Midrange communication and articulation is among the best we've heard from in-ears. Then there's that crisp attack at the top, along with a fanatical level of attention on the beginning and decay of notes. Dynamic headroom is considerable, refinement and timing are absolutely first-rate, while stereo focus and soundstaging are entirely lucid.

Such is the Sennheisers' manoeuvrability, eloquence and integration that the interplay between the musicians is not only apparent but obvious. Where sheer musicality is concerned, the IE 800s make a pretty much watertight case for themselves.

If you're spending this much, you'll want some fancy tech to justify it - and the IE 800s don't disappoint. The extra-wideband transducers promise distortion-free sound even at near-dangerous volume levels. Harmonic distortion levels are so low as to be apparently non-existent.

Small, but technically accomplished

Ceramic housings and dampened two-chamber absorbers also let you know that these small, unassuming-looking earbuds mean business.

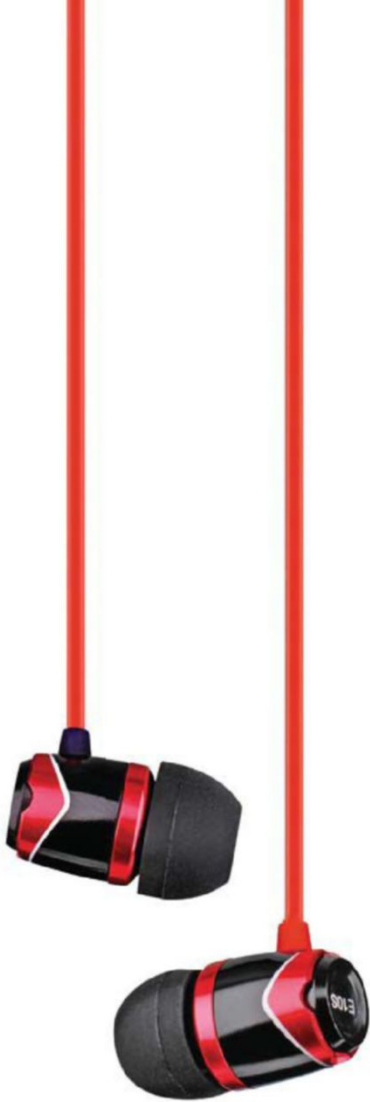
While there isn't much space to express the idea of premium materials, or painstaking construction, the Sennheisers' single-piece ceramic enclosures feel solid, and the stout cable resists tangling and transmitting noise.

If you can justify the cost, we think you'd be hard-pressed to find a more accomplished set of headphones at anywhere near this price.

*Yes, the **Sennheiser IE 800s** are eye-wateringly expensive, but they also sound astonishingly good. Once you've listened, the scope of their abilities becomes apparent*

Best in-ears up to ₹5000

SoundMagic E10S ₹2349



Over the past few years our regard for SoundMagic has developed into a deep admiration. The original E10 headphones came out of nowhere to dominate the budget in-ear domain for three years in a row.

Despite the success, SoundMagic hasn't rested on its laurels. The E10s keep receiving little tweaks. There have been subtle improvements in sound, and more obvious overhauls such as new cabling. Now we have the E10S.

The S is for 'smartphone'. The most obvious change is the inclusion of an inline mic remote for pause and playback.

There's also a clever little switch in the plug that guarantees button compatibility regardless of the operating system on your smartphone. It's SoundMagic's way of dealing with different manufacturers, whose phones don't always play nicely with your buttons.

*Improved sound and extra features: if you're looking to upgrade from your portable's bundled buds, the **SoundMagic E10Ss** are where you should start*

Internally, driver placement and venting have been adjusted to improve sound. This tweak has also been applied to the standard E10 model, which remains available for slightly less. That's good for those who don't need buttons.

Elsewhere, it's business as usual, including the same cable, twisted for toughness and glossy to prevent snagging in pockets. They're the same well-made metal buds too, which, as well as looking smart, feel a good deal more luxurious than their price might suggest.

The internal tweaks work, because the audio performance is better than ever. It's a more refined sound, offering more smoothness and subtlety at the top end.

Agility, sparkle and space

Bass weight is nicely judged, making for a tight, agile sound. The treble sparkles, and vocals are clear and nuanced. You get a lovely, airy presentation with a good sense of space, and plenty of detail too.

It's quite hard to improve on an Award-winning recipe, but SoundMagic has done just that. Improved sound, same good engineering and extra features too: if you're looking to upgrade from your portable device's bundled buds, this is where you should start.

Best in-ears ₹15,000-₹30,000

Shure SE425 ₹26,107

When we think of the Shure SE425s, quite a few superlatives come to mind. But we're tight on space, so we'll settle for five: fun; absorbing; classy; polished; captivating.

It's all in the detail, literally and figuratively. Get some music going and it's as if the SE425s disappear, leaving you with just the sound they're producing. It would be a shameful understatement to call them immersive. The level of finesse on offer here is astonishing. You'll hear things you never thought were there, even on recordings you thought you knew inside out.

For those about to rock

There's an abundance of energy. Put on a bit of AC/DC and the SE425s prove they're more than capable of handling punchy rock and tight rhythms. Guitar-picking is especially evident and sharp-edged, yet the sound never tips over into brashness.

The midrange is as solid as you like. That vein of detail continues right down the frequency range. Vocals are placed to the fore, yet they never clash with various other elements in the same frequency range. There's plenty of nuance too, and it's not hard to tell who's had a few too many cigarettes.

Descend to the frequency depths and there's a good amount of thud. It's helped by the sense of isolation, which aids the low-frequency extension. The SE425s really do block out almost everything around you, locking the music inside your head.

The design is a bit unusual: it's the in-ear monitor configuration favoured by pros, where the cable passes up your back and splits behind your head. They pass over the top of your ears, secured in place with a cable slider and wire inserts that mould to the shape of your lugs.

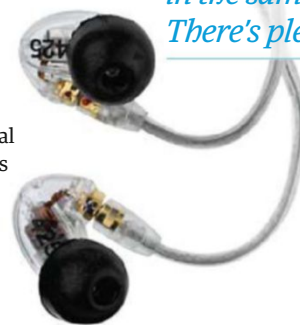
The enclosures are detachable, so worn-out cables can be replaced for less than the price of a new set of earphones. The enclosures also swivel on the ends of the cables, making them easier to fit and more comfortable to wear.

It's safe to say we think the Shure SE425s are great. If you can get over the less-than-conventional styling and get them into your ears (easier than you might think), you'll never look back. These are the finest in-ears at this price we've heard in ages, and that's why they deserve an Award for the second year running.

Apples are not the only fruit

There are versions of the SE425s offering three-button remotes for Apple, or one button for everything else.

*Vocals are placed to the fore with the **Shure SE425s** yet they never clash with various other elements in the same frequency range. There's plenty of nuance, too*





Living with it

The DragonFly has only a 3.5mm headphone output - and that's it. Volume is controlled via the computer

DACs

So much of our music is now stored in the digital domain that it's never been more important to get a decent digital-to-analogue converter

Best DAC up to ₹15,000

AudioQuest DragonFly v1.2 ₹13,800

The original DragonFly created a huge buzz (pardon the pun) when it launched back in 2012. AudioQuest managed to take a DAC and headphone amp, two traditional hi-fi components, and serve them up in a great-sounding consumer-friendly package. The DAC even won a Product of the Year award for its troubles.

Fast-forward a couple of years and history is repeating itself - the DragonFly is back, new and improved. Despite 'v1.2' being significantly cheaper than the original, inside there have been changes to the signal path between the DAC chip and analogue output. The internal power supply has also been tweaked.

We've always been fans of the design. The logo lights up in different colours to indicate the sampling rate of the file being played: green is 44.1kHz, blue is 48kHz, amber is 88.2kHz and magenta is 96kHz.

It's the DragonFly - but better

Play a couple of tracks and we soon hear that the open, spacious, detailed sound of the original DragonFly is still there, but the new version sounds even cleaner and clearer. There's even greater dynamic thrust. *Imagine the Fire*, from *The Dark Knight Rises* OST, is a brooding blockbuster of a track - pacy, powerful and dynamic. And the DragonFly easily communicates all these facets to the listener. Whether it's a WAV version or a relatively low bitrate file via an internet stream, the sense of drama, rising intensity and the explosive nature of the track are all expressed perfectly.

The DragonFly's ability to follow a track's rhythm and timing are superb. Duke Dumont's *I Got U* is a feel-good dance tune and the DAC matches it with a fine sense of enthusiasm and an equally upbeat tempo.

The emergence of the DragonFly led to a steady stream of impressive rivals from the likes of Fiio and Cambridge Audio - but it's the DragonFly v1.2 that takes the Product of the Year laurels.

Best DAC ₹30,000-₹60,000

Arcam irDAC ₹54,000

Product of the Year in 2013, the Arcam irDAC has to settle for a Best Buy Award this year. But that doesn't mean its sound quality is any less spellbinding - this is still a fantastic piece of kit for the money.

Fire it up and you'll find the Arcam's ability to stay true to the rhythm of a track is what makes it stand out from many of its peers. From simple hip-hop to complex jazz and classical pieces, the Arcam has the speed and agility to communicate pace and momentum superbly.

Plenty of connecting options

It helps that Arcam has equipped the irDAC with technology and design cues derived from the company's high-end FMJ D33 DAC. Beneath the well-damped aluminium casework you'll find much to admire in the high-quality output stage, advanced eight-stage power supply and high-grade Burr-Brown DAC.

The irDAC offers plenty of connections. The twin optical inputs (which support material up to 24-bit/96kHz) and the twin coaxial digital inputs (which can handle 24-bit/192kHz files) mean the Arcam can take feeds from multiple sources such as CD players, streamers, TVs and games consoles too. So, far from it being confined to your hi-fi kit rack, it can help to



improve the sound from your other home entertainment kit too. One of the two USB inputs is dedicated for Apple devices so the unit can also make the most of digital files stored on a smartphone or tablet.

The Arcam irDAC sounds big, bold, detailed and cohesive - and it absolutely sings, doing a grand job of joining strings, piano and bass, flowing them together

The irDAC sounds big, bold, detailed and cohesive - and it absolutely sings. Play Kanye West's *Gone* and the irDAC manages the ebb and flow of the track superbly. It does a grand job of joining the strings, piano and bass, flowing them together. It all comes together beautifully, producing a fluid, entertaining and expertly organised product that really engages.

The Arcam is never less than entertaining. The way it encourages you to keep listening is a rare talent, and one we are more than happy to confirm with a Best Buy Award.

Best DAC ₹1,00,000+

Chord Hugo ₹1,59,000

Just when you thought it couldn't get any better for Chord following the exploits of the Chordette QuteEX, the British company finds itself the recipient of its second Award in a page.

The Hugo's sound quality justifies the jump in price, and it also comes packed with a whole host of useful features. In fact, we're still scratching our heads over quite how Chord has managed to build such a



smartly finished, feature-packed device at the money without sacrificing sound quality. Just to clarify, this is a bona fide digital pre-amplifier with DAC, optical and coaxial inputs, two USB sockets, an analogue output, three (yes, three) headphone outputs and - last but not least - aptX Bluetooth connectivity.

Take it wherever you go

And it's portable! That's right - Chord has even found room inside that petite aluminium casework for built-in rechargeable batteries. A two-hour charge should be good enough for 12 hours' use. It's really going above and beyond the call of duty for a product of its type, and should be applauded.

But, as we say, Chord hasn't taken its eye off the ball in the slightest with regards to sound quality. The Hugo is as happy and communicative with a 320kbps stream as it is feeding off the meaty resolution of a DSD music file. Start with a basic Bluetooth stream of Aretha Franklin's *I Say A Little Prayer* and the Chord transports you directly to the recording studio. The Hugo's

Start with a basic stream of Aretha Franklin's I Say A Little Prayer and the Chord Hugo transports you directly to the recording studio

desire for detail and natural tone really brings the vocal to the fore. Piano and guitar sound realistic and pure, brought to life with amazing dynamics. It all blends together to really deliver the soulful feel of the track.

Change tack slightly, with Emeli Sandé's *Heaven*, and the Hugo goes with the flow. Highs sound airy and lively, but there's still decent weight and solidity too. The Chord gets the balance of subtlety during the verses and drive during the chorus spot on. The beat really takes hold thanks to the Hugo's ability to lock onto rhythms and organise them.

The Chord Hugo's neutral, even-handed approach to music is as evident whether you're using it as a DAC or headphone amp - it's a device of many talents and plenty of charm. And that's easily enough to convince us it deserves a Best Buy Award.

Home cinema amplifiers



If you are after power, precision and purity of sound while watching movies or listening to music at home, then these amps are ideal

Best home cinema amplifier ₹80,000+

Pioneer SC-LX58 ₹1,10,990

Historically, Pioneer's strike rate for its premium surround-sound amplifiers isn't too shabby: you have to go back to 2009 to find a non-Pioneer winner at this price point. So it's no surprise to see this year's SC-LX58 model earn a Best Buy Award.

At this level, sound quality goes up a notch when compared with our Sony Product of the Year. *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* is a veritable assault course: shattered glass everywhere, crunching metal, and armour-piercing bullets, topped with a caffeinated score. The soundtrack is a workout for any system and the Pioneer breezes through it, delivering a thoroughly immersive sound through your room with agility and accuracy.

The detail definition is exquisite. Everything that pings off Captain America's shield is clearly identified, and when he throws the disc at

somebody's face there's weight behind it. This detail extends throughout the frequency range, too: bass is deep and articulate, while the top end is nicely rounded and refined.

It's not all about muscle, of course. The Pioneer is capable of musical nuance as well. Move on to a Blu-ray of *U2: 360°* and the amp does a beautiful job rendering the emotive intro of *Where The Streets Have No Name*; Edge's guitar has a sense of fluidity and rhythm.

Heavy metal sounds

The design isn't going to turn heads - it's a heavy, black or silver metal box, and built like a tank. There are eight HDMI inputs and three outputs; 3D playback is supported, as is 4K 60p pass-through and upscaling. The SC-LX58 has built-in aptX Bluetooth, while there's built-in AirPlay compatibility too. You also have internet radio, plus more.

If you want to use the Pioneer as a music streamer it has WAV, FLAC, Apple Lossless and high-res support (including files up to 24-bit/192kHz), while there's support for Dolby Atmos surround-sound tech.

If you're looking to make the move from an entry-level home cinema system to something more mature, powerful and refined, then the Pioneer SC-LX58 is more than qualified.

The Pioneer SC-LX58 is capable of musical nuance, as well as muscle, doing a beautiful job rendering the intro of Where The Streets Have No Name

Best home cinema amplifier up to ₹35,000

Yamaha RX-V377 ₹34,990

Yamaha's budget home cinema amps have dominated this price point in recent years - and 2014 is no different. If you're new to the idea of surround sound and want a solid foundation for a system, look no further than the brilliant Yamaha RX-V377.

Compared to some of the other home cinema amps further up the price scale, you miss out on a few important niceties such as 4K upscaling, AirPlay and internet radio streaming - but you do get with it, the use of Yamaha's automatic speaker calibration technology to help with your set-up. There is also 4K Ultra HD pass-through and a rather useful and necessary four HDMI inputs.

The Yamaha RX-V377 grabs your attention, whatever the film. Only Lovers Left Alive is a great example - it switches easily from crashes and bangs to dialogue

Down to the wireless

There's the option to go wireless with Yamaha's YBA-11 Bluetooth receiver for an additional fee, while those with an iDevice can always play straight through the front-panel USB port (which can also be used to charge smartphones, tablets and other devices).

However, sound quality is the key when it comes to home cinema amps: powerful, punchy and full of detail, the RX-V377 exceeds our expectations. Yamaha receivers usually excel at steering surround-sound effects across the room with precision and detail - and this receiver does so on both Blu-ray and DVD.

Play the DTS-HD Master Audio soundtrack of *Robocop*, and you're placed in a bubble of sound with such startlingly accurate and detailed placement that you're immediately sucked into the action. Effects panning between speakers is seamless. The Yamaha is considerably weightier and more authoritative than anything we've heard at this price.

The Yamaha grabs your attention in a good way, whatever the film. *Only Lovers Left Alive* is

a great example - it switches easily from crashes and bangs to an atmospheric feel, where dialogue is prominent. When subtlety is required, the Yamaha delivers. This receiver comes with no fewer than 17 distinct DSP modes, and while they're fun to play around with (Sci-Fi and Drama for movies are worth trying), we prefer the 'Straight' option.

Even when you use the Yamaha as purely a stereo amp, its confidence and punch come to the fore - cementing its position as our number-one recommendation at this price point.

Radio Abilities

The RX-V377 has built-in FM and AM tuners and there's also the option of plugging in a YBA-11 Bluetooth wireless receiver too



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Speaker packages

From full-fat 5.1 systems to space-saving style combos, there's a quality surround sound speaker set that'll suit your budget



Up against the wall

The Dali standmounts sound best when pointed straight ahead and set fairly close to a wall - ideal for smaller rooms

Best traditional package ₹70,000-₹1,50,000

Dali Zensor 15.1 ₹1,22,200

It takes something very special to win an Award for a second year, but something exceptional to pick up Product of the Year again too. That coup belongs to the Dalis. You could argue that it's because the high fliers in the speaker package categories remain unchanged from last year, but that seems rather dismissive when you remind yourself of the Dali's make-up: two pairs of the brilliant Zensor 1 standmounts, an expressive Vokal centre speaker and an authoritative yet articulate E-9F subwoofer.

Together they run like clockwork. Well made, consistently matched and easy to accommodate, the Zensor 1 package offers the whole works without having to spend an arm and a leg. The Vokal is a little chunky at 44cm wide and 29cm deep, so make sure your TV rack can house it. These speakers can be wall mounted, lending them a flexibility many rivals lack.

The 34cm-cubed sub is helpfully unfussy when it comes to placement in the room thanks to its floor-facing port. While it has a front-firing 23cm aluminium drive unit, the rest of the channels use the same 25mm soft-dome tweeter and 13cm wood-fibre mid/bass driver for a uniform presentation. It pays off - we admire the consistency in character

between the front channels - the soundfield stays close-knit as sound effects pass across all three units.

The exquisite talents of the Zensor 1s are clear from the off: fluid and dynamic with splendid attention to detail, they make for an exciting listen as we delve into the action-packed *Robocop* reboot. There's plenty of pop to gunfire as our hero carries out his training regime, and the beautifully integrated subwoofer is as fast as it is precise.

A clear message from the centre ground

The centre speaker keeps its side of the bargain too, impressing with its insightful and delicate delivery of dialogue.

Swap discs to Kanye West's *Yeezus* album and the Zensor 1's refined yet exciting presentation reminds us why they've been so successful in the market. Their stereo delivery is balanced and detailed, enthusiastic and engaging - and that's about as much as we can ask for on music replay.

Whether it's with music or movies, the Zensor 15.1 produces a stunning sound. That's money well spent, we say.

Best traditional package up to ₹1,00,000

Q Acoustics 2000i 5.1 ₹87,750

Another year goes by and this package remains untouched. We simply can't find a rival (trust us, we've looked) that even comes close to the Q Acoustics' performance-per-rupee offering - despite its price since last year.

The marvel comes from two pairs of the much-loved 2010i standmounts making up the front left and right channels and back surrounds, an expressive 2000Ci centre speaker and a powerful 2070Si subwoofer.

A pretty face, and more besides

It's a neat bundle: the glossy white (or black) tapered cabinets set the bar high for design and finish at this price. Their compact, unfussy build wins points for practicality, too - the 2010i are happy sitting close to a wall if space is tight, making them ideal for smaller rooms, while the slim subwoofer can be easily tucked out of sight. The centre is a little bulkier than ideal, mind.

If speaker stands are impractical for your set-up (or budget), all the speakers here - with the exception of the subwoofer - can be wall-mounted. Handy indeed.

Typically for Q Acoustic speakers, the terminals can be found on the cabinet base, so - once the fiddly procedure of connecting cables is out of the way - the result is trim and tidy.

But it's in the sonic department that the package really shines. Delivering an easy-going yet detailed sound that strikes the right balance between smoothness and attack, every speaker plays its part to deliver a thrilling movie experience: the 2010i's presentation is cohesive, dynamic and detailed, and the sub digs deep but stays in control. The Centre speaker gives dialogue real expression and solidity.

As we spin *The Amazing Spiderman 2*, there's good tonal consistency between swinging effects as Spidey web-shoots his way through New York, and a wide and



consuming soundfield. We simply don't expect the scale this system can deliver for this money.

Stereo delivery is similarly impressive, the front pair of satellites proving rhythmically sound, while basslines are controlled but authoritative. Vocals are crystal clear, and there's a good sense of stage imagery when we play live recordings.

It might be a tad expensive, but the 2000i 5.1 is still remarkably good value.

Delivering an easy-going yet detailed sound, every speaker in the Q Acoustics 2000i 5.1 package plays its part to deliver a thrilling movie experience

Best traditional package ₹1,50,000-₹2,50,000

Cambridge Audio Aero 5.1 ₹1,57,000

It's a pleasure to have these speakers back out in the open.

The neat and robust Aero 5.1 package - consisting of a pair of Aero 6 floorstanders, an Aero 5 centre speaker, a pair of Aero 3 bipole surrounds and a relatively compact Aero 9

subwoofer - sees off rivals for another year and remains a high-flier in the market.

Following suit with the company's history of technology-packed products, the talking point of this Aero range is its BMR (Balanced Mode Radiator) drivers. These cover a much wider frequency range than a conventional driver (250Hz to 22kHz, to be precise) and move the crossover point into a region where our ears are far less sensitive to the distortions that are inevitable in any frequency handover. The result? A cleaner, more direct sound, and wide dispersion even at the very high frequencies.

Left and right in unison

The company has continued to incorporate the technology into many of its products of late, and we can see why. Here, the presence of the 4.6cm drivers in the front channels ensures they work in unison for a cohesive presentation.

Load up *Star Trek Into Darkness* and that tight co-operation is apparent as the *USS Enterprise* blasts left-to-right.

Producing a stunningly direct sound that excels in focus and clarity, this system makes more conventional rivals

sound a little soft and blurred in comparison. Its delivery shows no shortage of punch or attack as grenades are launched, and there's plenty to praise where detail and dynamics are concerned.

It only takes one on-screen explosion to appreciate the exceptional power and grunt from the sub's forward-facing 25cm driver.

It's not long before we're engrossed in the action - and that's in part thanks to the surrounds. It's their bipole design - which means they fire sound both forward and backward to make the soundfield more 'wrap around' - that make the experience totally immersive.

Though the package's slightly lean disposition gives it an agile quality, it makes system pairing crucial. So, if you plan to go for this brilliant package, stay away from bright or aggressive electronics and you'll have a sound to marvel at.

Producing a stunningly direct sound that excels in focus and clarity, the Cambridge Audio Aero 5.1 makes rivals sound a little blurred in comparison



Best traditional package ₹2,50,000+

KEF R100 5.1 ₹2,51,000

Despite some fierce rivalry from the brilliant Monitor Audio Silver 6AV12 this year, this elegant KEF combination takes the cake yet again, even in the face of the R100 standmounts (of which two pairs make up this package's corners) dropping their fifth star earlier this year.



Slipping from a five- to a four-star rating in the mid-range speaker market doesn't change the fact that, in a surround system, they work terrifically. In fact, their partnership with the R200 centre speaker and R400b subwoofer is a match made in heaven.

KEF's Uni-Q drivers are at the heart of these exquisitely built speakers and comprise a 25mm aluminium dome tweeter - with a 'tangerine' wave guide for improved rigidity - at the centre of a 13cm aluminium alloy mid/bass driver. The configuration is designed to deliver consistent dispersion, and help with driver integration too.

It certainly pays off - integration between treble and midrange is seamless, to the point that listeners will struggle to distinguish between the two drivers on each speaker. That cohesiveness is true of the front three channels, too: the consistency of their tonal character

Integration between treble and midrange is seamless, but it's the scale of the KEF R100 5.1 that impresses most - especially given the package's compact size

means that sound remains the same as it moves between the channels. As they should.

But it's the scale of the system that impresses most - especially considering the package's compact size. The wide-open soundstage conveys the sense of the roaring crowd in *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* superbly.

Clarity and detail

Refreshingly crisp and clear, the speakers handle the immediacy of Katniss' shooting arrows with precision. There's no shortage of detail in battle scenes, and the room-filling dynamics work wonders with the film's melodramatic soundtrack. The centre speaker ties it all together nicely, conveying impressive authority and expression with voices, while the powerful and agile sub does its bit too.

As crowd-pleasing with music as it is with movies, the KEF's stereo performance has all the balance and refinement, subtlety and rhythmic flair to make you fall in love with your favourite albums all over again.

Whether its finished in high-gloss piano white or black, rosewood or walnut veneer, the KEF is a born entertainer, and brings proper cinema surround sound to your home. You just have to supply the popcorn.

Best style package up to ₹70,000

Tannoy HTS-101 ₹60,200

Sometimes the very best products can only get better as time passes by - and that's the case with the Tannoy. The package has dominated this category for the last three years, and 2014 is no different.

If you're toying with the idea of buying a soundbar or soundbase over a speaker package because space or budget (or both) is tight, the Tannoy could well swing your decision the other way. Compact and affordable, the HTS-101 proves you don't have to go big, or dig deep into your wallet, to get a first-rate sound from your movie collection.

Enduring looks

You don't even have to compromise on build and looks. It may have been knocking around for a few years, but the glossy finish of its straight-edged wooden cabinets is still tasteful by today's standards.

Beneath the grille of each of the four tiny satellites are a 19mm titanium-dome tweeter and a 7.5cm paper mid/bass driver, while the slightly larger centre channel doubles up on the bigger driver. The equally space-efficient sub is blessed with 100W of power and a 20cm driver.

Load up *Pacific Rim* and the exhilaratingly action-packed film basks in the Tannoy's

impressive scale and detail. The gapless soundfield has a good sense of depth and breadth, and the breathing space between each sound effect makes for an effortless listen. Even during the rather dense *Kaiju* battle, tracking crossfire across the channels is easy work.

Constructive dialogue

While the satellites' subtle dynamic shifts are a highlight, the centre proves just as accomplished in the dialogue-driven scenes.

Tonally, it's nicely pitched just on the exciting side of neutral, with crisp and attacking highs complemented by a brisk and textured bass. The top end can be pronounced though, so a little care with matching wouldn't go amiss.

Nina Simone's *My Baby Just Cares For Me* is good for showing up timing and detail blips, but the Tannoys show no such shortcomings.

Compact and affordable, the Tannoy HTS-101 proves you don't have to go big, or dig deep into your wallet, to get a first-rate sound from your movie collection

Instead, piano rhythms are spot-on, and you'll be taken aback by the texture of Simone's vocals.

In short, the HTS-101 is every bit as good as we remember. If you're after an open, exciting and full-scale sound from a discreet and shiny set-up, the Tannoy is yours for the taking. Still dead set on that soundbar?



Best style package ₹70,000-₹1,00,000

Q Acoustics Q7000i ₹87,000 (Estd.)

**Out of sight,
out of mind**

The sub's terminals, and volume and crossover controls, are all tucked behind a side panel, making for a neat installation

If anything supports the notion that size doesn't matter, it's this hugely impressive 5.1 package - which you might remember seeing in this very spot in last year's Awards issue.

From just five small pill-shaped satellites and an accompanying subwoofer, you get an impressive sense of scale and a wide-open delivery of sound that far belies the physical proportions of this talented package.

Fine tonal character

But, of course, products can't win an award on size and scale alone. Thankfully, the Q7000i's performance offers the whole shebang. Walking a fine balance between smoothness and excitement, its tonal character is easy and enjoyable to listen to. Jump to the chase scene finale in *Fast & Furious 6* and the busy soundfield is clear and alive with detail.

Gun-shots fire from one car window to another with precision and accuracy, ricocheting convincingly around the channels without any gaps or lapses in concentration. Despite the picture being jam-packed with breakneck action, sound never feels lagging or missing information.

You get a reassuring thud from the bass, too, as cars hurtle into buildings. It's packed with

texture and manages to stay organised and agile without sacrificing any bass punch. This package keeps its composure at higher volumes too, and can flaunt its dynamic expression even at quieter levels.

Give *John Legend: Live At The House Of Blues* a whirl and the package thrives on the raw and atmospheric nature of a live recording. Spirited and insightful, the system's rendering allows you to really feel the passion in Legend's vocals.

Perfect if you're short on space or want a discreet set-up, the matt-finished package

Although you get an impressive sense of scale, products can't win an award on size and scale alone. Thankfully, the Q Acoustics Q7000i offers the whole shebang



(available in black or white) will slip into the shadows of the rest of your system nicely - or (bar the subwoofer) take up a patch on the wall if you choose. The satellites hide two 7.5cm long-throw mid/bass drivers that surround a 25mm ring-radiator tweeter, while the active sub packs a 20cm woofer.

"We wouldn't be surprised to see it back here in 2014" were our concluding words of the Q7000i last year, and (unsurprisingly then) here it is. Having taken the crown from the original Q7000 package last year, it remains at the top of the game in the cut-throat market. Can it do the triple come 2015?

Best style package ₹1,50,00-₹2,00,000

Bowers & Wilkins MT-50 ₹1,91,250

The **M-1 satellites** are a real standout in the speaker package universe - they make up the lion's share of not one but two multi-award-winning B&W speaker packages (the other is on the opposite page).

And well they might - married with the ASW608 subwoofer, as here, they make a particularly good team. We haven't come across anything even remotely as competitive in the ₹2,00,000 price band.

Though we prefer the bottom-end clout of B&W's pricier flagship sub, featured in the MT-60D package, we like the ASW608's agility and pace. It provides loads of detail and just enough kick without overloading the room. What's more, its modest size makes it incredibly easy to house.

Ample placement options

The unfussy M-1s are designed to work best when close, or even stuck, to a wall, so finding a home for them will be no trouble.

Put the bundle to work with a demanding Hans Zimmer track (this time the *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides* Blu-ray comes off the shelf) and that familiar orchestral score has plenty of dynamic might. It serves up stacks of drama at the track's climax, and shows no aversion to being pushed in the louder moments.

You may think it a Herculean task for such a diminutive package to fill a room, but the scope of the soundfield is startling. Always authoritative, it never makes the soundtrack seem restricted.

Take to the waters as the swashbuckling action ensues on the *Black Pearl*, and you're met with open, sparkling highs as swords clash in intense grapples. Attack and detail are here in spades, while thrashing waves carry weight and texture.

The verbal sparring between the pirates is projected with superb focus, carrying enough clarity and definition to reveal the nuances in each of their throaty 'ooah arrs'.

The good news continues with music performance. The MT-50 revels in the far-flung punch of Eminem's *Bad Guy*, while rendering all the deftness of the quirky bass tab. And let's not forget its expressive midrange - there's ferocity in those aggressive vocals.

Factor in its unique, versatile design to its all-round superb performance, and the MT-50 is one to be reckoned with.

You may think it a Herculean task for such a diminutive package to fill a room, but the scope of the Bowers & Wilkins MT-50's soundfield is startling



Best style package ₹1,00,000-₹1,50,000

Monitor Audio Radius R90HT1 ₹1,43,750

Monitor Audio may now have an upgraded version of this package - the newer Radius R90HT12 brings in the company's more advanced W12 subwoofer and carries a hefty price tag - but thankfully this original R90HT1 is still around.

Remaining a juicy filling between the two lower- and higher-priced B&W award-winners, the R90HT1 is ideal for those yearning for a discreet set-up.

At home in your room

Its two pairs of Radius 90 standmounts should blend in with most living rooms, whether they're on dedicated stands or wall-mounted (specific brackets and stands are available at extra cost), and the Radius 200 centre channel is compact enough for most equipment racks. Even the cubic Radius 390 subwoofer looks

stealthily enough not to intrude too much.

The surround speakers all use drivers made from Monitor Audio's ceramic-coated Aluminium/Magnesium (C-CAM) alloy, which has since reappeared in the company's newer Silver AV612 package. Monitor Audio claims the cone boasts low levels of distortion thanks to its longer excursion.

The sub has a 25cm C-CAM driver augmented by a passive radiator, and of its three sound settings ('Music', 'Impact' and 'Movie'), 'Music' gets our vote for its fine balance of solidity and punch. The Radius 390 displays a potent combination of precision and weight, staying taut and controlled when the plane crashes in the very silly action-fest *Enemies Closer*.

Of course, the surrounds have a huge hand in this package's success, and integrate seamlessly with the sub. The surround field is like an



airtight unit, with effects flowing smoothly and consistently between each channel. And as gunfire pours into the surrounds, they tear through with punch and precision.

Give the Radius a few days' workout before undertaking any serious movie-watching and the top end will lose its out-of-the-box brightness, making way for crisp and detailed highs. To boot, the centre channel delivers clear and communicative voices.

Overall, you have a package that blends nicely. With price, performance and practicality on its side, the Radius ticks all the boxes.

The surround field on the Monitor Audio Radius R90HT1 is like an airtight unit, with effects flowing smoothly and consistently between each channel

Best style package ₹2,00,000+

Bowers & Wilkins MT-60D ₹3,28,500

While the M-1 satellites are the pinnacles of the B&W MT-50 package, their accompanying PV 1D subwoofer is the real jewel in the MT-60D's crown. And that's not just down to its cool spherical casing. Featuring opposing drive units, clever digital signal processing and EQ presets, it's exactly what we want underpinning the brilliant satellites.

Real depth and high-tech

Taut, controlled and full of impact, that sub goes gut-stirringly deep as it swallows up the thud of Thor's Lightning Strike hammer in *Thor: The Dark World*. It's a perfect match for the M-1s, which use a tweeter that borrows technology from the company's high-end Nautilus speakers and a mid/bass driver that adopts a similar design to the brilliant PM1 standmounts. It's

impressive tech spec, and central to the dynamic and detailed craft of these speakers.

As the momentous score bellows out of the corners, the M-1s burst into life with staggering dynamics and drive. The soundfield is spacious and clean, the satellites steering effects confidently around the room, while the centre speaker does a fine job of caressing Chris Hemsworth's deep, burly voice with favourable weight and solidity.

Even after a sufficient run-in, those highs can sound a touch excitable at bigger volumes so something like the even, refined (not to mention current Award-winning) Pioneer SC-LX58 amp would fit well here.

Controlled and full of impact, the sub in the Bowers & Wilkins MT-60D goes gut-stirringly deep as it swallows up the thud of Thor's Lightning Strike hammer

The satellites and sub work together in harmony for a presentation that's balanced, precise and squeaky-clean, not just with movies but music too. Loading up Drake's *Nothing Was The Same* album throws it into a 2.1 configuration, and the delivery is music to our ears. Reinforcing the package's enthusiasm and composure, it drops the artist's charismatic beats and melodies with insight and inflection.

To top it all off, every part of this uniquely designed package looks stunning in either its matte-black or all-white finish, and it's easy to accommodate as well.

It's little surprise this talented all-rounder celebrates its third win in a row at this price, and we have no doubt about its worth as a Best Buy. The MT-60D once again sets the bar for high-end style packages.



On-wall Turn the music on-wall

Wall-mounted loudspeakers



WS 1645

WS 1665

WS 1425

WS 1445

WS 1465

Flexibility is the new mantra of our time. With drive units that have already attracted worldwide acclaim in the BS 312, this model offers astonishing bass extension thanks to special bass re-ex tuning. Now also available in a cabinet that guarantees flexibility.

If you're looking for a more expansive sound, you'll be amazed at the astonishing performance of this unique model. A floor standing model that's designed for the wall, the WS 1665 is an audiophile solution without the usual positioning problems.

Ideal as part of a 5.1, 7.1, or 9.1 setup ... or simply as a powerful solution when space is at a premium: The WS 1425 can be integrated unobtrusively but nevertheless creates an immediate acoustic impact thanks to its coaxial driver configuration.

Versatile, uncomplicated and ideal for any application: The WS 1445 is an all-rounder and this is apparent at first glance. Mounted horizontally or vertically, this visually unobtrusive loudspeaker always puts the focus firmly on the music.

On walls with slightly more space, the WS1465 brings an added sense of scale delivering an authentic movie experience either as part of a conventional stereo pair or in a surround sound system. This is a truly effortless performer with a sound that is detailed, powerful and utterly without compromise.

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Projectors

TV screen sizes are getting bigger, it's true - but for the ultimate in big-screen home cinema thrills you just can't beat a projector



Set-up

Try to get your projector as square-on to the screen as possible. Any use of keystone adjustment and the like will affect the picture.

Best projector up to ₹2,00,000

BenQ W1400 ₹1,50,000

Two years ago, BenQ dominated the budget projector category. With last year's winning Epson EH-TW5910 now out of the way (it's been discontinued), BenQ makes its comeback with this great-value offering.

It's had to leap over its younger sibling - the admittedly more budget W1070+, fresh from a *Group Test* win - to get here. The W1070+ is an achievement, but the W1400 gives a more mature and balanced take on the exuberant colour presentation.

Rich hues and plenty of detail

Showing the Blu-ray of *Life of Pi* the stunning landscapes are delivered with rich hues and lots of detail. There's convincing texture to Pi's sun-baked skin, the tiger's CGI fur and the silky waters of the ocean. The warm, sunlit scenes shine bright and clear, although the BenQ's colour palette tips towards a richer presentation than is totally natural. It's not too overblown, though, and W1400 delivers this lively quality alongside subtle shading and good skin-tones. Black levels plunge deep, with plenty to see in shadows. Not bad for ₹1,50,000.

Inevitably, there's a drop in sharpness and subtlety when we switch to DVD. That steady balance between exciting and natural colour is still present, though.

There's a good sense of depth and punch to 3D films, despite the inevitable darkening. A pair of active-shutter glasses is supplied - they are light and not too tiring on the eyes. Our only real gripe is that we're not entirely convinced by the W1400's handling of motion - slow pans across the screen look a little shaky. But since we find this true in pretty much every rival, we'll write it off as a minor niggle.

Elsewhere, the W1400's compact build, backlit remote and multiple connections make it a doddle to use. A vertical lens shift further speeds up the set up process. There are even surprisingly listenable built-in speakers (but we'd urge you to get a 5.1 speaker package).

If you've been thinking about taking those first steps towards your own home cinema, this projector is a great place to start. It won't cost you a fortune, and you'll be the envy of your friends with such riveting big-screen performance.



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Tablets

Best tablet over 8in

Apple iPad Air from ₹28,900

Apple lost out to Google in last year's tablet Product of the Year Award, but then it launched the iPad Air - the most desirable tablet to come out of Cupertino to date.

Build quality is impeccable. No tablet on the market can match the way the iPad Air feels in the hand - its unibody aluminium construction looks and feels as premium as ever. But it's the reduction of thickness and weight that makes the biggest difference in use. It's managed to shave 2mm from its chassis and nearly 200g in bulk, compared to its predecessor, making the iPad Air easier to hold in one hand.

Vision of beauty

The iPad Air offers the same 2048 x 1536 resolution display as before - retaining its punchy, sharp, clean image and adding a little more brightness to whites (though blacks remain detailed and inky deep) and a touch more crispness. This improved image processing is thanks to the boosted 64-bit A7 processor and its M7 co-processor (which deals with motion-related data collection, leaving the A7 to deal with bigger jobs).

This also ensures a faster, slicker user experience than before, and while some of its competitors may match it in speed, iOS remains the best for tablet-specific apps - a factor that cannot be underestimated.

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

Sound, just like the picture performance, is crisper on the Air than with previous versions - with a clean, open and precise character that its competitors can't come close to. Voices are wonderfully



expressive too, and there's an improved sense of space. There might be tablets out there capable of playing higher resolution file formats, but none manage such a cohesive and listenable character as that found on the iPad Air.

The 10in-tablet arena isn't as crowded as it used to be, with many manufacturers focusing their attentions on the smaller end of the market. But despite some good competition from manufacturers such as Samsung and Sony this year, we haven't been able to find the same balance of performance, functionality and pure usability anywhere else. The Nexus 7 still offers superb value for money, but this year it's been bested.

Best tablet up to 8in

Google Nexus 7 from ₹20,000

Tidy looker

With a 7in screen, the Nexus 7 is one of the smaller screens on the market now, but its 1900 x 1200 resolution makes it a versatile performer



No one had really taken the smaller tablet category seriously until Google produced the Nexus 7 in 2012. Apple followed shortly afterwards, with its 8in iPad Mini, and now everyone is at it: LG, Samsung and Amazon.

None, however, has been able to match the Nexus 7's excellent performance-per-rupee ratio. Though we've seen advances in screen technology in 2014, with resolutions and pixels-per-inch increasing, the Nexus 7 remains very competitive. It still looks remarkably sharp, with a beautifully balanced colour palette that is never short of punch. It's not flustered by motion either, and its strong handle of contrast makes for strikingly bright whites against deep, but detailed, blacks.

Music performance is equally strong. It's enjoyable to listen to and, if you're without headphones, its stereo speakers produce a relatively rich, full-bodied sound too. This is all backed up by a quad-core processor that keeps things running smoothly, not to mention the purest version of Android (fully updatable to the most recent version, Lollipop 5.0); our favourite way to experience Google's operating system.

However, the knockout punch to win this Award is the Nexus 7's price: you can now get the 32GB version for less than ₹20k online, making it half the price of a comparable iPad Mini with Retina.

Wireless speakers

We want our music to be mobile these days. Here's an impressive bunch of Award winners that will shift your ideas of 'high-fidelity' for any location



App to it

The neatly-designed Mu-so app gives you full control over your music across smartphones and NAS devices, as well as the speaker's settings.

Best wireless speaker ₹75,000+

Naim Mu-so ₹87,000 (Approx.)

This is as close to hi-fi as a wireless speaker has ever been. The Naim Mu-so establishes a convincing template of how premium wireless speakers should be. It looks stunning. The wooden cabinet is wrapped in a layer of aluminium, giving it a premium, hefty feel. The aluminium heatsink spanning the length of the unit is distinctive, and overall the finish is exquisite. The highlight, of course, is that gorgeous volume dial, which doubles up as the unit's interface. We can't stop tapping at the classy, illuminated touchscreen, nor can we stop turning the smooth and perfectly weighted volume dial - it's a tempting bit of kit.

Stream on

Naim has thrown every method of streaming into the Mu-so, covering all OS platforms and devices: aptX Bluetooth, AirPlay, UPnP, ethernet and wi-fi connections and thousands of internet radio stations. Physical connections include 3.5mm and optical inputs, and a USB port that plays and charges Apple devices. File compatibility is extensive as well, from low-res internet streams to 24-bit/192kHz WAV, FLAC and AIFF files.

Soundwise, the sheer power - all 450W of it - pulsing through songs is incredible. It drives the huge-scale presentation with a confidence, ease and skill we wouldn't have thought possible from a wireless speaker. There's an astonishing depth of detail. Subtleties in the harmonics and textures of instruments are laid bare, basslines are taut and punchy, and highs have plenty of bite without ever sounding aggressively sharp. Attack and delicacy go hand-in-hand here.

The Mu-so's full-bodied and weighty sound lends authority and enthusiasm to all files played through it. While it flourishes with hi-res tracks, it doesn't shy away from tackling MP3s with just as much enthusiasm. Instruments are arranged accurately in a spacious soundstage, and notes start and stop with unerring precision. Voices in particular benefit from Naim's talent with midrange fidelity - every attitude, emotion and intonation is subtly revealed.

The Naim Mu-so came with high expectations, and it passes with flying colours. Its design and performance prove worthy of its premium billing, and offer a pointer into the possibilities of the wireless speaker.

Best wireless speaker up to ₹15,000

Cambridge Audio Go ₹12,500

In a market saturated with budget Bluetooth speakers, the Cambridge Audio Go stands head-and-shoulders above the competition. The company's propensity for turning out talented portable speakers continues with the updated Go - it's a stellar performer at such an attractive price.

It's tad pricier than last year's model (the Minx Go, which won Product of the Year), but it comes with a host of added features. The new Go has the higher-quality aptX codec for Bluetooth streaming, near-field communication (NFC) pairing, and it will charge your smartphone via the USB port (without needing to be plugged into the mains). The cabinet has been given a polish, too, with dedicated buttons for the inputs and satin finishes in black or white. The steadying foot has been done away with - the Go stands up on its own. Build quality is solid, yet it's still small and light enough to carry in a large handbag.

Upwardly mobile

And this portable compact speaker is likely to become quite the jet-setter: its powerful lithium-ion battery lasts for an impressive 18 hours of playback. It's a good thing, too, as once you start streaming songs over Bluetooth you'll

never want to stop. The sound is upbeat, punchy, and full of admirable detail. The bold dynamics seem to defy its petite dimensions, and there's plenty to admire in the rich, full-bodied delivery. Rhythm changes are superbly handled, timing is spot-on, and it never runs out of energy. It sounds weighty, too.

Digging the bass

The basslines in SBRKT's *Wildfire* dig deep enough for a cabinet of this size, while the treble stays clear of any brittleness. Lesser speakers would stumble clumsily or inflict

The Cambridge Audio Go is tad pricier than last year's model but it comes with a host of added features. The cabinet has been given a nice polish too



sharp edges on to the listener, but the Go soldiers on and keeps its composure intact. Voices are packed with character - it's not afraid to tackle the more subtle tones of Nina Simone or Tom Waits.

Go for gold

Most importantly, the Go is just so much fun to listen to. Few wireless speakers offer such a winning combination of build, portability and performance.

Its closest rival is the rugged and funky Ultimate Ears Boom, but the Go's battery lasts longer, it sounds better and it's cheaper, too. Which settles it rather easily: the Go is our runaway winner in this category.

Best wireless speaker ₹50,000-₹75,000

Dali Kubik Free ₹75,000 (Each)

A richly detailed and fluid performance wrapped up in a luxurious cloth finish - we're huge fans of the Dali Kubik Free.

It may be costly, but Dali's expertise in traditional hi-fi speakers has found its way here. The compact build is sturdy, the finish classy, and we like the row of tiny symbols and LEDs along the bottom edge that indicate which input is in use. It's an elegant design.

Musically, it's an absolute treat. Songs are delivered with an enthusiasm. The rhythm is taut, upbeat and has a tireless drive that doesn't let up no matter how hard the Kubik is driven. Notes stop and start with precision. Drums hit with power, and a full-bodied sound accentuates the clear and sparkling high notes.

Voice of reason

It's particularly subtle and delicate with vocals. There's so much feeling and expression in Birdy's breathy vocals, while Eminem's raps are delivered unflinchingly. There's warmth to the clean sound, and Kubik's ability to dig up a tremendous amount of detail means your attention will be fully engaged.

Optical and micro-USB inputs - both support 24-bit/96kHz files - are neatly hidden underneath the base of the speaker. There's a

handy USB port for charging your smart devices, while a 3.5mm input opens up compatibility with a variety of music players. Bluetooth is of the aptX variety. A credit-card style remote is supplied, but you're more likely to use your smartphone's intuitive controls for playback and volume changing.

The Kubik's party trick comes in the flavour of a second, extra unit, named the Kubik Xtra. Link them up to create a stereo system, which you can then use as desktop or TV speakers. The Xtra module costs more, but it does add weight and a wider stereo image.

On its own, though, the Kubik Free is an immensely entertaining listen. It's talented enough for involved listening sessions, and fun enough to provide the soundtrack for a house party. It's seen off fierce competition from price-rival and well-featured Sony SRS-X9. The

If you want a compact wireless speaker that combines luxury and convenience with a sound that does justice to its hi-fi roots, the Dali Kubik Free is the one



Sony has its highlights, but the Dali is a more desirable object (the Sony's finish feels a little cheap) and delivers a more engaging and subtle performance, especially with voices/vocals.

If you want a compact wireless speaker that combines luxury and convenience with a sound quality that does justice to its hi-fi roots, the Dali Kubik Free is the one you're looking for. A worthy Award-winner.

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Best portable on-ears up to ₹10,000

AKG Y50 ₹8000*

AKG has had a good run when it comes to our Awards. For three years in a row the company has had at least one winner. And in each of those three years, one of those products has managed to get Product of the Year. Now, make it four.

The AKG Y50s were only introduced in August, but they've not taken long to win our admiration. They're a radical departure from what we've come to expect from AKG. The branding is bold, with the logo so large it doesn't entirely fit on the colourful (or black) backgrounds. This is the Y-series, a 'lifestyle' range aimed at attracting a younger crowd.

It's a creative design, but it's not just a gimmick. These headphones are exceptionally well made. The aluminium ear cups, each housing a 40mm driver, offer a smooth glossy feel and fine cosmetic detail. The headband of wafer-thin stainless steel looks delicate, but it is durable enough to survive being yanked out of your pocket, manbag or handbag.

Speaking of which, portability is not an issue. They're larger than the AKG K451s (2013's Product of the Year), but the folding mechanism is neat: they fold flat and collapse inwards to fit into the supplied pouch.

But while it's a surprise in the design department, there's nothing unexpected about the sound. While the appearance might not be typical for AKG, the performance is. It's certainly not a case of style over substance.

Punch plus precision equals fun

Play something with a bit of bounce (anything from Pharrel Williams, then) and the Y50s will revel in it. Their timing and rhythmic precision is impressive, and the far-reaching dynamic punch helps to make for an entertaining listen.

There's a lovely sense of space, too - more than you might expect from small, closed-back cans - and it's filled well with a balanced, insightful sound. Clap beats, vocals and cymbals are all clearly presented. There's an extra gesture towards the low end, but this is no bad thing. A nice bonus is the silence provided by the leather earpads, which are great at blocking out other people's racket. Perfect for a commute, then.

Don't let the funky, cheerful design fool you: when it comes to sound quality, the AKY Y50s are perfectly serious, and seriously good.

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Best portable on-ears ₹10,000-₹20,000

Philips Fidelio M1MKII ₹17,500

A winner, improved. Last year, the Philips Fidelio MIs won this Award. But Philips didn't want to rest. Now we have the follow up, the M1MKIIs.

The new design boasts a lighter voice coil, extended high frequencies and more accurately tuned bass. It works, because the sound is a step up from what won our hearts and ears last year.

There is an abundance of detail, only now it is accompanied by a larger sense of space, with

more precision and greater clarity. The sound is never clinical, though. It's a fun listen. The bass is as weighty as ever, but it's now better defined.

Aesthetically, there's little change; the MKII is a light yet sturdy body of, mostly, metal and leather. The earpads of memory-foam sit snugly on the ears, gripping but never squeezing while providing a good deal of passive noise isolation.

If you're looking for a pair of headphones under ₹20,000, you've found them.

Best home on-ears ₹15,000-₹30,000

Grado SR325e ₹29,000

As headphones go, these aren't that big. But we've put them in the 'home on-ears' category because that's where you'll use them unless you're determined to start fights on a bus.

The thing is, they leak a lot of sound. Anyone anywhere near you would be able to hear every single note. Why is this a good thing? Because closed-back designs create internal reflections, enclosure vibrations and standing waves - all of which are detrimental to sound quality.

The looks or leaking won't be for everyone, but there's no doubt about their structural integrity and the on-ear foam pads are comfortable.

They are stonkingly good performers. It's a clear, weighty musical sound. Listen to anything from Michael Jackson and the Grados lap up the rhythmic energy. Layers of tracks are distinct and well organised, and all musical styles are treated with equal respect. Just wait until you're home before you break out the *Mamma Mia*.



Best home on-ears ₹30,000+

Shure SRH1540 ₹48,367

We've long been acquainted with Shure's great-sounding, comfortable headphones, but these really are something.

By Jove, they are comfy. The super-soft earpads are covered in Alcantara, which can also be found on Formula One car seats. It's about as close as you'll get to a bear hug for your ears.

The large oval earcups are less than ideal as travelling companions, but weight - at a surprisingly light 286g - is not a problem.

It only takes a moment to appreciate the dynamic, exquisitely detailed sound on offer here. It's a broad sonic presentation with a wide spread. They're as easy on the ears as they are on the ear lobes, with a balanced presentation.

Play anything upbeat and they're fanatical. Bass lines are distinct. The headphones' fast, nimble manner makes a meal of the subtlest of rhythmic shifts. Factor in the seamless fluidity and it's a performance that's hard to match.

Best noise-cancelling on-ears

Bose QuietComfort 25 ₹21,263

It's not often a product hogs an Award for four years in a row. That's the case with the Bose QuietComfort 15s, parked right here from 2010 to 2013. It would take a lot to dethrone such a Colossus, so around of applause, please, for the Bose QuietComfort 25, successor and superior in every way: design, aesthetics, performance.

'Quiet' is right, the QC25s at times giving the impression of actively pushing silence into your ears. The idle hum of office air conditioning is

easily eliminated. Take these on a commute and they will soon become your new best friend. They're comfortable too, as the name suggests. Performance is stronger than ever. There's a good deal of detail, with plenty of nuance in guitar-picking and vocals. It's a clear, balanced and insightful sound too, but fun with it.

Quiet, comfortable and great-sounding - factor in the shiny new looks and you have something very special indeed.



Multi-room systems

Hi-fi lovers finally got what they've long wished for in 2014: multi-room systems that are easy to use, versatile, and most importantly, sound great



Open access
Bluesound will play high-res tracks and music from a host of streaming services. It will scan and index contents of network drives and connect to streaming services

Best multi-room system ₹50,000+
Bluesound from ₹45,000

High-resolution music has seen a surge of support in 2014 and, after years of asking for it, the hi-fi community finally got what it wanted: a musically talented multi-room system capable of 24-bit/192kHz music playback. The best of these comes from a new company called Bluesound.

While the name might not be familiar, the people behind it are: it's home to many of the same designers and engineers who pioneered respected hi-fi brand NAD in the 70s. With its tag line of "Hi-fi for the wireless generation", it's answered the call for high-quality multi-room.

Take five

Bluesound has launched five products that cover most situations. The Node is a simple music streamer, attaching to an existing amp and speaker set-up to make it wireless and multi-room ready. The Pownode is similar, but features a built-in amp so you just need speakers, while the

Pulse is Bluesound's "one box" integrated speaker solution. Add to that the music-streaming, CD-ripping, ITB-packing Bluesound Vault and the Duo 2.1 speaker package, and you've got high-resolution music throughout the home. There's even a USB port on the back of all of its components, meaning you can add a USB key filled with music for playback from any speaker in the house, or a Bluetooth dongle to further stretch the Bluesound's capabilities.

It's a hugely versatile system and one of the most musical multi-room systems we've heard, with an open, spacious presentation and plenty of detail. Everything you throw at this system sounds entertaining. What tops off the experience is its pure usability. Whether you're using the desktop app, or you're on your tablet or smartphone, it's simple to use.

It's not cheap (we've listed the Node's price only, no other components), but one listen will have you hooked.

Best multi-room system up to ₹50,000 Sonos from ₹34,000 (Approx.)

For years Sonos has been synonymous with multi-room audio and dominated the market. And despite a number of capable competitors trying their hand at toppling them this year, this doesn't look set to change any time soon.

A big reason for this is the breadth of products Sonos has to offer - and the addition of the Play:1 to the family late last year only bolsters that.

Have an existing set-up that you want to go wireless with? The Sonos Connect will do that for you. Only got speakers? Try the Connect: Amp. The family of Play:5, Play:3 and the new Play:1 has the integrated speaker market covered at various sizes, while the Playbar and Sub brings all of Sonos's multi-room smarts to your home cinema set-up. No other system on the market can match it.

App side of performance

Of course all this wouldn't mean much if the user experience wasn't up to scratch, but Sonos has that right too. Of all the systems we've tested, Sonos is the easiest to set up, and when it comes to usability it remains one of the most intuitive, too.

The Sonos app sits at the heart of the system, and is a large part of its charm. With the app, you can easily control all of the speakers in your house, search music on network drives and

*The **Sonos** app sits at the heart of the system. You can control all of the speakers, search music on network drives, and access a wide range of streaming services*

choose from the widest choice of streaming services on any multi-room system - giving you access to all your music in one place.

You're also able to build playlists directly within Sonos, and from multiple sources as well. So if you want tracks from certain streaming services to play nice with tracks from your NAS drive, you can do so.

From a performance perspective, the Sonos system continues to impress. Each member of the Sonos family packs the same entertaining, enthusiastic character, so you get a wholly universal sound, no matter which parts of the system you own.

Across the spectrum

It might not offer high-res support like some other systems, but what it does deliver is an insightful and full-bodied sound that works across all genres. It's well balanced, offering a solid, but controlled, bass with a treble that never sounds hard or harsh.

Vocals are expressive and focused. Rhythms have precision, and the soundstage is wide and open - all coming together to provide a thoroughly engaging listen that you'll never tire of.

Best of all, with the addition of the Play:1 speaker, a Sonos multi-room system is cheaper and more accessible than ever. The price listed here is the lowest combined price of two speakers (well it would hardly be a multi-room system with one, would it?), meaning you could get started for very little with two of the Play:1s.

If high-res music is not a consideration for you, Sonos's ecosystem is hard to fault, and it remains one of our favourite ways to transform your system into a multi-room experience.

*The **Bluesound** is hugely versatile and one of the most musical systems we've heard, with an open, spacious presentation and plenty of detail*



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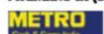
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Streamers

The streamer is an integral part of the music lovers' consciousness now. Find out how we made up our minds on the Award winners



Best streamer ₹60,000-₹1,00,000

Cambridge Audio Stream Magic 6 v2 ₹69,700

After a successful number of years for the first version of this streamer, Cambridge Audio has released an update - introducing new functionality that helps this versatile unit regain Product of the Year status.

A lot of things about it remain the same, and that's no bad thing. It's still an accomplished network player, capable of handling most popular file formats (AAC, WAV, FLAC, MP3) up to 24-bit/192kHz, and it can still be used as a DAC and digital pre-amp, bringing its influence upon a whole system's-worth of kit thanks to its plethora of digital inputs.

It looks almost exactly the same too, and its sound is as excellent as ever, offering a confident performance, no matter the genre or file size.

Changing the game

Before we get into that though, it's worth considering what has changed. Native 24-bit/192kHz playback is now capable over wi-fi as well as via USB thanks to a more powerful streaming module. And a lot of work has been done, to great effect, to improve and simplify the user interface and control apps. This new processor architecture also means browsing menus are

much faster than on its predecessor, plus additional streaming services have now been added to make this streamer more flexible. Soundwise, it's a very similar character to before - powerful, with a strong rhythmic drive and a boundless enthusiasm for any music you throw at it.

Play a 16-bit/44.1kHz file of Kanye West's *Send It Up* and the Cambridge Audio shows good control over the shrill synth note, never sounding pushed or hard. Vocals are expressive, and the bass tight and agile.

Captivating detail

Detail levels are certainly impressive, even on 320kbps streams from the net, where it still offers a decent level of insight without uncovering the fragility of weaker recordings. Dynamically it's superb too, demonstrating admirable precision with the way it deals with loud and soft, and the starting and stopping of notes.

Above all, it's as captivating as ever, and its new functionality makes it a better proposition than ever before. Back on the top and rightfully so - the Stream Magic 6 v2 is an easy choice for Product of the Year.

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Best streamer up to ₹60,000

Bluesound Node ₹45,000

The entry-level streaming category has found a new star in the Bluesound Node. As the most affordable component of the company's excellent multi-room system, it's no wonder it caught our eye when in our testing rooms.

It's a music streamer but not as we know it - shunning the standard black box look for a glossy cubed design instead. Just like all of the Bluesound range, it doesn't have to be used in a multi-room set up, though that added

functionality is always nice to have for the future, even if you don't have the need for it now.

Spec and span

Specs are kept relatively simple. It will hook up to your amp via its analogue outs, or there's a single optical out instead, with a USB port for connecting USB keys and an optional Bluetooth dongle for further increasing its functionality.

It's capable of playing uncompressed FLAC and WAV files up to 24-bit/192kHz, as well as other popular audio formats: MP3, AIFF, AAC and WMA. It also has the option for streaming directly from Rdio, Deezer, Qobuz and TuneIn Radio. Connection to the home network can be wired or wi-fi.

Through its tablet, smartphone or desktop app, the Bluesound Node will discover any music stored both on your network and locally, indexing it quickly and simply for easy playback. It'll also offer you the option to create and save playlists from across multiple sources, which is a nice touch.

Best of all though, is the way the Node sounds. It's a rich and full-

bodied character, which is well balanced and full of enthusiasm. Bass response is full and punchy, with detailed, focused midrange and controlled treble all working together to ensure nothing is ever overbearing, nor laid back.

It's rhythmically adept too, and hangs together beautifully, offering space and separation to instruments and vocals.

Ready for resolution

This is the case no matter what resolution of music you throw at it. Of course high-res content offers more transparency and detail, but the Node's fun, entertaining way with music doesn't change when you drop down to a 320kbps stream, for example.

In fact, it's hard not to be entertained by the Bluesound Node - an endlessly entertaining box of tricks at a superb price.

The Bluesound Node will discover music on your network and locally, indexing it quickly for playback. You can also create playlists across multiple sources



Best streamer ₹1,00,000-₹2,00,000

Cyrus Stream Xa ₹1,79,000

The Cyrus Stream Xa uPnP network player is one of Cyrus's more straightforward streamers, doing away with any pre-amp functionality to focus purely on streaming music.

On board there is a 32-bit DAC, capable of streaming 24-bit/192kHz high-res recordings, alongside networking capabilities. This streamer features six digital inputs to ensure its influence can be felt across your whole system.

Bus down the line

As with all Cyrus kit, there's room for upgrades down the line too, including the ability to add an external DAC and power supply should you wish, plus connections

The Cyrus Stream Xa is a Cyrus product through and through. It's got all the main characteristics of the signature Cyrus sound, with class-leading levels of detail

for the MC Bus control system, allowing this to slip seamlessly into an existing Cyrus system.

Set-up is simple and quickly done via the front panel, the Xa picking up our networked drives without issue. For controlling music, there's the included 'n-remote' and Cyrus's Cadence app for Android and iOS, which is well worth a look following its most recent update this summer.

Mark of Cyrus

The Cyrus Xa is a Cyrus product through and through, and we're not just

talking about its half-width aluminium design. It's got all the main characteristics of the signature Cyrus sound - superbly organised, with class-leading levels of detail and a hugely musical tone.

Stars into space

Stream The Unthanks' *Starless* and the instruments in the introduction are reproduced with real subtlety and insight, while the vocals sound beautifully textured and three-dimensional. There's plenty of space awarded to the presentation throughout the frequency range for that matter, with all elements working together cohesively to form a sound to make the Cyrus family proud.

It's as precise as it is agile, as detailed as it is dynamic. While its bass punches low and controlled, its treble is allowed the space to soar high without restriction, steering clear of hardness even with aggressive recordings.

This helps to inject a likeable liveliness to its character, one that hooks you in and keeps you listening album after album.

There's no doubt that paying over ₹1,50,000 for a streamer is a serious consideration, but one listen to this and you will hear where every rupee is going.



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Best streamer ₹2,00,000+ Cyrus Stream XP2-Qx ₹2,69,000

As the old saying goes, if it ain't broke, don't fix it - and seeing the Cyrus Stream XP2-Qx here for the third-year-running, certainly suggests that the adage is true.

Cyrus's flagship streamer and pre-amp is a powerhouse of high-tech specifications, with its top-of-the-range Qx DAC module on board, supported by a superbly specified power supply and internal circuitry.

The right input

There's a wealth of auxiliary input options to go at, so you can connect all manner of kit (including tablets and smartphones), and it supports file playback all the way up to 24-bit/192kHz, with almost any file format you can throw at it.

At this price, the XP2-Qx needs to prove its worth though, and it does so without hesitation. Once on our network, it finds our high-res-packing NAS drive quickly, and we stream Hans Zimmer's brooding *Gotham's Reckoning*.

The XP2-Qx immediately demonstrates its superior rhythmic ability, with a fast, agile character that never loses its footing or sounds unsure of itself.

Instead it powers forwards with confidence, showing off its dynamic wherewithal

throughout, steadily building the tension and releasing it as the music moves through its dramatic peaks and troughs.

There's plenty of room at the top end for the treble to reach a natural high without ever sounding strained, while the powerful bass is as agile as it is strong - offering punch and solidity when it matters.

There's a really high level of clarity here too, meaning detail retrieval is outstanding across the frequency range, with each instrument finding its own space within the open and transparent soundstage. We could listen to it for hours.

Remote backup

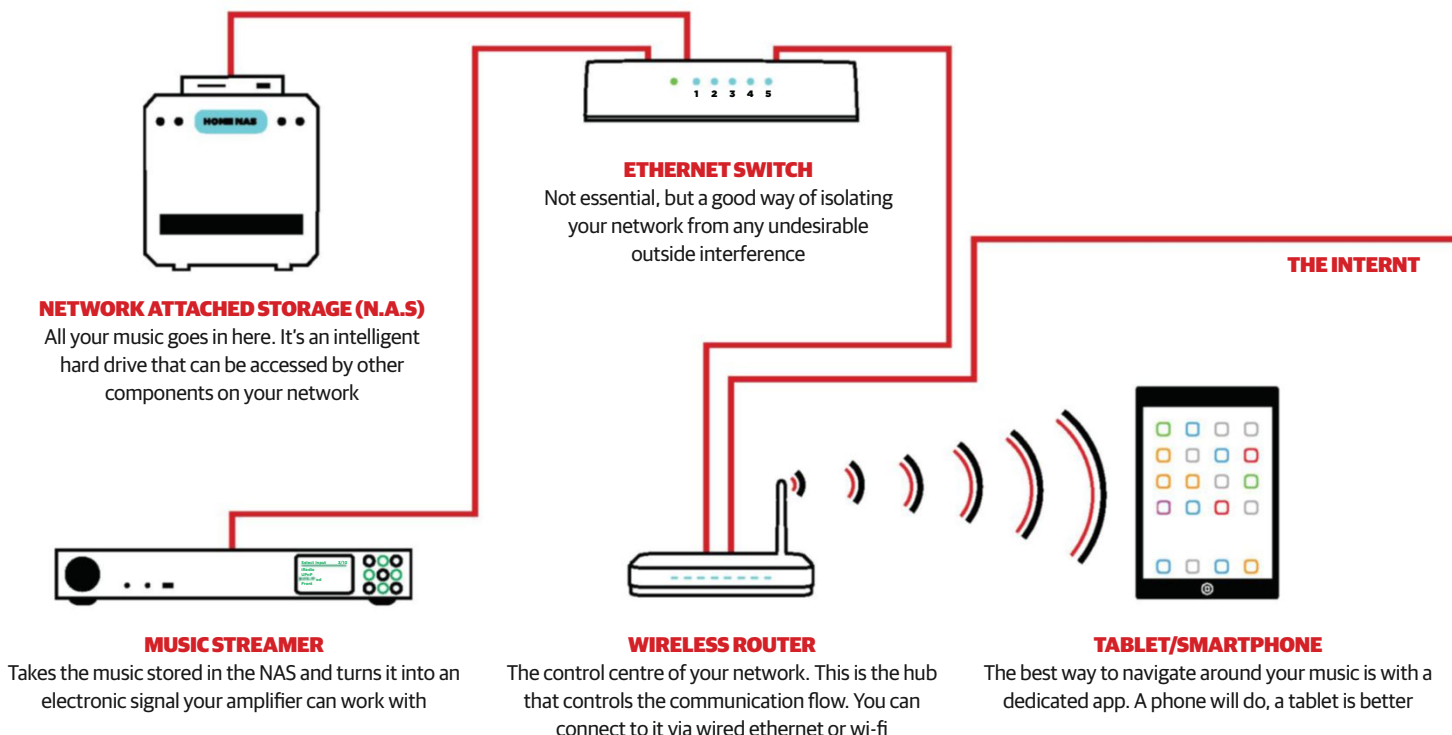
For control, you can use Cyrus's much-improved Cadence app or the included 'n-remote', either of which make browsing, playback and source selection a bit more convenient than using the unit's front panel.



It's the sound quality that really shines here though - and the XP2-Qx continues to provide the best on the market at this price. If you've got this kind of budget to play with for a music streamer, we can't recommend this addition to your system enough.

The Cyrus Stream XP2-Qx needs to prove its worth at this price, and does so without hesitation, with its rhythmic ability and fast, agile character

Streaming system set-up



Eminently compatible

As well as supporting high-res, the Minx plays all manner of file formats, including FLAC, WAV, MP3 and Apple Lossless



Systems

All-in-one streamers, micro systems and ready-made home cinema set-ups - we've listened to them all and singled out five leading performers

Best music system ₹40,000-₹80,000

Cambridge Audio Minx Xi ₹55,000

Fancy a streaming system, but not sure if you're ready to dish out the cash for a class-leading Naim or Cyrus? This excellent Cambridge Audio Minx Xi is just the solution for you. It's an impressive package, offering myriad streaming features and the kind of insightful yet musical performance that's difficult to achieve at this price.

Width, height and depth

Down to business, and the Minx charges through alt-J's dreamy dub-pop tunes with a lively, sure-footed sense of rhythm. Instruments are easily identifiable and placed inside an airy soundstage that's as wide as it is tall and deep. Dynamic upheavals are handled with ease. There are no hard edges, and plenty of dynamic headroom.

The subtle harmonics and vocals inflections in *Fitzpleasure* are beautifully conveyed. There's texture to the synthesised strums, while the ethereal sound is weighted and cohesively organised. The song flows so smoothly that you barely notice just how deep and taut the bassline is nor how crisp the sound is. The Minx Xi makes it all sound effortless.

High-resolution audio files are supported up to 24-bit/96kHz. We would have preferred an upper limit of 192kHz, but it's not a deal breaker.

The Minx Xi is kitted out with a good spread of digital and analogue connections, including three USB ports. Supplied dongles give the unit aptX Bluetooth and wi-fi abilities. One of the biggest attractions of this Cambridge Audio system is that it gives you thousands of internet radio stations at your fingertips thanks to the preloaded with the run-of-the-mill streaming services. Internet playlists can be streamed from your smart device, while connected laptops and NAS devices can be played using wired or wireless methods.

This is an attractive piece of kit, too. The petite size will fit into most spaces, and we're quite taken with the sleek, glossy finish and sharply legible display.

What we love most about the Minx Xi is its ability to balance stunning levels of insight with an easy-going approach to music. Its willingness to get along with a variety of speakers comes a close second. Awarding it a Product of the Year gong was an easy decision. It's a fantastic system.

Best music system up to ₹50,000

Denon D-M39 ₹47,900

In a time when the wireless speakers market is exploding, the micro-system could easily be written off as obsolete.

But time and again - three years in a row now - the excellent D-M39 proves the micro system is still relevant, still appealing, and a great-sounding machine for the money.

The key component is the CD player. Despite the rising tide of audio files and streaming services, let's not pretend we still don't own a stack of CDs that are begging to be played. And you'll want to play them through this.



It's a wonderfully musical presentation. There's a sweet and engaging way to the Denon, which zings through songs with lively, agile timing and layers of subtle detail. Its midrange fidelity in particular is commendable.

Capable when challenged

It doesn't balk at fast, attacking tunes (Eminem's *The Way I Am*) or at far-reaching dynamics (Hans Zimmer's *Time*), and there's a good sense of scale, with instruments placed in a spacious soundfield. It never sounds overly bright, either.

You won't get any networking or Bluetooth features with the Denon, but an Apple-approved USB port in front lets you play songs and streaming services from your iPod, iPhone and iPad, and other music players can go through the 3.5mm jack.

While songs played through USB aren't quite as detailed and transparent as on CD, the Denon still treats them with respect. WAV files offer more insight than internet streams, but the Denon imprints its musicality over any song, regardless of file type or resolution. The FM tuners sound solid and clear, with higher-quality stations getting the upper hand.

You can buy the unit on its own and add your own speakers, but we love the system as a whole. It's a steal for ₹48,000, and no other micro-system - at any price - comes close to the Denon's value for money.

*It's a wonderfully musical presentation. There's a sweet and engaging way with the **Denon D-M39**, which zings through songs with lively, agile timing*

Best music system ₹80,000-₹1,50,000

Naim UnitiQute 2 ₹1,25,000

The UnitiQute 2 is a tiny powerhouse of a system. Its half-width design, streaming prowess and sonic ability won us over last year, and there's still no rival to its claim as the music streaming system of choice at this price.

Even by today's standards, the Naim UnitiQute 2 has a modern look about it. The impeccable finish, the uncluttered fascia, the high-contrast OLED display - it all combines to produce a very smart-looking machine.

Underneath the neat chassis lie the twin beating hearts of the UnitiQute 2: a 30W-per-channel amplifier derived from the superb Nait 5i, and a 24-bit/192kHz Burr Brown DAC that handles music in all popular file formats, including WAV, FLAC, ALAC, MP3 and Windows Media files.

Options galore

The unit is DLNA certified, too, so you can easily stream music stored on a PC, Mac or NAS device either wirelessly or via ethernet. Connectivity is exhaustive, including five digital inputs that can handle hi-res audio, a pair of RCA inputs, a 3.5mm/optical hybrid, and a USB port for plugging in iPods. FM tuners, and the excellent vTuner internet radio service are also provided. Its looks belie the sheer power, scale and

insight it can achieve. The UQ2 is astonishingly transparent and revealing - sometimes unforgivingly so - and delivers an open and weighted sound. Whether you're playing Shostakovich, Shakira or The Smashing Pumpkins, the stop and start of notes are dealt with unerring precision, the rhythm is fast and nimble, and detail retrieval is nothing short of exceptional.

Voices are loaded with character. Subtle intonations are laid bare, while emotion and attitude are delivered unflinchingly. Instruments are accurately placed, and songs of all resolutions are marshalled with exquisite control and cohesion.

*Its looks belie the sheer power, scale and insight it can achieve. The **Naim UnitiQute 2** is astonishingly revealing and delivers an open, weighted sound*



It's an enthralling listen, with songs sweeping around a vast, airy soundstage with effortless dynamic reach. The system can go extremely loud without faltering or sounding laboured when driven hard. Basslines are satisfying deep, taut and laden with texture, while the treble reaches sweet, clear highs.

There are few rivals that can compete against such an accomplished system, so if you've got the budget for it, the Naim UQ2 is worth consideration. Add a pair of great speakers, and you've got a mighty powerful music system.

Best music system ₹1,50,000

Cyrus Lyric 09 ₹4,40,000

Allowing for analogue

Despite the Lyric's flair for digital, analogue connections aren't forgotten, with a stereo input and output included.



The **Cyrus Lyric 09** made quite the splash when we first reviewed it. Its looks - a far cry from the aluminium half-width chassis that has remained a design staple for the marque since 1984 - are, well, different. The angular shape, the glowing CD slot, and the touchscreen display all mark this out as something unusual.

The looks here might divide opinion, but it's admirable to see a company take a risk and try something different. On the performance side, Cyrus has remained true to its heritage. A stunningly precise, enthusiastic and agile sound bursts from the Lyric 09. It's the sound we all know and love from Cyrus, with added muscle.

High-quality treatment for all

There's a fabulous amount of detail on board. Feed it hi-res audio and the Lyric lavishes you with the extra resolution - it's an extremely confident and subtle player. It's not a sonic snob, either. The Cyrus delivers streams with as much diligence as it would a 24-bit/192kHz FLAC file, managing to pick out subtle edges of notes, with a clean and precise sound that is usually unheard over Bluetooth.

From the *Inception* soundtrack to Adele's ballads, the Lyric shows off its remarkable dynamic reach. The sense of scale is awe-

inspiring and it handles sudden shifts from loud to quiet with ease and authority. It sounds utterly gorgeous.

As befits its price tag, the Lyric is laden with extensive features. A built-in 24-bit/192kHz DAC can be accessed by the USB, coaxial and optical inputs. The Lyric supports a large variety of

*A stunningly precise, enthusiastic and agile sound bursts from the **Cyrus Lyric 09**. It's the sound we all know and love from Cyrus, but with added muscle*

formats, from hi-res WAV, FLAC and AIFF files to the more humble MP3s. If you have songs stored on a NAS device or laptop, you can stream them over your home network using wireless or wired means. Bluetooth is of the higher quality aptX quality, and a vast number of radio stations are in your grasp thanks to FM tuners and TuneIn internet radio.

All-in-one systems tend to come with a caveat or two. But in the Lyric's stunning performance we found none. Yes, ₹4.40 Lacs is a lot to pay, but when something is this good, it's worth it.

Best cinema system

Sony BDV-N5200W ₹TBA

You may not think this is enough to build up a home cinema system from scratch, but you haven't reckoned with Sony. The BDV-N5200W is a fantastic all-in-one system that has more goodies than a Christmas stocking.

Including a Blu-ray player, multichannel amplifier, five speakers, a wireless subwoofer and all the latest smart features you can think of, this neat and stylish package is your ticket to bringing the cinema into your home without any major fuss.

Play the Blu-ray of *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* and the DTS-HD Master Audio soundtrack zings across the 5.1 channel system with a remarkable amount of precision and authority. The sound is crystal clear, and oozes subtle detail. There's plenty of excitement as special effects - Spidey's web-slinging across Midtown skyscrapers, Electro's crackling electricity - are steered across the five speakers with lively timing. It's a captivating listen.

Always engaging

Dynamics are free to soar in an open and wide soundfield, and it's a testament to the Sony's sonic skill that it all sounds interesting even at low volumes. Part of this is because dialogue is fiercely crisp and expressive - you'll never get

bored watching films with this Sony system. Explosions are packed with punch and attack, and the talented subwoofer sets the weighty, rumbling foundation.

We know how good Sony Blu-ray players can be, and this one does its lineage proud by delivering a beautifully punchy, clean and richly detailed picture. Colours are vibrant while maintaining a natural tone, and motion is stable.

Wired and wireless connections open up a world of on-demand video and music streaming from smart apps such as BBCiPlayer, Netflix, Demand 5 and Amazon Instant. Bluetooth, NFC and DLNA certification mean that you can stream music from laptops, smartphones and NAS devices

*There's plenty of excitement with the **Sony BDV-N5200W** as special effects are steered across the five speakers with lively timing. It's a captivating listen*



over your home network. Connections are plentiful, and the Sony also supports the rarer DSD and SACD formats alongside the more regular 3D Blu-rays, DVDs and CDs.

You'll need a dedicated hi-fi system for seriously cohesive and musical results, but streamed tracks and music Blu-rays still sound enveloping and powerfully cinematic.

We can't think of a tidier system. The Sony does it all, and does it so brilliantly and effortlessly that we have to give it an award.

Bluetooth at its best

Many portable devices, such as the Samsung Galaxy S5 and HTC One (M8), now also support the superior aptX Bluetooth



Accessories

They might seem to be incidental players in any musical performance, but these sonic extras can make all the difference to your system's sound

Best Bluetooth receiver

Arcam miniBlink ₹13,800

For a wallet-friendly ₹13,800, this aptX-supporting Bluetooth receiver makes the idea of a wireless set-up all the more tempting.

The small, compact unit is shaped like a well-polished pebble, featuring only a round Bluetooth button (press and hold for easy pairing) and single 3.5mm output. Though the device's limited connections may seem a little mean to those expecting digital outputs to feed into an amplifier or external DAC, performance through the supplied 3.5mm-to-RCA phono cable is surprisingly good.

Unusually smooth

Where some Bluetooth receivers sound prickly and bright, the miniBlink has a smooth, insightful and rhythmical temperament. It's impressive that Arcam has managed to squeeze such a sense of refinement and quality from a device like this.

The 'Blink doesn't leave much to the imagination, faithfully laying bare the percussive and vocal details in *The Knife's Pass This On*. There's texture and variation to steel drums - a decent amount of reverb is clear too - and vocals quiver, while musical oddities abound.

You get a real feel for dynamic shifts within music: huge leaps from quiet moments to more outlandish sections are explicitly done, and music sounds all the more exciting for it.

This sound quality doesn't come easy to products like this, which makes the miniBlink's abilities all the more special.

*Where some Bluetooth receivers sound prickly and bright, the **Arcam miniBlink** has a smooth, insightful and rhythmical temperament*



Making the best better

Adding Cyrus's outboard PSX-R power supply is worth doing, as it improves just about every aspect of the CDi's sound

CD players

Two enduring greats plus a return to the top for a legendary disc-spinning marque - the choice of premium hardware for CD lovers is as good as ever

Best CD player ₹50,000-₹2,00,000

Cyrus CDi ₹1,59,000

For years **Cyrus** seemed like a permanent fixture in our CD player Awards, yet in 2013 it missed out altogether thanks to the brilliance of Naim's CD5si. The company's answer was the introduction of the CDi, and what a response it has turned out to be.

The CDi replaces both the CD6 SE2 and CD8 SE2 players, falling between them in price but eclipsing both in performance. As is usual with Cyrus's products you'd never guess from the outside that this was a new model. The casework retains the company's classic half-width design, leaving the CDi looking like any of its slot-loading predecessors.

But take a look inside and it is clear much has changed. Cyrus has continued to develop its in-house transport mechanism and the software behind it. The company is particularly proud of the transport's ability to read the data off the disc correctly the first time rather than relying on error correction to fill in the gaps.

The CDi's other technical highlight is an upgraded DAC section that now uses a new 32-bit design. The aim, as always, is to improve resolution and dynamics while keeping noise and distortion as low as possible.

Around the back of the player are two pairs of single-ended analogue outputs and the traditional digital duo of optical and coaxial. There's also a connection for the outboard PSX-R power supply (see roundel).

In true Cyrus tradition this player puts detail resolution, agility and dynamic expression above all else. We certainly haven't come across a more insightful performer below the ₹1,60,000 mark.

Speed, punch and resolution

Take a listen to Stravinsky's *The Rite Of Spring* and the CDi puts on an exhilarating show. The music's savage dynamics are delivered with breathtaking speed and punch, and the level of resolution is top-class. We know few players, even at double this price, that deliver as much in the way of detail and precision. There's class-leading composure too, with the player keeping a firm hold of low-level instruments even when the piece becomes demanding. This stability is deeply impressive.

Cyrus players have tended to edge towards leanness in their tonal balance, and the CDi still shows a little of that trait. Avoid overly bright or aggressive partnering kit and the player's innate refinement is enough to avoid any issues.

We ended our *First Test* of the CDi by suggesting that Naim's CD5si had plenty to fear. With hindsight it really did. The CDi is the best player we have heard anywhere near this price this year - and for that it grabs the Product of the Year title for 2014.

Best CD player under ₹50,000

Marantz CD6005 ₹41,900

Marantz has made something of a habit of winning our budget CD player award. This is the second time the CD6005 has won this category, and that accolade follows years of domination by its predecessors. A slight price drop from last year doesn't hurt its case either.

An aura of class

As with all of Marantz's best budget offerings, the CD6005 is a superbly judged product. It's beautifully built for starters; there's a solidity and aura of class around this player that no rival we've come across can better. It comes down to sturdy casework, lovely finish and a slick precision to the way the controls work. Even the remote control is classier than the norm at this level. All this would count for nothing if the player didn't perform but, of course, it does - rather well.

The CD6005's sonic presentation marries refinement and drama superbly. There's an element of deliberate smoothing of rough edges here, which makes a lot of sense in this part of the market. Many budget amplifiers and speakers are prone to aggression and hardness, particularly in the treble, so the Marantz's tailored balance helps counter that.



However, this civility doesn't go too far. Any recording that should excite still does, and that quality is vital.

The CD6005 is a design with plenty of sonic stretch, which is good news for those who love

The Marantz CD6005 is a player that will continue to shine long after you've upgraded the rest of your system. It's a pleasure to use and even better to listen to

to upgrade. As you'd expect, it will shine with similarly priced partnering equipment. The company's PM6005 is the obvious amplification partner and we like what Dali's lively Zensor 3s do at the end of this pairing.

But move up to the realms of Arcam's A19 with B&W's 685S 2s, and the Marantz CD player is more than up to taking the extra scrutiny. In such a set-up this player sounds right at home.

This is a player that will continue to shine long after you've upgraded the rest of your system. It's a pleasure to use and even better to listen to. If you're looking for the best budget CD player on the market, look no further.

Best CD player ₹1,50,000+

Roksan Caspian M2 ₹1,98,000

You'd think we'd get bored of recommending the Caspian M2 CD player by now. This is the fifth consecutive year this masterful player has won our premium CD-player category, which is a stupendous achievement.

That's five years in which none of the competition has managed to come up with a similarly priced player that we prefer. Some have more features, but, when it comes to all-round talent, nothing has come close to worrying the Caspian.

This Roksan doesn't feature digital inputs nor does it stream music from an iDevice as the Marantz CD6005 does. What it does do, however, is play CDs brilliantly.

The Caspian M2 has a smoother and richer balance than the norm, but uses that to deliver one of the most engaging performances we've heard anywhere near this price.

There's plenty of detail here, and enough transparency to reveal every single flaw in a

It takes a gifted product to win one of our Awards just once. To win it five consecutive years means the Roksan Caspian M2 is truly exceptional

recording. It never overstates shortcomings though, preferring instead to concentrate on the positives.

As with all our Award-winners the real achievement here is balance. Despite its forgiving nature, this isn't a machine to short-change in other areas.

A master of all trades

It has the dynamic reach to truly thrill with something as forceful as Tchaikovsky's *Marché Slave Op.31*, yet it still has the finesse and midrange expressiveness to make the most of Leonard Cohen's *I'm Your Man* set - an impressively wide spread of talents. You can add strong rhythmic ability and stable sound-staging to this player's list of talents too.

Build quality is everything we'd expect at this level - solid, well finished and damped - and the controls work with positive precision.

It takes a gifted product to win one of our Awards just once. To win it five consecutive years means the Caspian M2 is exceptional. Buy with confidence.



Keep it in the family

The M2's easy-going nature extends to partnering kit, but one obvious choice is the matching Caspian M2 amplifier

Editor's Picks

A lot of great AV kit has passed through our listening rooms this year. These are some that we didn't want to return. But had to!



Best AV Receiver

Onkyo TX-NR929 ₹1,30,000

Never the one to play second fiddle when it comes to new tech rollouts in the AV receiver range, Onkyo has consistently been on the top of the charts. 2014 saw a minor refresh to its current range, now updated with 4K passthrough and upscaling, built-in Wi-Fi, 9 HDMI inputs and a massive 11.2-channel pre-out section. Amplifier channels can be reassigned to drive Zones 2 and 3, or biamping of the front left and right channels using Onkyo's Digital Processing Crossover Network. Burr-Brown 192kHz/24-bit DACs are used, with one stereo DAC per front channel in differential mode, and the amplification uses Onkyo's Wide Range Amp Technology and Three-Stage Inverted Darlington Circuitry to maintain quality even at high volumes.

As well as the built-in Bluetooth capability, the receiver has built-in Wi-Fi to enable lossless audio streaming from iPhone and Android devices. It also uses an icon-based overlaid graphical on-screen display and InstaPrevue video switching technology to allow users to check what's playing on other HDMI-connected sources while still watching the main input. Now that's a whole lot of convenience that the competition

hasn't even thought of. Hybrid Standby, meanwhile, preserves a network connection and HDMI passthrough while the home theatre sleeps, allowing the use of TV and media players with the receiver powered down. The rated power of 150 watts seems genuine and there is palpable weight and scale to the dialogue and effects. This is an outright movie machine that comes out as a total winner at this price. There's also app-controllable 192 kHz/24-bit FLAC, Apple Lossless, Dolby TrueHD, LPCM, and DSD streaming from NAS and personal computer (via network and DLNA), plus access to online streaming services.

With so much going for it, it was obvious that Onkyo wanted this to be flagship until Dolby Atmos came along and forced them to refresh the line-up again. Sure, it won't really tango well with a Jeff Rowland when it comes to musical purity but that would be missing the point. As an entertainer, the mighty Onkyo is fantastic value for money and won't fail to get the popcorn churning. We have always liked Onkyo's ease of use, clean aesthetics and the promise of being upgradeable. That proposition just got more tempting with the 929.

Best Instant Upgrade

Asus Essence One ₹50,000



No one ever thinks of Asus when it comes to serious audio gear, but the Xonar Essence One changes that preconceived notion, and how. We were unpacking the sample unit in utter disbelief when it arrived due to its high-end traditional hi-fi like build quality. Asynchronous USB DAC was the buzzword of the season and the Asus has a great implementation of it along with

connectivity options like balanced outputs and both, optical and coaxial digital inputs. Quality of sound through the amplifier is dynamic, detailed and although slightly forward sounding, it is a stomper. If you have a pair of big cans or even desktop speakers that need a little push, this little number can add oodles of pizzazz to the presentation and that is its biggest strength.

Best Large-Screen Television

Samsung F9000 ₹3,29,900

Not within everyone's reach, Samsung knew it was going to be a tough battle to sell merely a 55in television with a price tag that compares to a 65in and above category. But thankfully, that didn't stop their engineers from pouring every last grey cell into this brilliant video product. Although it is capable of displaying 4K content, what really got us levitating was its solid performance in 1080p mode. A colour

palette so wide that it will infuse new life into your Blu-rays and detail so deep, it'll make you want to watch your entire movie collection all over again.

Samsung's One-Connect outboard box lets you swap it for a newer unit with newer I/Os as the future may hold while the Evo Kit lets you upgrade the brains of the TV, adding new features as you go along. Future-proof and bad-picture proof, this is a dream TV!



Best Budget Bookshelf speakers

NHT Classic Three ₹85,000



After a long hiatus, 80's poster child, NHT is back. We were glad to receive the Classic Three's simply because of nostalgic value but closer inspection and listening revealed pleasant surprises. An inert and solid cabinet that holds a unique 3-way design in a bookshelf size. We dug deeper and realised that NHT engineers have spend countless hours in ensuring perfect coherence between all the drivers and getting the off-axis

response to be as linear and smooth as possible. Music was held tight in line with a soundstage that never let up. Holographic imaging and a bass that is controlled are its hallmarks. But even in the high and mid frequencies, the NHT shines with its accuracy. It may not be the name that comes instantly to mind while researching for a great compact speaker but if you take our word for it, you wouldn't be going wrong with this one.

Best Active Home Speakers

Sonodyne SRP 202 ₹26,500 (Each)

When we reviewed these babies, we asked if spending ₹53,500 on something that small was worth it. The answer was a resounding yes! And these Sonodynes have not been trumped since. The Sonodyne 202s were incredible performers when coupled with our reference MicroMega DAC, but true magic happens when they're paired with Sonodynes own DAC P1. The addition of the DAC P1 instantly adds the warmth and richness that was otherwise missing.

Each guitar strum in Bon Iver's *The Wolves* was full of character and detailed beautifully. We also loved the brilliantly defined soundstage along with the agility and detail offered to us by these tiny speakers. They also got pretty loud without losing much composure and didn't seem ruffled at all. The SRP 202s clearly bring out the experience Sonodyne has in the world of studio monitors and we think it is a brilliant result. The Sonodyne SRP 202 is well worthy of an award.



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**NEED TO KNOW****CONSIDER IF**

You don't want the bulk of adding an amplifier to your mix of components

YOU'LL NEED

Balanced XLR cables for the best quality of transmission without interference

MAKE SURE

You tweak around with the gain and tone contour settings for the best balance

AVOID

Playing with the tone controls unless you feel its absolutely necessary

HIGHLIGHT?

Rock solid soundstage that makes the speakers almost disappear from view

Sonodyne SRA-2100

₹58,000 (Each)

No other Indian brand has shown the commitment that Sonodyne has. Over its three decade-long run, it has spread its wings wide over Asia and Europe, consistently garnering support from professionals and enthusiasts alike. Unpacking them hints at the heft with which they have been constructed. The extruded aluminum front baffle and enclosure edges keep the cabinet extremely rigid and the knuckle rap test only ends with bruised digits and a feeling of pride that an Indian brand is able to produce a loudspeaker of such high standards. The metal grille too, with its gentle curve, lends sophistication and purposeful intent to this design.

Our review samples were finished in gloss white but they are also available in red and black with contrasting top and bottom plates. But it's not just the aesthetic value that Sonodyne has poured its resources into. Dig deeper and you'll find a robust 6in kevlar woofer and a 1in silk-dome tweeter, both drivers mated to their individual amplifiers since this is an active design, like all of Sonodyne's loudspeakers. The amplifiers are rated to send 80watts to the LF driver and 50watts to the HF driver,

making it suitable for small to medium sized rooms.

Designed to serve professional and consumer requirements, it is clear from the very first moments of listening that this is a neutral monitor. The tonal balance is instantly likeable with an open soundstage that belies the size of the speaker. Ben Howard's *I Forget Where We*

One of the best features of this speaker system is how easy it is to make them sound good

Were is as mature a record as it gets for alt-rock and his shimmering guitar work is superbly rendered through the SRA-2100, both in terms of timing and timbre. Every pluck and strum of the guitar is transparent while the whack of the snare and thump of the kick drum is felt (along with being heard). As a tool that provides insight into the music at close quarters, the Sonodyne monitor is as good as they come and a huge chunk of this compliment could be attributed to the cabinet design and construction. It doesn't seem to store an iota of energy within itself and as such, there is an openness to the sound that is more akin to small, high-end bookshelf speakers. Hardly of any resemblance to this blocky number.

The amplifier power is ample and also

keeps the drivers in perfect sync thanks to the DSP control. User-adjustable gain, bass and treble contour also go a long way in aiding to customise the sound for a particular location or preference. This is invaluable when setting up the speakers on a desk where one speaker may invariably be closer or misaligned to the other. In fact, one of the best features of this speaker system is how easy it is to make them sound good. No rocket science degree required and that is how Sonodyne likes to keep it. As a plug and play system, this may be the best-value system out there. Just add a decent source and you have a two-channel system that can handle the stiffest and the best competition from anywhere in the world. Bravo!

Rating

FOR Simple set-up, superb build-quality, neutral tonality and more than enough power

AGAINST Minor finish issues but sonically, nothing at this price

VERDICT If you want to keep things simple, yet accurate, this speaker is the one to get

TECH SPECS

Design 2-way active, **Drivers** 1 x 6in kevlar woofer, 1 x 1in silk-dome tweeter, **Amp power** - 80watts (LF), 50watts (HF), **Maximum SPL** - 108dB, **Frequency Response** 60Hz-22kHz, **Dimensions (WHD)** 240 x 377 x 250mm



Lenovo Yoga Tablet 2

₹28,990

Part aluminum, part plastic and built fantastic. That's the Yoga Tablet 2 in a nutshell. It's Lenovo's latest flexible tablet that bends over backwards to please you. Armed with its versatile kick-stand, it holds a generous 9600mAh battery. For its build and design alone, the Yoga Tablet 2 gets top scores. To adapt to various positions the way it does is truly a remarkable feat achieved by Lenovo. The power

button is intuitively placed on one side of the hinge while the AUX port is present on the other side. A soft light ring pulsates around the power button when charging. Needless to say, a bunch of elements reminiscent of a certain rival. Up front right below the screen are a pair of stereo speakers powered by Dolby Digital Plus. Combine that with its 1900x1200 10.1in screen, and you're looking at a device that doesn't take AV lightly.

We feed it a Full HD copy of RoboCop and see if it delivers the goods. Little can be done to tweak the picture that feels dull and washed out. Blacks are a

There's punch and volume in spades, even if detail is lacking a bit. Media junkies will be left craving more

far cry from being deep and colours just lack accuracy.

We even notice how fast-paced scenes set up a formidable challenge for the device that stutters in the process. Sound on the other hand can be customised to a large extent using the bundled Dolby app. There's punch and volume in spades, even if the detail is lacking a bit. Media junkies will be left craving more. As a tablet, there's little left to desire as it zips through tasks. It's a trusty little companion. But for an AV experience on-the-go, you could do better.

Rating

FOR Price, build, versatility, battery, expandable storage

AGAINST Inaccurate colour reproduction, washed out picture,

VERDICT The Yoga looks the part and sounds it too. But it'll take a lot more than a pretty face for a strong recommendation from us.

TECH SPECS

Screen 10.1in(1900X1200) IPS LCD, **Processor** Intel Atom Z3745 **Camera** 8MP (front), 1.6MP (rear) **OS** Android 4.4.

NEED TO KNOW

CONSIDER IF

You need a highly adaptable tablet perfect for on-the-go tasks

YOU'LL NEED

To invest in a nice pair of in-ears such as the SoundMAGIC E10 for quality audio

MAKE SURE

You tweak the settings in the Dolby app so the sound is to your taste

AVOID

The auto-brightness feature. The constant fluctuations are just unacceptable to the eyes

HIGHLIGHT

That design. It's as functional as it is pretty. If only there was more.



BenQ W1070+

₹1,10,000

Alf you're looking for big-screen entertainment on a budget, then this BenQ should be your first port of call. A Full HD 3D projector that delivers an astonishingly good performance, it's an absolute bargain for its price tag. Getting on to business, play the *Pacific Rim* Blu-ray and the W1070+ delivers a richly detailed, silky smooth and wonderfully punchy picture. Its vibrant colour palette has no trouble tackling the film's myriad colours with aplomb.

Vivid reds could do with a touch more subtlety and skin-tones could be shaded more realistically, but overall it's an enjoyable picture.

That picture is clear and crisply drawn too, with a good sense of depth to films. The W1070+ also manages to discern dark objects against shadowy backgrounds without compromising on fine detail.

It's also a smooth picture, with no hiccups in motion, whether it's Captain America dishing out justice with his speedy shield or the panning scenes across the railway station in *Hugo*. Sound quality, too, is refreshingly

That picture is clear and crisply drawn too, with a good sense of depth to films

good for a projector. In 3D, the picture has a lovely sense of depth, and the W1070+ manages to deliver a stable and likeable image despite the inevitable dimming.

The W1070+ is also compatible with BenQ's new Wireless Full HD Kit that will cost approximately ₹10,000 and will soon be available. If you're thinking of building your first home cinema system, this projector should be at the top of your shopping list.

Rating

FOR Clear, richly detailed picture, deep blacks, smooth motion, great price

AGAINST 3D glasses need to be bought separately, wireless kit adds ₹10,000

VERDICT A superb budget projector that delivers subtlety and excitement in spades

TECH SPECS

System DLP **Resolution** 1920 x 1080 **Contrast Ratio** 10000:1 **Brightness** 2200 ANSI Lumen **Weight** 2.7kg

NEED TO KNOW

CONSIDER IF

You need big screen entertainment on a budget

YOU'LL NEED

To buy 3D glasses and the wireless kit that will set you back a certain amount

MAKE SURE

You experiment with the basic GUI for added ease of use

AVOID

Blocking the air vents on

HIGHLIGHT

Fact that you can project from even an off-centre position



Vu 50in 4K UHD 3D SMART LED TV

₹90,000

Monsoon is long gone, but the 4K TV deluge continues with VU's latest making it to our media room. It packs in 4K resolution and is 3D-ready with 50in of screen size. The set is not exactly a looker. VU has stuck with a simple design, and the white finish on the rear tries hard to give the telly a suave look but fails. We weren't too impressed with the build and finish of the set either with visible panel gaps. However, to make things enticing, VU

has priced the set at ₹90K, which sounds like a steal. But can it blow competing sets out of the water?

Fire up *The Dark Knight Rises* on Blu-ray and the VU delivers punchy detail in the opening scene that introduces Bane. However, there is noticeable motion judder during panning and action shots but it settles down during close-ups. Skin tones are well rendered but you can further tweak settings to your heart's content via the picture menu. Interacting with the menu system is painfully slow in some areas, and we hope VU fixes this with an update. The impressive image quality across an edge-to-edge wide 178° viewing angle makes sure you

Fire up *The Dark Knight Rises* on Blu-ray and the VU delivers punchy detail in the opening scene

won't miss out on the fun even if you were seated at the far end of your living room. The set is also capable of upscaling video to 4K and it does a decent job of it. With support for built-in wi-fi you can play videos off your smartphone, tablet or computer. Speakers placed on the rear do not deliver the goods, which is why we would highly recommend using separate external speakers. Overall, with more positives going for it than the other way around, we recommend it if you are looking for a feature packed 4K TV on a budget.

Rating

FOR Pricing, 4K ready (also upscales content to 4K), 3D, built-in wi-fi

AGAINST Audio quality, motion judder, picture not entirely noise free

VERDICT This VU 50in 4K TV does have its quirks but manages to be a good buy thanks to its pricing and features

TECH SPECS

Screen Size / Type 50in / Edge-lit LED Backlit
4K Yes, **3D** Yes, **Built-in wi-fi** Yes **Connectivity** HDMI x 4, USB x 3 **Speakers** 10 + 10 Watt Audio

NEED TO KNOW

CONSIDER IF

You need a large-screened telly which supports 4K spec, 3D and wireless capabilities

YOU'LL NEED

To invest in separate speakers for a sonically involving movie experience

MAKE SURE

You tweak the picture settings to neutral and turn off motion smoothing

AVOID

Upscaling anything below 480p for best results

HIGHLIGHT

Feature-packed 4K TV that doesn't burn a hole in your pocket



Signature Acoustics O-16 Live

₹1800 (when tested)

When you think of buying new budget in-ears, you tend to limit your purchase options to a handful of popular brands (Sony, Philips and Sennheiser, most likely). What if we told you that the better options were brands you've probably never heard of? Signature Acoustics is one such small gem of a brand. It's very unlikely you've heard of this Navi Mumbai-based outfit,

since they're really just a bunch of enthusiasts that have designed and built their own earphones. They started with the rather unique C-12 wooden in-ears, and are back with their second effort, the all-metal O-16s.

Straight out of the box, the O-16s are anything but convincing. They're open-backed and therefore include a back mesh, that, along with the rear casing, looks poorly built. But we're a bit partial to open-backed, so we quickly get over that. The O-16s also come with a neat leather carry-pouch and extra size-specific ear tips, but no 6.3mm or airline adapters.

As is standard procedure for us when it comes to headphones, we plug them into our reference Micromega MyDAC, which does its usual job of smoothening out the track and opening up the sound. Unfortunately, this doesn't seem to go well with the O-16s, mellowing the sound down and making a right mess of the bass and treble. Netsky's *No Strings Attached* seems to lose all of its excitement and drive.

Taking the DAC out of the equation and plugging the 'phones straight into our HTC One (M8) threw out some dramatically different results. The O-16s suddenly produced new found power, bass and treble, with a FLAC of *No*

With a bit of running in and patience, you warm up to the O-16s eventually.

Strings Attached sounding very different. Initially, they sounded a bit overbearing and messy, but with a bit of running in and patience, you warm up to the O-16s eventually.

They may not have the brand recognition of typical in-ears at this price level but the Signature Acoustics O-16s are easy to love once you've lived with them for a while. Like the C-12s, these home-made in-ears provide quality performance for the price.

Rating

FOR Insightful detail, exciting bass, comfortable fit, quality cables

AGAINST No adapters in the box, may not work well with DACs and other equipment

VERDICT Stick to simply plugging into the 3.5mm port and give it some time and patience, and you'll be amply rewarded

TECH SPECS

Drivers 8mm **Voice Coil** Copper-clad Aluminium wire **Type** Open-backed **Connector** 3.5mm gold-plated stereo pin

NEED TO KNOW

CONSIDER IF

You're looking at being a bit different and ignoring the big brands

YOU'LL NEED

Good audio files and a decent playback device

MAKE SURE

You use the correct-sized ear-plugs, or the fit will be too uncomfortable and sound will suffer

AVOID

Using any equipment in the middle, plug straight into your phone/PC

HIGHLIGHT

Powerful, insightful sound that you slowly fall in love with

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BUYER'S GUIDE

We can help

Welcome to India's best guide to TVs, hi-fi, home cinema and MP3, with full specs and ratings for hundreds of products.

Up to date and to the point

We've put the Buyers Guide through a much needed refresher. All prices and products are now up to date and current, and there are also a few tips and tricks for getting the best out of your kit.



Ali Pardiwala
Editor, Buyer's Guide

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1 Browse by section: categories are arranged logically, with products accompanied by price, date and star rating.

2 Entries have a star rating followed by a concise summary of the review, so you can easily find the product for you.

3 We offer the most comprehensive list of technical specifications for each and every product we've reviewed.



AV receivers & amplifiers

Budget	Well-equipped and deliver convincing surround sound
Mid	There are gains in features, build quality and sonic performance
Premium	Real powerhouses that pack loads of features and cinema-style sound

Product	₹	Verdict	Channels /power (w)	HDMI in	HDMI out	Networking	3D passthrough	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Pioneer VSX-522	NA	★★★★★	An agreeable entry-level amp	5x125	4	1	●	17x44x36
Pioneer VSX-922	NA	★★★★★	A highly specified all-round performer that excels at its new price point	5x125	4	1	●	17x44x36
Yamaha RX-V373	28,990	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier (budget), Awards 2012	5x100	4	1	●	15x44x32
Yamaha RX-V375	30,990	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier (budget), Awards 2013	5x100	4	1	●	15x44x32
Denon AVR-1912	45,900	★★★★★	A fine amp bettered by close rivals	7x90	5	1	●	17x44x38
Onkyo TX-NR525	46,000	Not rated	Not rated	5x160	6	1	●	17x44x33
Denon AVR-2113	49,900	★★★★★	Solid, likeable option for both novices and enthusiasts	7x125	6	1	●	17x44x33
Harman Kardon AVR171	59,990	★★★★★	Could be subtler but still delivers a powerhouse performance	7x100	6	2	●	12x44x30
Pioneer VSX-923	55,190	★★★★★	Needs more heft but it's still a compelling and confident amp	7x150	8	2	●	17x44x36
Onkyo TX-NR626	63,000	Not rated	Not rated	7x175	6	2	●	17x44x33
Onkyo TX-NR727	72,000	Not rated	Not rated	7x185	8	2	●	17x44x38
Denon AVR-X4000	1,34,900	★★★★★	A decent enough AV receiver	7x125	7	3	●	17x43x38
Yamaha RX-V673	56,990	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier (budget-mid), Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	7x150	6	1	●	17x44x36
Pioneer SC-LX57	1,10,990	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier (mid), Awards 2013	9x190	9	3	●	19x44x44
Pioneer SC-LX87	1,73,990	★★★★★	Pioneer strikes gold again with this feature laden powerhouse	9x170	7	2	●	17x43x41
Onkyo TX-NR1009	1,30,000*	★★★★★	An incredibly talented amplifier	9x180	8	2	●	20x44x44
Yamaha RX-A3030	1,61,000	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier (premium), Awards 2013	9x150	8	1	●	19x44x47
Onkyo TX-NR828	95,000	Not rated	Not rated	7x215	8	2	●	20x44x40
Pioneer SC-LX56	NA	★★★★★	Best home cinema amplifier (mid-premium), Awards 2012	9x170	8	2	●	19x44x44
Arcam AVR750	4,50,000	★★★★★	It isn't flawless, but it is very good indeed	7x100	7	2	●	17x43x43
Yamaha RX-A1010	89,990	★★★★★	A receiver with huge but fluid delivery	7x170	8	2	●	18x44x43
Yamaha RX-A1020	89,990	★★★★★	Delivering excitement, detail and precision, this is a brilliantly capable all-rounder	7x110	8	2	●	18x43x43
Onkyo TX-NR1010	1,60,000	★★★★★	Power-packed heavyweight needs a touch more precision	7x200	9	2	●	20x44x59
Onkyo TX-NR3009	1,60,000*	★★★★★	Produces seriously rewarding surround sound	9x200	8	2	●	34x61x60
Onkyo TX-NR3010	1,90,000	★★★★★	A solid performance but lacks the subtlety to cut it as a complete all-rounder	9x160	9	2	●	20x44x60
Onkyo TX-NR5010	2,20,000	Not rated	Not rated	9x280	9	2	●	20x44x46
Pioneer SC-LX86	NA	★★★★★	Best Home Cinema amplifier (premium), Awards 2012	9x190	8	3	●	19x44x44
Yamaha RX-A3020	1,34,990	★★★★★	A shot across the bows of the class leaders	9x230	8	2	●	19x44x47
Yamaha RX-V377	34,990	★★★★★	Superb surround sound on a budget	5x70	4	1	●	15x44x32
Yamaha RX-A1030	1,04,000	★★★★★	Not without some niggles, but this receiver delivers big-time power and muscle	7x110	8	2	●	18x43x43
Pioneer SC-LX87	1,73,990	★★★★★	Pioneer strikes gold again with the feature-laden powerhouse	9x220	9	3	●	19x44x44
Arcam AVR450	2,55,000	★★★★★	There's plenty to like with this receiver, but its rivals better it	7x110	7	2	●	17x43x42

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Surround speakers

Full size	Traditional cabinet design that are big but can deliver a great sound
Style	Compact speakers that make a lot of sense in smaller living spaces
Bipole/Dipole	Surround speaker designs that give a more cohesive soundfield

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
Q Acoustics 2000i 5.1

Awards 2013: Best Traditional Pack (Budget)



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Dali Zensor 15.1

Awards 2013: Best Style Pack (Mid)



AWARD WINNER
Cambridge Audio Aero 5.1

Awards 2013: Best Traditional Pack (Premium)

Product	₹	Verdict	Front speaker (h/w/d, cm)	Center speaker (h/w/d, cm)	Rear speaker (h/w/d, cm)	Subwoofer (h/w/d, cm)	Finishes	
Boston Ac. Soundware XS SE	33,099	★★★★★	Just as good as its predecessor: a must-hear	11x11x9	11x11x9	11x11x9	31x28x40	2
Canton Movie 125 MX	39,375*	★★★★★	A choice compact speaker package	12x9x10	9x20x10	12x9x10	43x24x42	3
Canton Movie 130	75,000	★★★★★	Likeable and listenable	12x9x10	9x19x10	12x9x10	41x24x42	3
Wharfedale DX-1HCP	45,000	★★★★★	Gets a lot right for this kind of money	19x12x12	12x29x12	19x12x12	34x29x32	2
Cambridge Audio Minx S215	58,500	★★★★★	Lots to admire here from very little	8x8x9	8x8x9	8x8x9	22x21x22	1
SKS HT-528	25,000	Not rated	Not rated	18x10x12	10x27x11	18x10x12	43x23x41	
KEFKHT3005 HD2	1,08,000	★★★★★	Great build with an expansive sound	25x13x15	13x25x15	25x13x15	38x37x18	1
Monitor Audio MASS	80,000*	★★★★★	Best style package (mid), Awards 2012	22x13x13	13x22x13	22x13x13	42x38x38	1
Monitor Audio Vector AV10	59,000	★★★★★	For those who like big sound, not big boxes	24x15x17	15x35x17	24x15x17	37x32x32	3
Q Acoustics 2000i 5.1	87,750	★★★★★	Best traditional package up to (mid), Awards 2012	23x15x20	23x16x12	23x15x20	23x16x12	2
Q Acoustics Q7000	95,250	★★★★★	Product of the year - Speaker packages, Awards 2011	24x10x16	12x21x16	24x10x16	37x51x22	2
Tannoy HTS-101	60,200	★★★★★	Best style package (budget-mid), Awards 2012	16x11x14	11x25x17	16x11x14	42x28x37	1
B&W MT-50	1,91,250	★★★★★	Best style package (mid-premium), Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	25x11x16	25x11x16	25x11x16	26x26x33	2
B&W MT-60D	3,28,500	★★★★★	Best style package (premium), Awards 2012	25x11x16	25x11x16	25x11x16	34x27x36	2
Cabasse Eole 2	88,000	★★★★★	Enjoyable sound meets decorative looks	13x13x13	13x13x13	13x13x13	33x33x36	2
DALI Zensor 1 5.1	1,12,000	★★★★★	Best style package (mid-premium), Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	27x16x22	16x44x29	27x16x22	31x29x31	3
DALI Zensor 5 5.1	1,55,400	★★★★★	Best traditional package (mid-premium), Awards 2012	84x16x27	16x44x28	97x16x23	34x37x38	2
Elipson Planet M 5.1	1,05,000	★★★★★	Enjoyable looks and sound, just lacking a on detail	15x15x15	15x15x15	15x15x15	39x32x32	3
Jamo D500 THX Select 2	2,17,000	★★★★★	Exceptional and unbeatable value too	26x45x13	26x45x13	26x45x13	42x40x42	2
KEFKHT3005SE	1,08,000	★★★★★	Still a valid product and test winner	25x12x15	13x30x18	25x12x15	39x44x19	2
KEF Q300 5.1	1,26,000	★★★★★	An admirable package for the purists	36x21x30	21x63x30	36x21x30	33x34x33	3
KEF T105	89,900	★★★★★	A stealthy package that looks the part	33x14x4	33x14x4	33x14x4	38x37x8	1
Monitor Audio Bronze BX2 5.1	1,60,000	★★★★★	Thrillingly fit for purpose	35x19x26	17x46x17	29x28x11	33x32x33	4
Monitor Audio Bronze BX5 5.1	2,75,000	★★★★★	Does a good job of filling a big room	85x17x25	17x46x17	29x28x11	33x32x33	2
Tannoy Rev. Compact 5.1	1,40,000*	★★★★★	Exceptional sound in the average living room	27x15x16	15x30x16	39x31x34	32x29x29	2
B&W CM9 Theatre	7,99,875	★★★★★	Best traditional package (Premium), Awards 2012	102x32x37	22x59x28	34x20x28	32x32x32	2
B&W CT800 system	2,01,65,625	★★★★★	Expensive but it's the best we've heard	110x33x55	33x110x55	110x33x10	48x48x48	1
DALI Ikon 5 Mk2 5.1	3,21,900	★★★★★	An exciting speaker package that will thrill film and music fans	81x15x28	15x57x26	38x27x15	45x41x46	2
Cerwin Vega SL Series 5.1	2,36,000	Not rated	Not rated	84x36x38	17x28x18	91x42x50	45x13x16	1
Cambridge Audio Aero 5.1	1,57,000	★★★★★	Best traditional package (Premium), Awards 2013	98x24x34	15x43x21	18x46x15	34x33x36	2
KEFR100 5.1	2,47,000	★★★★★	Best traditional package (Premium), Awards 2012	28x18x29	17x53x31	28x18x29	37x33x35	4
Monitor Audio Apex	1,68,100	★★★★★	Best style speaker package (Premium), Awards 2011	25x14x14	14x61x10	25x14x14	34x34x41	2
Energy Veritas RC Micro 5.1	47,100	Not rated	Not rated	12x9x9	9x9x15	12x9x9	32x31x27	1
Monitor Audio PL300 AV	14,10,000	★★★★★	One of the finest 5.1 speaker packages on the market	111x41x47	22x58x29	37x22x28	45x48x47	2
Mon. Audio Silver RX6 AV12	2,93,400	★★★★★	Best traditional package (Premium), Awards 2011	85x19x25	19x50x20	30x12x25	34x34x41	6
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 5.1	2,50,800	★★★★★	Guaranteed to keep you on the edge of your seat	95x21x32	18x46x23	95x21x30	42x31x36	3
Mordaunt-Short Mezzo 5.1	5,27,200	★★★★★	Lots of attack, with little respite	100x22x28	18x49x22	35x22x28	32x34x35	2
Mordaunt-S. Performance 5.1	13,14,000	★★★★★	Deeply impressive, they will leave you breathless	121x24x37	60x21x22	121x24x37	50x50x50	2
PMCDi 5.1	5,00,000*	★★★★★	Small and sonically brilliant package	29x16x23	16x29x23	29x16x23	55x20x55	4
Tannoy Revolution Signature	1,64,500*	★★★★★	As thrilling or as calming as you want it to be	85x17x18	17x45x18	27x17x18	37x34x34	2

CD Players

Integrated Has both a CD mechanism and digital-to-analogue conversion tech
Transport Needs an outboard DAC but can deliver a higher standard of sound

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
Marantz CD6005

Awards 2013: Best CD Player (Budget)



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Naim CD5si

Awards 2013: Best CD Player (Mid)



AWARD WINNER
Roksan Caspian M2 CD

Awards 2013: Best CD Player (Premium)

Product	₹	Verdict	Integrated Transport	Co-axial out	Optical out	XLR out	RCA out	Headphone out	Co-axial in	Optical in	AES/EBU in	USB in	Finishes	Dimensions (h/w/d, cm)	
Cambridge Audio Azur 351C	30,800	★★★★★	A worthy rival to the Award-winning Marantz CD6004	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	9x43x31
Cambridge Audio Azur 651C	46,600	★★★★★	Aspacious sounding disc spinner	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x31
Denon DCD-710AE	27,400	★★★★★	Enjoyable enough, but holds itself back	●	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x43x28
Marantz CD6004	39,900	★★★★★	Best CD player (Budget), Awards 2012	●	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	2	11x44x34
NAD C546BEE	41,000	★★★★★	Excellent all-rounder that entertains like no other at this price point	●	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	7x44x29
Audiolab 8200CD	80,000*	★★★★★	Best CD player (Mid), Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	●	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	0	1	1	8x44x30
Cyrus CD T Transport	1,15,000	★★★★★	An impressive and affordable CD transport	●	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36
Cyrus CD6 SE2	1,25,000	★★★★★	Subtly upgraded, with worthwhile results	●	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	2	8x22x36
Naim CD5si	1,25,000	★★★★★	A stripped down affair, but it's as musical as they come	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	7x43x30
Roksan Kandy K2	68,500	★★★★★	Big and powerful, with an entertaining sound	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	10x43x38
Burmester 069	45,00,000*	★★★★★	Quite possibly the best CD player money can buy	●	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	13x48x31
Audio Research CD5	6,18,750	★★★★★	Audio Research strikes gold again. The CD5 is a terrific player	●	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	13x48x31
Cambridge Audio Azur 851C	1,23,000	★★★★★	Impressive sonic presentation but a touch too clinical for our tastes	●	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	1	1	2	12x43x34
Cyrus CD 8 SE2	1,82,000	★★★★★	Best CD player (mid-premium), Awards 2012	●	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x22x36
dCS Puccini	9,50,000	★★★★★	With the master clock it's an amazing combo	●	1	0	1	1	0	2	0	0	0	2	11x46x40
Parasound Halo CD1	3,00,000	★★★★★	Great player for classical, jazz and sultry female vocals	●	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	2	11x44x34
Naim CD5 XS	2,50,000	★★★★★	It's an excellent CD player, but faces stiff competition	●	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	7x43x30
Naim CD555	14,00,000	★★★★★	The CD555/555PS has a hefty price tag, but a classy performance	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	11x43x31
Naim CDX2	4,50,000	★★★★★	The tweaked CDX2 remains a fine proposition	●	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	9x43x31
Primare CD32	1,63,000	★★★★★	It's massively detailed, but not as engaging as we'd like	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	11x43x38
Roksan Caspian M2 CD	1,98,000	★★★★★	Best CD player (Premium) Awards 2013	●	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	8x43x33
Marantz CD6005	41,900	★★★★★	Best CD player (Budget), Awards 2013	●	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	11x44x34
Esoteric K-05	8,50,000	★★★★★	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

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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 turn 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

The shortlist



HRT microStreamer

Has beaten our 2012 Award-winner

“Truly captivated us with a stunningly agile-paced performance that reveals layers of subtlety hitherto unheard with just a pair of headphones and a laptop.”



Chord Chordette QuteHD

Awards 2012: Best DAC (Mid)

“It’s simple, looks great – and above all, sounds absolutely fantastic. You’ll have to spend twice as much to get something significantly better.”



NAD M51

Awards 2012: Best DAC (Premium)

“The M51 sounds sensational. In fact, we’d go further than that by saying it’s one of the best NAD separates we’ve heard in recent memory.”

Product	₹	Verdict	USB in	Optical in	Co-axial in	AES/EBU in	HDMI in	Wireless	Headphone out	RCA out	Balanced XLR out	Dimensions (h/w/d, cm)
Audioengine D1	11,789	★★★★★	1	1	0	0	1		1	1	0	3x9x10
Audioquest DragonFly	18,900	★★★★★	1	0	0	0	0		1	0	0	1x2x6
Arcam rDAC Wireless	36,000*	★★★★★	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	0	4x16x11
Arcam rPAC	19,800	★★★★★	1	0	0	0	0		1	1	0	3x10x6
Camb. Audio DacMagic 100	18,800	★★★★★	1	2	2	0	0		0	1	0	5x11x13
Camb. Audio DacMagic Plus	38,500	★★★★★	1	2	2	0	0		1	1	1	5x22x19
HRT microStreamer	20,000*	★★★★★	1	0	0	0	0		1	0	0	1x3x6
Meridian Explorer DAC	31,000	★★★★★	1	0	0	0	0		1	0	0	2x3x10
Micromega MyDAC	32,000	★★★★★	1	0	0	0	0		1	0	0	2x3x10
Musical Fidelity M1 DAC	40,500	★★★★★	1	1	1	1	0		0	1	1	10x22x30
NAD DAC 2	25,500	★★★★★	1	0	0	0	0		0	1	0	4x14x7
Cambridge Audio Azur 851D	1,03,000	★★★★★	1	4	3	1	0		1	0	1	12x43x36
Chord Electronics QuteHD	1,00,000*	★★★★★	1	1	1	0	0		0	1	0	7x16x4
Meridian Director	65,000	★★★★★	1	1	1	0	0		0	1	0	3x14x8
Audio Research DAC8	5,30,000*	★★★★★	1	1	1	0	0		1	1	1	13x48x25
Arcam FMJD33	2,34,000	★★★★★	3	2	2	1	0		0	1	2	11x43x37
Burmester 113	4,00,000*	★★★★★	1	1	1	0	0	●	0	1	1	6x20x17
Rotel RDD-1580	80,000	★★★★★	1	2	2	0	0	●	0	1	1	6x43x32
NAD D1050	42,500	★★★★★	1	2	2	0	0		1	1	1	19x6x21
NAD M51	1,27,000	★★★★★	1	1	1	1	2		0	1	0	8x44x30
Naim DAC	2,50,000	★★★★★	2	3	3	0	0		0	1	0	7x43x30

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Hi-Fi speakers

- Stands** Usually smaller speakers that need to be put on a stand, not bookshelves
- Floorstanders** Larger speakers that tend to go louder and deeper than standmounters
- Powered** Have built-in amplifiers and need mains power to work

The shortlist



Q Acoustics Concept 20

Awards 2013: Best Stereo Speaker (Budget)



AWARD WINNER
KEF LS50

Awards 2013: Best Standmounter (Mid)



AWARD WINNER
PMC Twenty 22

Awards 2013: Best Standmounter (Premium)

Product	₹	Verdict	Standmount	Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Audioengine P4	18,000	★★★★★ Small in size, huge in sound: a must-audition pair	●			3	23x14x17
PSB Alpha T1	37,000	Not Yet Rated Not Yet Rated		●		3	91x18x31
PSB Alpha LR1	13,000	Not Yet Rated Not Yet Rated		●		3	18x12x16
Waterfall Serio	15,000	Not Yet Rated Not Yet Rated				3	5x5x3
Q Acoustics 2010i	19,200	★★★★★ Set the standard at this price and size level	●			4	23x20x15
Q Acoustics 2020i	25,900	★★★★★ Best stereo speakers (Budget), Awards 2013	●		●	4	26x17x28
Tannoy Mercury V1i	19,800	★★★★★ An excellent entry-level all-rounder	●			2	30x17x26
Wharfedale Diamond 10.0	11,500	★★★★★ An ideal choice for the easily startled, but a little straitlaced for our liking	●			7	24x15x17
Audioengine A5+	27,980	★★★★★ Bigger, better and more flexible than the originals	●			3	27x18x20
Q Acoustics Q-BT3	39,990	★★★★★ There are few other products as versatile and easy to like at this price	●		●	4	31x19x24
Boston Acoustics A-26	24,600	★★★★★ A beautifully accomplished standmounter	●			2	33x21x27
B&W 685 S2	65,000	★★★★★ A superb, hugely entertaining pair of speakers. Worth the wait? Absolutely	●			2	35x19x32
B&W MM-1	40,000	★★★★★ Still good, but there's better available			●	1	17x10x10
Waterfall Hurricane Evo	31,200	Not Yet Rated Not Yet Rated				3	11x7x3
Bose Computer MusicMonitor	28,013	★★★★★ Enjoyable sound for a speaker this small	●			2	12x7x12
DALI Lektor 2	37,500	★★★★★ Seriously entertaining speakers and simply stunning at this money	●			2	31x18x22
DALI Zensor 3	33,000	★★★★★ If it's entertainment you crave, these standmounters deliver in spades	●			3	35x21x29
DALI Zensor 1	23,700	★★★★★ These brilliant budget standmounters demand a listen	●			2	27x16x22
Epos Epic 1	32,950	★★★★★ Punchy and exciting but they can't deliver all-round ability	●			2	31x19x25
Focal Chorus 706V	49,999	★★★★★ Thoroughly enjoyable but they may not cut it with dance music	●			3	39x22x29
Focal XS Book	29,999	★★★★★ A potent-sounding speaker that brings hi-fi listening to your desktop.			●	1	28x11x20
KEF Q300	33,000	★★★★★ Product of the year - Stereo speakers, Awards 2011	●			3	36x21x30
Totem Dreamcatcher	33,250	Not Yet Rated Not Yet Rated				4	11x5x7
Totem Mite	44,750	Not Yet Rated Not Yet Rated				6	11x6x8
Monitor Audio Bronze BX2	32,000	★★★★★ Best stereo speakers (Budget-Mid), Awards 2012	●			4	35x19x26
Monitor Audio Silver RX1	43,900	★★★★★ Form and function in perfect harmony, these speakers will sit pretty in any home	●			6	31x19x24
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 1	18,000	★★★★★ Still great, but the rivals have caught up	●			1	28x18x27
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 2	23,000	★★★★★ Plenty of bang for your buck, and more besides	●			3	32x21x30
Mordaunt-Short Mezzo 2	37,800	★★★★★ For speakers so small, you get surprisingly full bass	●			2	35x22x28
Q Acoustics 2050i	66,400	★★★★★ Best floorstander (Mid), Awards 2012			●	4	100x32x27
Quad 11L Classic	38,000	★★★★★ Impressive standmounters but lack a touch of sparkle	●			4	31x19x24
Tannoy Mercury V4i	48,200	★★★★★ Best floorstander (Mid), Awards 2011			●	2	97x20x28
Tannoy Revolution DC4	42,700	★★★★★ They may be small of stature but these Tannoys have a huge sonic heart	●			2	27x15x16
Tannoy Revolution DC6	70,300	★★★★★ Best standmounter (Mid), Awards 2012	●			1	36.5x20x25
Triangle Color	49,400	★★★★★ Small, but perfectly formed	●			3	29x17x24
Wharfedale Diamond 10.1	18,500	★★★★★ Fresh competition now offers more for the money	●			4	30x19x28
Wharfedale Diamond 121	20,000	★★★★★ Fabulous sound. For insight and entertainment, the 121s needn't fear any rival.	●			7	32x17x23
Audio Pro LV2e	86,625	★★★★★ Wireless desktop speakers with a hi-fi flourish				3	98x14x24
Audiovector Ki1 Super	TBA	★★★★★ These pint-sized speakers lack far-reaching dynamics, but are easy to live with			●	5	98x14x24
Audiovector Ki3 Standard	TBA	★★★★★ Packed with resolution and speed			●	5	98x14x24

SPEAKERS continued

Product	₹	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
Dynaudio DM 2/6	59,000	★★★★★ Best stereo speakers at this price. Just the right amount of sparkle at the top end	●		2	29x17x24
Dynaudio DM 2/7	66,000	★★★★★ A seriously competitive speaker at this price point	●		1	36x22x27
ATCSCM 11	93,000	★★★★★ Best standmounter (Mid-Premium), Awards 2011	●		1	38x21x25
B&W XT2	1,12,500	★★★★★ Classy, sophisticated but the sound lacks bite	●		2	31x15x20
DALI Ikon 6 MK2	1,26,000	★★★★★ Cleaner, clearer and more insightful than its forerunner	●		3	100x219x36
DALI Ikon 1 Mk2	60,000	★★★★★ Huge sound and good timing, these Dalis are heartily recommended	●		3	33x15x26
DALI Mentor Menuet	84,000	★★★★★ These Menuets are something of a gem	●		2	25x15x23
DALI Zensor 5	54,900	★★★★★ Compact and affordable floorstanders	●		2	84x16x27
Energy Speakers CF70	78,400	Not yet rated	●		1	103x21x40
Energy Speakers CF50	67,200	Not yet rated	●		1	98x18x37
PSB Image T5	67,000	Not yet rated	●		2	94x21x32
PSB Imagine T	1,39,000	Not yet rated	●		5	94x21x35
Elac BS142	60,000	★★★★★ An organic sounding and entertaining pair of speakers that are fun to listen to	●		1	26x16x26
Elipson Planet L	60,000	★★★★★ Charming in many ways, with good transparency	●		3	40x42x43
Epos Epic 5	66,425	★★★★★ Hugely likeable floorstanders with broad sonic appeal	●		2	92x21x32
KEFLS50	1,10,000	★★★★★ Best standmounter (Mid-Premium), Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	●		1	30x20x28
KEFR100	73,000	★★★★★ These are extremely talented stand-mounters	●		4	28x18x29
Monitor Audio Bronze BX5	55,000	★★★★★ Easiest floorstanders to live with we've heard in a good while	●		4	85x17x25
Monitor Audio Silver RX2	65,300	★★★★★ A lot of speaker and a lot of sound	●		6	37.5x23x30
Monitor Audio Silver RX6	83,250	★★★★★ A sensational product from Monitor Audio – detailed, dynamic and very attractive, too	●		6	91x28x31
Monitor Audio Silver RX8	1,09,000	★★★★★ If you're addicted to bass, these floostanders will suit you	●		6	96x28x39
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 6	41,500	★★★★★ A fine all-rounder, with power and bass in spades, and plenty more besides	●		3	95x21x30
Mordaunt-Short Aviano 8	52,000	★★★★★ Great speakers for sure, but too controlled	●		3	95x21x32
Mordaunt-Short Mezzo 6	75,600	★★★★★ Possibly the best in their class	●		2	100x22x28
Mordaunt-Short Mezzo 8	1,09,000	★★★★★ Not the best all-rounders in the Mezzo range, but still very likeable	●		2	107x22x31
PMCDDB1i	1,20,000*	★★★★★ Superbly detailed and rewarding small speakers	●		4	29x16x23
Quad 12L Classic	52,000	★★★★★ There's plenty to admire here	●		4	34x21x28
Spendor S3/5R2	84,500	★★★★★ A little less than the sum of their parts	●		4	31x17x18
Spendor SA1	1,35,800	★★★★★ Small, top-class standmounts	●		3	31x17x19
Tannoy Precision 6.1	96,300	★★★★★ Rhythmic, detailed speakers but a lack of solidity leaves them sounding unbalanced	●		2	33x22x26
Tannoy Precision 8D	60,000*	★★★★★ Solid active speakers that sound good	●		1	44x27x37
Tannoy Revolution DC6T	1,03,700	★★★★★ Best floorstander (Mid-Premium), Awards 2011	●		1	95x26x29
Tannoy Revolution DC6T SE	1,10,000*	★★★★★ Best floorstander (Mid-Premium), Awards 2012	●		1	100x31x28
Tannoy Rev. Sig. DC4	40,000*	★★★★★ DC4s are still appealing across the board	●		2	27x17x18
Tannoy Rev. Sig. DC6T	1,20,000*	★★★★★ Expensive but fully justify the price tag – expertly balanced performance	●		2	14x9x9
Totem Rainmaker	59,500	★★★★★ Hugely musical, and a pleasure to listen to	●		4	36x17x23
Triangle Color 123	77,000	★★★★★ A brilliant desktop speaker package	●		3	14x14x14
Triangle Comete Anniv.	1,24,000	★★★★★ Ideal for injecting energy into your music	●		1	42x20x34
Vienna Ac. Haydn Grand	85,920	★★★★★ Beautifully built, they pack a sweet sonic punch that's focused and purposeful	●		5	36x17x27
Wharfedale Denton	52,000	★★★★★ Relaxed yet engaging sound has a lot of appeal	●		1	32x20x31
Neat Iota	85,000	★★★★★ Attractive, but with a hefty sound too	●		5	13x20x17
Elac FS249	2,40,000	Not yet rated	●			115x26x36
JBL Project Everest DD6000	16,16,999	Not yet rated	●		2	44x38x18
JBL Synthesis 4700	7,04,599	Not yet rated	●		1	43x20x15
Neat Motive SX1	2,20,000	★★★★★ Charming, unique speakers - they lean backwards	●		4	93x16x20
PSB Synchrony One	3,47,000	Not yet rated	●		3	109x23x33
PSB Synchrony One B	1,49,000	Not yet rated	●		3	99x19x28
ATCSCM 100A	10,99,000	★★★★★ Massively talented and proportioned	●		4	107x40x56

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SPEAKERS continued

Product	₹	Verdict	Standmount Floorstander	Powered	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd,cm)
ATCSM40	2,20,000	★★★★★ Among the best at this price level, but is your system good enough?	●		1	97x23x32
Harbeth P3ES-R	1,74,027	Not yet rated Not yet rated	●		4	30x19x20
Harbeth Compact 7ES-3	2,46,089	Not yet rated Not yet rated	●		4	52x27x32
Harbeth Super HL5	3,00,181	Not yet rated Not yet rated	●		4	64x32x30
B&W 800 Diamond	26,71,875	★★★★★ An exceptional performer, and a fine showcase for B&W's range of technology	●		3	118x45x65
B&W 805 Diamond	5,34,375	★★★★★ Good, but easier to admire than really love	●		3	42x24x35
B&W PM1	2,79,000	★★★★★ Best standmounter (Premium), Awards 2011	●		1	33x19x30
Burmester B10	5,60,000	★★★★★ Well built, well refined and an engaging listen. We're in love	●		3	39x22x28
Neat Motive SX2	1,75,000	★★★★★ Cohesive, authoritative and downright exciting	●		3	39x21x37
DALI Fazon F5	2,49,000	★★★★★ Stylish deliverers of audiophile sound	●		3	92x28x32
DALI Mentor 6	2,55,000	★★★★★ Dynamic floorstanders that are really fast and agile	●		1	40x8x15
Dynaudio Excite X32	1,94,000	★★★★★ These pack an eloquent, expansive sound	●		4	92x17x27
Dynaudio DM 3/7	1,48,000	★★★★★ Plenty of positives in this mid-range floorstander	●		2	96x20x27
Dynaudio Focus 160	1,88,000	★★★★★ Just do the job and don't intrude on the entertainment	●		6	35x20x29
Dynaudio Excite X12	80,000	★★★★★ They get enough right to warrant the full five stars	●		4	29x17x26
Focal Diablo Utopia	8,99,999	★★★★★ When it comes to levels of insight, little at this price even comes close	●		Any	43x26x43
Jamo R907	4,98,000	★★★★★ The innovative R907s are stunningly capable speakers	●		1	119x44x19
KEF Reference 207/2	12,50,000	★★★★★ Big, bold and stunningly built, they major on bass	●		4	123x40x69
Linn Akurate 242	6,74,860	★★★★★ Very impressive speakers, and ideal in a Linn set-up	●		2	100x21x38
Monitor Audio PL100	2,13,000	★★★★★ For those who want sonic delivery and insight	●		3	37x23x29
Mon. Audio Platinum PL300	4,78,000	★★★★★ Its been a long time coming, and it is well worth the wait	●		3	111x41x47
Mordaunt-Short Perf. 2	1,56,000	★★★★★ Not all-rounders, but exceptional in some areas	●		3	49x24x36
Mordaunt-Short Perf. 6	2,68,000	★★★★★ Among the most realistic-sounding speakers ever	●		2	121x24x37
Neat Petite SX	1,75,000	★★★★★ Small and perfectly formed standmounters	●		6	31x20x18
Neat Ultimatum XLS	6,20,000	★★★★★ An entertainer of the highest order if partnered with care	●		9	38x22x37
PMCD15-All	2,20,000*	★★★★★ They may not look it, but these PMCs sound like every penny's worth	●		1	29x16x28
PMC Fact 3	4,20,000*	★★★★★ Hugely capable but a touch overcontrolled	●		4	54x16x30
PMC Fact 8	5,00,000*	★★★★★ These PMC floorstanders are quite simply magical - even at this price	●		4	103x15x38
PMCFB1i	2,50,000*	★★★★★ Great all-rounders. They have real long-term appeal	●		4	100x20x30
PSB Imagine Mini	49,000	★★★★★ Tiny speakers with a surprising amount of heft. Good for a small room	●		5	23x14x21
PMCPB1i	6,50,000*	★★★★★ Simply excellent speakers: big, bold and accomplished	●		1	108x20x40
PMCTwenty 22	2,20,000*	★★★★★ Best standmounter (Premium), Awards 2012	●		4	41x18x37
PMCTwenty 23	3,25,000*	★★★★★ Best floorstander (Premium), Awards 2012	●		4	92x15x33
ProAc Response D18	1,49,625	★★★★★ Best floorstander (Premium), Awards 2011	●		6	93x19x27
ProAc Studio 140 Mk2	1,16,275	★★★★★ An entertaining and dynamic performer	●		4	104x19x28
Quad ESL 2805	5,40,000	★★★★★ Exceptional electrostatic speakers	●		1	104x70x39
Quad ESL 2812	on request	★★★★★ Still a terrific electrostatic speaker, in certain respects it remains unmatched	●		1	107x69x38
Spendor A6R	2,25,000	★★★★★ An outstanding pair of speakers that do very little wrong	●		5	88x19x28
Sonus F. Cremona Auditor M	4,83,750	★★★★★ One of the best standmounts money can buy	●		2	35x20x37
Spendor A5	1,63,000	★★★★★ The most accomplished speakers for this money	●		4	79x17x25
Spendor A6	2,06,000	★★★★★ Brilliant speakers for the money - a class-leading combination of insight and naturalness	●		4	88x19x28
Spendor A9	4,06,000	★★★★★ Best stereo speakers (Premium), Awards 2010. Stunningly capable	●		4	103x21x35
Spendor D7	3,18,000	★★★★★ The finest Spendors in years	●		6	95x20x32
Spendor SP100R2	6,28,500	★★★★★ Can still compete with the best at this price level	●		2	70x37x43
Spendor SP2/3R2	2,24,500	★★★★★ They're wonderfully natural with a seamless presentation	●		1	55x28x33
Tannoy Definition DC8	2,81,500	★★★★★ Capable of seriously controlled sound	●		3	47x27x26
Totem Mani-2 Signature	2,49,900	★★★★★ When it comes to outright enjoyment we can't think of any rival speakers we prefer for this money	●		442x21x31	
Triangle Quartet	2,48,400	★★★★★ Hugely entertaining premium floorstanders	●		2	123x37x39
Wharfedale Jade-5	1,52,000	★★★★★ Floorstanders that pack immense power and poise	●		3	106x25x40

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Stereo amplifiers

Integrated These amplifiers combine a preamp and power section in one box
Power output A higher number usually means louder, depending on speakers
Digital inputs Some amplifiers now have a DAC built in, which could be useful

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER
NAD D 3020



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
Arcam FMJ A19



AWARD WINNER
Naim Nait 5i

Product	₹	Verdict	Power (w)	DAC	Line level in	MM phono in	MC phono in	USB in	Tape loops	Preamp out	Speaker outs	Tone controls	Headphone out	Remote control	Finishes	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Arcam FMJ A19	72,000	★★★★★ Picky about partners but wonderfully talented	50	6	1	0	1	●	2	●	●	●	●	1	9x43x28	
Cambridge Audio Azur 351A	TBA	★★★★★ Worth considering if you prefer an energetic approach	45	5	0	0	●	1	2	●	●	●	●	2	9x43x34	
Cambridge Audio Azur 651A	43,000	★★★★★ Meaty and powerful, but not the most refined	75	5	0	0	1	●	2	●	●	●	●	1	12x43x35	
Cyrus 6a	1,24,000	★★★★★ Best stereo amp (Mid), Awards 2012	40	6	0	0	0	●	2	●	●	●	●	2	7x22x36	
Denon PMA-710	29,700	★★★★★ The most enjoyable Denon amp we've heard in ages	50	5	1	0	2	●	2	●	●	●	●	2	12x43x21	
Denon PMA-720AE	34,900	★★★★★ Entertaining and capable, but sonically stubborn	50	4	1	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	●	2	12x43x31	
Marantz PM6005	41,900	★★★★★ A shot across the bow to Marantz's rivals. An excellent system	45	5	1	0	1	2	●	●	●	●	●	2	11x44x37	
Marantz PM6004	39,900	★★★★★ Product of the Year - Stereo amplifiers, Awards 2011	45	5	1	0	1	2	●	●	●	●	●	2	11x44x37	
Marantz PM8003	56,700	★★★★★ Built like a battleship and delivers most of the goods	70	5	1	0	2	●	2	●	●	●	●	2	12x44x36	
NAD C326BEE	38,000	★★★★★ A really musical amplifier to grace any budget system	50	7	0	0	2	●	1	●	●	●	●	1	10x44x29	
NAD C356BEE	57,000	★★★★★ A party animal of an amplifier	80	7	0	0	2	●	2	●	●	●	●	1	13x44x34	
Naim Nait 5i	1,00,000	★★★★★ The Nait 5i gets all the basics right and more	50	4	0	0	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	1	7x44x31	
Onkyo A-9030	25,000	★★★★★ Proof that Onkyo knows how to build good stereo gear	65	4	1	0	1	2	●	●	●	●	●	2	14x44x33	
Onkyo A-9050	35,000	★★★★★ Lean presentation, but there's plenty to like	75	5	1	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	●	2	14x44x33	
Roksan Kandy K2BT	1,30,000	★★★★★ Full of power and punch, but some heart and soul is missing	140	5	1	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	●	2	11x43x38	
Roksan Kandy K2	82,600	★★★★★ Best stereo amp (Budget-Mid), Awards 2011	125	5	1	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	●	3	10x43x38	
Rotel RA-04SE	45,000	★★★★★ A startling upgrade to an already strong performer	40	4	1	0	1	●	2	●	●	●	●	2	7x44x34	
Rotel RA-06SE	91,125	★★★★★ A forceful, articulate listen. Could do with more detail	70	5	1	0	1	●	2	●	●	●	●	1	9x44x34	
Rotel RA-10	55,125	★★★★★ Best Stereo Amp (Budget), Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	40	4	1	0	1	●	2	●	●	●	●	2	27x43x34	
Rotel RA-1520	1,05,750	★★★★★ It's got good looks, a good spec, and a great sound	60	5	1	0	1	●	2	●	●	●	●	2	9x43x269	
Cyrus 8a	1,82,000	★★★★★ Everything we've come to expect and love about Cyrus	70	5	0	0	1	●	2	●	●	●	●	2	7x22x36	
Cyrus 8 DAC	2,19,000	★★★★★ Meticulous and engaging amp and DAC combo	70	●	6	0	0	●	0	2	●	●	●	2	7x22x364	
Denon PMA-2010AE	1,39,900	★★★★★ Listen to this amp in full flow and it's a monster	80	4	1	1	2	●	2	●	●	●	●	1	18x43x449	
Naim Nait XS	1,75,000	★★★★★ Still a top class premium amplifier	60	3	0	0	2	●	1	●	●	●	●	1	7x43x30	
Quad II Classic Integrated	3,80,000	★★★★★ A fine integrated amplifier with a hefty price tag	25	3	1	1	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	1	20x31x38	
Roksan Caspian M2	1,80,000	★★★★★ Best stereo amplifier (Premium) Awards 2012	85	5	0	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	●	2	8x43x332	
Unison Research Preludio	2,40,000	★★★★★ Rubs shoulders with the very best at this price	14	4	0	0	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	1	20x40x38	
Unison Research S6	2,90,000	★★★★★ In the right system, the S6 is truly magical	33	5	0	0	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	2	21x35x49	
Unison Research S9	6,45,000	★★★★★ We can't help but love this quirky valve amplifier	35	4	0	0	0	1	1	●	●	●	●	1	25x41x57	
Unison Research Simply Italy	1,50,000	★★★★★ A well-engineered valve amplifier at a sensible price	12	5	0	0	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	2	26x19x35	
NAD D3020	42,500	★★★★★ Best stereo amplifier (Budget) Awards 2013	30	2	0	0	●	0	1	●	●	●	●	2	19x6x22	
Naim Nait 5si	1,25,000	★★★★★ Best stereo amplifier (Mid) Awards 2013	60	3	0	0	1	1	●	●	●	●	●	2	7x43x31	
Cyrus DACXP Signature	TBA	★★★★★ With the signature update, the DACXP remains a fine product	70	2	0	0	1	●	1	●	●	●	●	2	7x22x36	

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.

Product	₹	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)
ATC CA-2	1,43,000	★★★★★	A matchless preamp when paired with the P1 power amp	5	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	9x44x32
Cyrus DACXP+	3,28,000*	★★★★★	Massive ability in a small box	2	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	7x22x36
Linn Akurate Kontrol	4,18,600	★★★★★	Part of the Linn Akurate system - and truly awesome	4	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	9x38x38
NAD C165BEE	75,000	★★★★★	A brute of a preamp	4	1	1	2	●	●	●	●	8x44x29
Naim NAC 152 XS	1,25,000	★★★★★	It's good, but could do better with dynamics	5	0	0	0	●	●	●	●	7x43x30
Quad Elite Pre	79,000	★★★★★	Doesn't blow us away, but it's still worth consideration	6	1	1	1	●	●	●	●	7x32x31
Rotel RC-1580	1,59,750	★★★★★	A likeable, fully featured performer that delivers much for the money	5	1	1	2	●	●	●	●	10x43x34
Audio Research LS27	7,31,250*	★★★★★	A fine preamp but struggles to shine in comparison to the Reference 75	6	0	0	1	●	●	●	●	13x48x34
Burmester 808 MK5	25,00,000*	★★★★★	A beautifully constructed, highly versatile preamp for serious devotees	Opt	Opt	Opt	Opt	●	●	●	●	95x48x33
Chord Electronics CPA 8000	20,50,000	★★★★★	A magnificent preamp, but not quite the masterpiece its price demands	0	0	2	●	●	●	●	●	31x42x36
Naim NAC252	6,50,000	★★★★★	Makes a magical combination with the NAP250 power amp	6	0	0	0	●	●	●	●	9x43x31

Power amps

These are effectively the powerhouse of the system. They deliver the high currents necessary to make a loudspeaker work. They can be configured as a stereo unit, or monoblocs, where the circuitry for each channel is housed separately. Don't judge a power amp by its output level.

Product	₹	Verdict	Type	Power (w)	Phono in	XLR in	Dimensions (hwd, cm)	Weight (kg)
ATC P1	2,16,000	★★★★★	A matchless power amp when paired with the CA-2 preamp	Stereo 150	1	1	14x44x35	26
Cyrus Mono X300	3,28,000*	★★★★★	Exceptionally fluid and agile. Recommended	Stereo 235	1	1	7x22x36	73
Linn Akurate 2200	3,33,795	★★★★★	A fine product with a distinctive sonic signature	Stereo 111	1	1	9x38x38	6.5
NAD C275BEE	99,000	★★★★★	A great power amp, best matched with the C165BEE preamp	Stereo 150	1	0	13x44x35	15
Naim NAP 155 XS	1,50,000	★★★★★	It's a good performer, but not the last word in dynamics	Stereo 60	0	0	7x43x30	7.5
Naim NAP 250	3,75,000	★★★★★	Paired with the NAC252 preamp it's magical	Stereo 80	0	0	9x43x32	165
Quad QSP	95,000	★★★★★	Needs to be auditioned - a confident listen	Stereo 140	2	0	15x33x27	14
Rotel RB-1582	1,80,000	★★★★★	Great when paired with the RC-1580 preamp	Stereo 200	1	0	14x43x41	33
Audio Research Reference 75	9,00,000*	★★★★★	A fabulous power amp, match it with care and you'll have sonic magic	Stereo 75	0	1	22x48x50	21
Burmester 911 Mk3	35,00,000*	★★★★★	Awesome price, awesome bit of kit	Stereo 535	0	1	22x48x48	31
Chord SPM 14000 MkII	19,75,000	★★★★★	An awe-inspiring monobloc, yet not quite as sonically rounded as we'd like	Mono 700	1	1	31x48x69	75

Instant expert... hi-fi separates

1. Why matching pairs are a winning combination

We advocate separates over all-in-one systems. Sound-wise, separates tend to perform better, but when buying we still suggest you demo the same maker's matching amp and CD player. The kit usually shares the same design team and will sonically complement each other: if you like the sound of the amp, you'll probably enjoy the CD player, too.

3. Position before you listen - and don't stack it, rack it

You've bought your shiny new system. But you're not going to stack your new amp, CD spinner and turntable on that rickety table, are you? And don't even think of putting the kit on the floor. To sound it's best, hi-fi kit needs a dust-free, level and secure base. Invest pounds in a dedicated rack, and the sonic (and visual) rewards justify the outlay.

2. Listen to your favourite music, not the dealer's

Hi-fi dealers should have a decent CD and vinyl collection for demo purposes, but we suggest you take your own. Take tunes you know so you can concentrate on how the kit is performing, rather than on the new music. And don't just take your 'good'-sounding CDs. If you listen to lots of compressed pop, take it and hear exactly how it sounds.

4. Give your amplifier room to breathe

Well done for buying that nice equipment rack, but before you undo all your good work, make sure you give your stereo amplifier room to breathe. These machines get hot, and the chassis vents shouldn't be covered up. The top shelf of your rack is ideal, but if you also own a top-loading CD player and/or turntable you'll need clearance for all.

5. Keep on running, keep on improving

Hi-fi units are also (sort of) like Spanish footballers. No, not constantly feigning a blown fuse, but happiest playing in the heat. New kit can take weeks to reach optimum levels. Once run-in - unless you have an environmental conscience - we suggest you leave your kit on. Otherwise, give it around half-an-hour to warm up before you hit play.

iPod docks

Docks with power _____ These are ready-made systems for your iPod; usually include speakers
Docks without power _____ These integrate an iPod into an existing system as a line level source

The shortlist



Bowers & Wilkins Zeppelin Air

AWARD WINNER
Epoz Aktimate Micro

JBL OnBeat Venue LT

Product	₹	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	Dock type	Aux	Power (w)	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
Arcam rCube	42,300*	★★★★★			iOS	●	90	20x20x20
Bose SoundDock II	14,513	★★★★★			iOS	●	n/a	17x30x17
Epoz Aktimate Micro	27,500	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	24x15x20
Gear4 AirZone Series 1	19,900	★★★★★	●		iOS	●	n/a	18x33x19
GenevaSound Model S	24,990	★★★★★			iOS	●	30	14x24x19
JBL OnBeat Venue LT	15,990	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	30	13x42x14
Logitech S715i	9995	★★★★★			iOS	●	20	6x39x13
Logitech UE Air Speaker	TBA	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	n/a	17x53x15
Monitor Audio i-deck 100	20,000	★★★★★			iOS	●	90	25x32x21
Monitor Audio i-deck 200	TBA	★★★★★			iOS	●	140	25x55x21
Revo K2	30,000*	★★★★★			iOS	●	40	33x11x11
B&O BeoSound 8	92,000	★★★★★			iOS	●	n/a	24x66x16
Bose SoundDock 10	48,263	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	n/a	22x43x24
B&W Zeppelin Air	48,000	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	150	17x54x21
Epoz Aktimate Maxi	56,450	★★★★★			iOS	●	60	32x21x265
Geneva Lab Model L	1,10,000	★★★★★			iOS	●	100	29x45x37
Geneva Lab Model M	54,990	★★★★★			iOS	●	50	20x37x25
Geneva Lab Model XL	2,00,000	★★★★★			iOS	●	600	79x55x37
JBL OnBeat Xtreme	24,990	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	120	23x44x24
Loewe AirSpeaker	TBA	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	4x20	13x24x244
Marantz Consolette	75000*	★★★★★		●	iOS	●	150	26x54x21

Wireless speakers

Bluetooth _____ Universal wireless system that's incorporated into most sources
AirPlay _____ Apple's proprietary wireless system; works over your home network

Product	₹	Verdict	AirPlay	Bluetooth	Aux	Charging	Battery	Dimensions (hwd, cm)
B&O Beolit 12	66,600	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	19x23x13
B&W A5	38,000	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	18x30x20
B&W A7	62,750	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	22x36x16
Bose SoundLink Air	23,513	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	17x31x10
Bose SoundLink W'less Mobile	20,138	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	13x24x5
Cambridge Audio Minx Air 100	36,100	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	18x35x12
Cambridge Audio Minx Go	12,500	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	23x24x6
JBL Charge	9990	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	18x7x7
Bose SoundLink Mini	16,200	★★★★★	●	●	●	●	●	5x18x6

Headphones

Ear tips Most in-ears come with these. Experiment with sizes to get the best fit.
In-line remote Mostly for Apple devices, but Android-friendly units are growing. Handy.

The shortlist

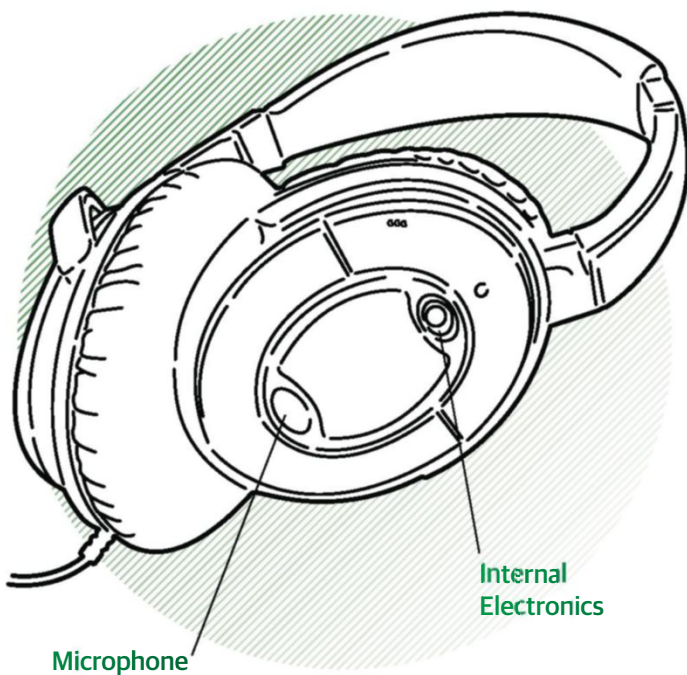


Product	₹	Verdict	In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight (g)
Audio Technica ATH-CK550	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			8
Audio Technica ATH-CK551i	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			6
Audio Technica ATH-T400	TBA	★★★★★		●	Closed			260
Beyerdynamic DTX101IE	6795	★★★★★ Best in-ears (Budget), Awards 2012	●		Closed			11
Nokia BH-504	6500	★★★★★		●	Closed		●	108
Panasonic RP-HJE170	799	★★★★★	●		Closed			3
Panasonic RP-HTX7	3999	★★★★★ Best portable on-ears (Budget), Awards 2012		●	Closed			153
Sennheiser CX 300-II	3490	★★★★★	●		Closed			4
Sennheiser CX281	2790	★★★★★	●		Closed			16
Sennheiser HD 202	2290	★★★★★		●	Closed			130
Sennheiser MM 70i	7490	★★★★★	●		Closed	●		12
Sennheiser MM50	4990	★★★★★	●		Closed			7
Sennheiser PX100-II	3990	★★★★★		●	Open			80
Skullcandy Full Metal Jacket	3559	★★★★★	●		Closed			13
Skullcandy Icon 3	1949	★★★★★	●		Closed			45
SoundMagic E10	2500*	★★★★★ Best in-ears (Budget), Awards 2012	●		Closed			11
SoundMagic PL30	1486	★★★★★	●	●	Closed			10
SoundMagic PL50	2730	★★★★★	●		Closed			8
Sony MDR-570LP	2990	★★★★★		●	Closed			110
B&WP7	33,990	★★★★★ Best portable on-ears, Awards 2013		●	Closed			290
Audio Technica ATH-ANC1	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed	●		100
Audio Technica ATH-ES55	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			120
Audio Technica ATH-ES7	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			160
Audio Technica ATH-ES88	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			130
Audio Technica ATH-EW9	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			33
Audio Technica ATH-M50	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			284
Audio Technica ATH-W1000	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			350
Audio Technica ATH-W1000X	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			350
Audio Technica ATH-WS55i	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			165
AKG K3003i	1,00,000*	★★★★★	●		Closed			10
AKG K370	8000	★★★★★	●		Closed			4
AKG K451	5000	★★★★★ Best portable on-ears, Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	●		Closed			120
AKG Q701	19,990	★★★★★	●		Open			236
AKG Q460	TBA	★★★★★	●		Closed			120
Beyerdynamic DT880	22,399	★★★★★	●	●	Open			340
Beyerdynamic DTX80	4999	★★★★★	●		Closed			12

HEADPHONES continued

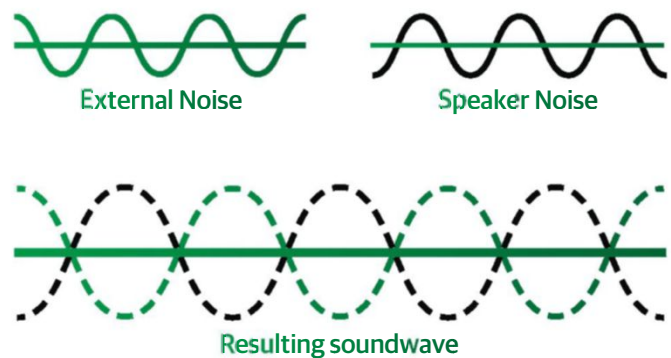
Product	₹	Verdict	In-ear	On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling	Wireless	Weight (g)
Beyerdynamic MMX 101iE	4,750	★★★★★ Best in-ears (Mid), Awards 2012	●		Closed	●		11
Beyerdynamic T1	1,00,000*	★★★★★ Best home on-ear headphones (Premium), Awards 2010.		●	Closed			350
Beyerdynamic T50P	11,800	★★★★★ Best portable on-ears (Premium), Awards 2012	●		Closed			174
Bose Around-ear 2	8,663	★★★★★ Packed with clever technology and work well		●	Closed			142
Bose MIE2i	7,650	★★★★★ A perfect headphone meets microphone solution		●	Closed			19
Bose Mobile in-ear headset 2	8,213	★★★★★ Unobtrusive in place, but lacking in excitement		●	Closed			18
Bose QuietComfort 15	17,550	★★★★★ Best noise-cancelling headphones, Awards 2012	●		Closed	●		227
B&W P3	16,500	★★★★★ Stylish and sonically talented on-ear headphones		●	Closed			130
B&W P5	23,500	★★★★★ Aesthetically beautiful and aurally accomplished too		●	Closed			195
Focal Spirit One	19,999	★★★★★ Refined enough, but not the most exciting		●	Closed			225
Grado SR80i	12,000*	★★★★★ Best home on-ear headphones (Budget-Mid), Awards 2012.	●		Open			200
Harman/Kardon CL	9,990	★★★★★ An impressive headphone debut for Harman/Kardon		●	Closed			195
Klipsch Image One	6,600	★★★★★ Perfect for those who enjoy a lot of bass		●	Closed			138
Klipsch Image X5	9,750	★★★★★ Still a great buy, with a very balanced sound		●	Closed			11
Klipsch Image X10i	12,000	★★★★★ Best in-ears (Premium), Awards 2011		●	Closed			320
Klipsch S4i	4,490	★★★★★ These Klipschs are great all-rounders, with an exciting edge		●	Closed			12
Logitech UE9000	31,995	★★★★★ Could be more refined, but make up for this with bundles of energy			Closed	●	●	378
Martin Logan Mikros 70	TBA	★★★★★ If you like your music to be presented with a matter-of-fact approach, these are just the job		●	Closed			13
Monster Beats by Dre iBeats	15,000	★★★★★ For smooth, bassy sounds they're ace		●	Closed			n/a
Monster Beats Pro by Dre	38,000	★★★★★ Brilliant at what they do well		●	Closed			299
Oppo PM-1	79,999	★★★★★ Oppo's first pair of headphones are a resounding success		●	Open			395
Philips Fidelio M1	16,000*	★★★★★ Best portable on-ears (Mid-Premium), Awards 2012	●		Closed	●		166
PSB M4U2	28,000	★★★★★ PSB's first headphones are truly brilliant. Hear them now!		●	Closed			362

How Does Noise Cancelling Work?



This kind of design is usually battery-powered and will reduce background noise. They contain microphones that pick up external noise, and then invert its waveform electronically before outputting it to your ears. This inverse wave works against the original, and greatly reduces the amount you hear.

It works best on continuous low-frequency sounds such as plane engines and Brian Blessed humming. It's not unusual for such designs to tweak tonal balance to improve things, although some add a degree of hiss in the process.



Try these

Bose QuietComfort 15 ★★★★★ ₹19,013

"The noise-cancelling is so effective it can feel like silence is being pushed into your head. Mid-tune, it's almost as if the outside world disappears completely."

Logitech UE9000 ★★★★★ ₹35,000

"They could do better in terms of refinement - but if it's energy and entertainment you're after (as well as Bluetooth), they're pretty much spot-on."

PSB M4U2 ★★★★★ ₹28,000

"If you want to turn your office, flight or train journey into a private listening experience of exceptional quality, these are the headphones to get."

HEADPHONES continued

Product	₹	Verdict	In-ear On-ear	Type	Noise cancelling Wireless	Weight (g)
Sennheiser HD 380 Pro	9990	★★★★★		Closed		220
Sennheiser HD25-1 II Adidas	3990	★★★★★		Closed		140
Sennheiser HD 800	84,990	★★★★★		Open		350
Sennheiser IE 8i	24,990	★★★★★		Closed		18
Sennheiser IE80	27,990	★★★★★		Closed		5
Sennheiser MM 400-X	17,990	★★★★★		Closed	●	105
Sennheiser Momentum	24,990	★★★★★		Closed		190
Sennheiser PXC 450	27,990	★★★★★		Closed		240
Sennheiser RS 160	13,490	★★★★★		Closed	●	226
Sennheiser RS 180	21,990	★★★★★		Open	●	204
Sennheiser RS 220	29,990	★★★★★		Open	●	329
Sennheiser X 320	7990	★★★★★		Closed		280
Shure SE115	8200	★★★★★	●	Closed	●	30
Shure SE310	21,000	★★★★★	●	Closed		7
Shure SE420	29,000	★★★★★	●	Closed	●	29
Shure SE535	31,000	★★★★★	●	Closed	●	272
Shure SRH1840	49,778	★★★★★		Open		268
Sony MDR-1R	TBA	★★★★★		Closed		240
Sony MDR-Z1000P5	19,990	★★★★★		Closed		270
Sony XBA-3iP	7990	★★★★★	●	Closed	●	7
SoundMagic HP100	15,000*	★★★★★	●	Closed		228

Headphones Jargon Buster

OVER-EAR



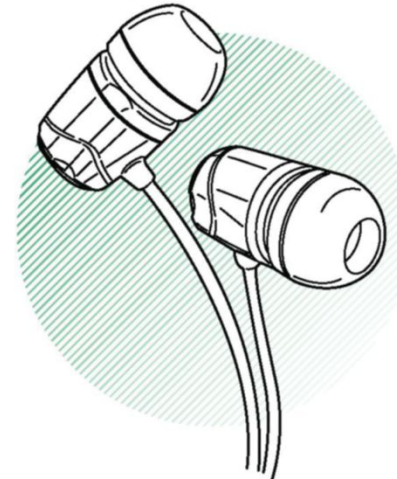
The most popular hi-fi headphone design (also called circumaural), these cup your ears completely, usually with semi-air-tight earcups. You'll notice cans of this type used as monitors in recording studios: depending on the type of design they use they can be extremely effective at cutting out the outside world.

ON-EAR



Supra-aural or on-ear designs tend to be smaller and lighter than circumaural models. They sit on your ear rather than over it, usually pressing on to it as well. Some listeners find them lighter and easier to wear for extended listening than over-ear models, but they do tend to allow in more sounds from outside.

IN-EAR



Gone are the days when everyone else needs to hear your music. In-ear buds are a great way to isolate yourself in sound. Nowadays, in-ears usually come with rubber tips, which provide a good seal and help the music travel only down your ear canals. A better fit means better sound, so experiment with tip sizes.

Try these

AKG K550 ★★★★★

"The K550s are sweetly communicative, handle tempos in a natural, unforced manner and punch into and out of low-frequency information with precision."

Philips Fidelio M1 ★★★★★

"A rounded, refined presentation. Vocals have room to breathe, while high-frequency sounds are natural and don't harden up when you crank the volume."

Sony XBA-2iP ★★★★★

"Agility and precision is up there with the very best at this price, and the spacious delivery allows for plenty of detail all the way up the frequency range."

Stereo systems

This category includes a wide range of products including all-in-one packages where the speakers are part of the system, through to micro systems where the electronics are housed separately from the speakers. A streaming option is available on many newer systems.

The shortlist



PRODUCT OF THE YEAR

Denon D-M39DAB

Awards 2012: Best Micro System



Ruark R4i

Awards 2012: Best All-In-One Music System



Onkyo CR-N755

Awards 2012: Best Networked Micro System

Product	₹	Verdict	CD	Streaming	Internet Radio	DAB	FM	Analog inputs	Digital inputs	Headphone out		
Denon CEOL Piccolo	39,900	★★★★★	No matter what the source, the CEOL Piccolo will play all your music in superb style									
Denon D-M39	44,900	★★★★★	Best micro system, Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR									
Marantz M-CR502	31,758	★★★★★	Exceptional precision and timing, and better value									
Onkyo CR-N755	32,000*	★★★★★	Best networked micro system, Awards 2012									
Marantz M-CR610	54,900	★★★★★	Best music system (premium), Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR									
Arcam Solo Mini	87,000	★★★★★	Best CD system (Mid), Awards 2010									
Arcam Solo Neo	1,38,000	★★★★★	Extra functionality over the original Solo - great buy									
Denon CEOL (RCD-N7)	39,900	★★★★★	Smooth and detailed, with great features									
Linn Majik DSM	3,85,000	★★★★★	A thoughtfully designed system and a pleasure to use									
Marantz M-CR603	39,900	★★★★★	Best microsystem (Premium) Awards 2011									
Naim Uniti 2	3,25,000	★★★★★	Best Network Music Player (Premium)									
Naim UnitiQute 2	1,25,000	★★★★★	Systems Product of the Year									
Ruark Audio R4i	60,000*	★★★★★	Best all-in-one music system, Awards 2012									

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.

Product	₹	Verdict	HDMI out	Optical out	Coaxial out	HDMI in	Optical in	Coaxial in	USB in	Wireless	Resolution (bit/kHz)	Video
Apple TV	8900	★★★★★	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	16/48	●
Asus O!Play HD2	8595	★★★★★	1	1	1	0	0	0	3		20/48	●
Cambridge Audio NP30	38,400	★★★★★	0	1	1	0	0	0	2	●	24/96	
Denon DNP-720AE	29,990	★★★★★	1	0	0	0	0	1		●	24/192	
Camb. Audio Stream Magic 6	69,700	★★★★★	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	●	24/96	
Cyrus Lyric 09	4,40,000	★★★★★	0	0	0	0	2	2	3	●	24/192	
Pioneer N50	NA	★★★★★	0	1	0	0	1	0	1		24/192	
Rotel RT-09	NA	★★★★★	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	●	24/192	
Cambridge Audio MinxXi	55,500	★★★★★	0	0	0	1	1	1	1		24/96	
Cyrus Stream X2	1,45,000	★★★★★	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192	
Cyrus Streamline2	1,75,000	★★★★★	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192	
Cyrus Stream XP2-QX	3,08,000	★★★★★	0	0	1	0	2	3	1	●	24/192	
Linn Kiko	3,20,000	★★★★★	1	0	0	4	1	0	0	●	24/192	
Naim NDX	3,50,000	★★★★★	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	●	24/192	
Naim Uniti 2	3,25,000	★★★★★	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	●	24/192	
Naim UnitiLite	2,00,000	★★★★★	0	0	0	0	3	2	1	●	24/192	

Tablets

- Android** Offers great flexibility and innovation
- Apple iOS** Fantastic ease of use; massive choice of quality apps
- Windows** New kid on the block. Watch this space

The shortlist



Apple iPad Air



Apple iPad Mini Retina



Google Nexus 7

Product	₹	Verdict	OS	3G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (h/w/d, mm)
Amazon Kindle Fire HD 16GB	14,590	★★★★★ A solid option for Amazon users, but no Apple-beater	Android	●	7	1280x800	16/32	171x117x13
Apple iPad 2 16GB Wi-Fi	24,500	★★★★★ Best tablet, Awards 2011	iOS	●	9.7	1024x768	16/32	241x186x9
Apple iPad Mini 64GB Wi-Fi	33,900	★★★★★ It's pricey, but it feels and performs as it should	iOS	●	7.9	1024x768	16/32/64	200x135x7
Apple iPad 4 32GB Wi-Fi	37,900	★★★★★ iPad tweaked and improved, again	iOS	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x190x9
Asus Eee Pad Transformer	49,999	★★★★★ A competitive tablet with a keyboard dock	Android	●	10.1	1280x800	16/32	271x177x13
Asus Eee Pad Trans Prime	42,999	★★★★★ A slim and smart tablet that we love	Android	●	10.1	1280x800	16/32	181x263x8
Google Nexus 7	9999	★★★★★ Best tablet (Budget), Awards 2012. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	Android	●	7	1280x800	16/32	99x120x11
Google Nexus 10	34,413	★★★★★ Great performance and price: a real iPad-botherer	Android	●	10	2560x1060	16/32	264x178x9
Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 7	25,000*	★★★★★ A n excellent tablet but Android fans might find it a little restrictive	Android	●	7	1920x1200	16/32/64	186x128x9
Apple iPad Mini/Retina display	28,900	★★★★★ 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	31,900*	★★★★★ Best tablet over 8in, Awards 2013	iOS	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x190x9
Apple iPad Air	35,900	★★★★★ Refined and improved, the iPad Air is a stunning piece of technology	iOS 7	●	9.7	2048x1536	16/32/64	240x170x8
Google Nexus 7 (2013)	20,999	★★★★★ Best tablet up to 8in, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	Android	●	7	1920x1200	16/32	200x114x9
Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1	49,470	★★★★★ A great screen that's let down by a cluttered interface	Android	●	10.1	2500x1600	16/32/64	171x243x8
Sony Xperia Tablet Z	46,990	★★★★★ Sony fans will love it, but there are tablets out there for less money	Android	●	10.1	1920x1200	16/32	72x266x9

Things to consider: tablets



Camera

Most tablet cameras are decent, but they won't be able to beat a dedicated camera in terms of picture quality. Think long and hard if you're looking to capture footage as quality can be inconsistent.

Apps

iOS is the king of apps, but Android is hard on its heels and Windows is catching up. If apps are your thing then your choice may come down to which ones are available on each platform, rather than quantity.

Keypad

Want to increase productivity? On-screen keypads are a mixed bag, but some have optional (and expensive) physical keyboards. Keep that in mind if you're looking to do some work on the go.

Ecosystem

iOS, Android and Windows 8. Each one is better (or worse) than the other, in some way. Apple has the apps, while Android is customisable and Windows offers a lot in terms of functionality.

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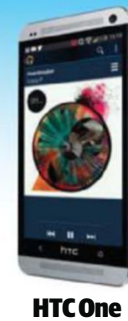
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Smartphones

- 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	Verdict	OS	4G	Screen size (in)	Resolution	Storage (GB)	Dimensions (h/w/d, mm)
Google Nexus 5	★★★★★ A powerhouse of a smartphone in every respect	Android	●	5	1920x1080	16/32	138x69x9
Apple iPhone 5	★★★★★ Faster, lighter and better: iPhone gets its annual facelift	iOS	●	4.0	1136x640	16/32/64	124x59x8
Google Nexus 4	★★★★★ A top performer and a brilliant realisation of Android power	Android	●	4.7	1280x768	8/16	134x69x9
HTC One Max	★★★★★ A fine performer but could make better use of its big screen	Android	●	5.9	1920x1080	32	146x71x9
HTC One X+	★★★★★ Well worth considering: good for music and a joy to use	Android	●	4.7	1280x720	32/64	
LG G-Flex	★★★★★ All the pros of the G2 and more, but with a low-res screen	Android	●	6	1280x720	32	161x82x8
Nokia Lumia 920	★★★★★ A promising start for Nokia's flagship	Windows	●	4.5	1280x768	32	130x71x11
Nokia Lumia 1520	★★★★★ Apps still disappoint, but this is the best Windows Phone yet	Windows	●	6	1920x1080	32	163x85x9
Oppo N1	★★★★★ Quirky and flexible, this is a great effort from a promising brand	Android	●	5.9	1920x1080	16	171x83x9
Samsung Galaxy Note III	★★★★★ The original phablet. Updated and still among the best	Android	●	5.7	1920x1080	16/32	151x80x8
LG G2	★★★★★ Unbridled power and thoughtful design. A fantastic phone	Android	●	5.2	1920x1080	16/32	139x71x9
Samsung Galaxy S III	★★★★★ Best smartphone, Awards 2012	Android	●	4.8	1280x720	16/32	137x71x9
HTC One M8	★★★★★ Improves considerably on its predecessor. Does very little wrong	Android	●	5	1920x1080	32	146x71x9
Sony Xperia Z1	★★★★★ Sony fans will love it. A speedy, sleek and impressive smartphone	Android	●	5	1920x1080	16	144x74x9
HTC One	★★★★★ A true marvel in terms of smartphone tech	Android	●	4.7	1920x1080	16	
Apple iPhone 5S	★★★★★ Best smartphone, Awards 2013. PRODUCT OF THE YEAR	iOS	●	4.0	1136x640	16/32/64	124x59x8
Google Nexus 5	★★★★★ A powerhouse of a phone in every respect	Android	●	4.95	1920x1080	16/32	138x69x9
Nokia Lumia 925	★★★★★ The best Windows Phone yet	Windows	●	4.5	1280x768	16/32	129x71x9
Samsung Galaxy S4	★★★★★ Better than its predecessor but not as good as its rivals	Android	●	5.0	1920x1080	16/32/64	137x70x8

Consider these

Wired cans sound better, but wireless is catching up. Here are the best on offer



Logitech UE 9000

Solid build and effective noise-cancelling features make the UE 9000 a fine proposition. The wireless connection is a tad unrefined but the energy produced is excellent. Good for six hours' use.



Parrot Zik

Stylish and advanced, the Zik features the 2.1 A2DP variant of Bluetooth which doesn't quite match aptX. Still, with NFC on board and a detailed sound to boot, the Zik should be on your list.



Philips Fidelio M1BT

Our 2013 Award-winners boast aptX compatibility and easy-to-use controls. Its in the sound where they really shine, showing off an excellent turn of pace with bags of detail. Good for 10 hours' use.



Sennheiser MM 400-X

A compact, portable design and low(ish) price make these cans quite enticing. Vocals have plenty of detail and directness, and with aptX along for the ride too, these are some capable headphones.

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.

Product	₹	Verdict	Lengths tested (m)	HDMI type
Audioquest Pearl	2100	★★★★★ Best HDMI cable, Awards 2012	1	1.4
Chord Company Supershield	5000	★★★★★ Still a class-leading cable, but now it's 1.4 too	1	1.3
Kimber Kable HD-09	6500	★★★★★ Picture quality is up with the best and it creates a wide sound field	2	1.3
Profigold SKY HDMI Ethernet	2999	Not rated Not rated	2	1.4
QED Performance HDMI-e	7410	★★★★★ Perfectly good cable that just falls down in its pricing	7	1.4
QED Profile HDMI	2225	★★★★★ Now with 1.4 status, this is still a worthy cable	1	1.4
Wireworld Chroma 6	1589	★★★★★ Best HDMI cable, Awards 2010. Great upgrade cable for higher-end systems	1	1.4
Audioquest Cinnamon	6600	★★★★★ A top-notch HDMI that's a credit to any system	2	1.4
Audioquest Forest	9300	★★★★★ A true and worthy rival to Chord's Supershield and again	5	1.4
Bridge Connect BPE105	3399	Not rated Not rated	1	1.4b
Chord Co. Active Silver + HDMI	9500	★★★★★ An impressive successor to the old Active cable	1	1.4
Chord Co. Supershield (5m)	9000	★★★★★ A punchy award winner that defies its low price tag	5	1.3a
QED Reference	7740	★★★★★ An assured, but expensive, performer	5	1.3ab
van den Hul Flat HDMI (3m)	10700	★★★★★ One of the best HDMI cables we've ever heard	3	1.3
van den Hul Ultimate	13000	★★★★★ It's pricey, but has good performance	1	1.3

Digital interconnects

- USB** An increasingly common way to connect your computer to your hi-fi
- Optical** Digital cable that uses light to transmit sound between components
- Coaxial** Sends audio via an electrical signal between your hi-fi and AV kit

The shortlist



QED Performance Graphite
Awards 2012: Best Optical Digital Cable

"The sound through this cable is incredibly detailed and startlingly clear. There's a good grasp of dynamics, too."



QED Performance
Awards 2012: Best Coaxial Digital Cable

"The QED is good at conveying subtleties. There's a good sense of energy too, with plenty of attack."



Supra USB 2.0
Awards 2012: Best USB Cable

"It helps deliver impeccable timing and plenty of energy, both of which translate into a tangible sense of fun."

Product	₹	Verdict	Type	Length tested (m)
Profigold SKY Optical	2299	Not rated Not rated	Optical	2
QED Performance Digital	4135	★★★★★ Best coaxial digital cable, Awards 2012	Co-axial	1
QED Performance Graphite	2760	★★★★★ Best optical digital cable, Awards 2012	Optical	1
Supra AnCo (coaxial)	4700	★★★★★ Ideal if you like it meaty and beaty - it revels in low-end stuff	Co-axial	1
Wireworld Nova 6	1059	★★★★★ Like and up-and-coming band: unrefined but likeable and energetic	Optical	1
Wireworld Ultraviolet USB	1324	★★★★★ Best USB cable, Awards 2010. If you use digital kit, this needs to be on your audition list	USB	1
Chord Company Optichord	3300	★★★★★ Confident, competent and extremely likeable. Highly recommended	Optical	1
Bridge Connect BEA562	2599	Not rated Not rated	Optical	2

Analogue interconnects

These carry audio signal from source to amplifier, or between pre-amplifier and power amplifier. Some use a shielding construction to reduce external electrical interference.

The shortlist



AWARD WINNER

Atlas Element Integra

Awards 2012: Best Analogue Interconnect

“Improves on many of the things that the former champ did right. The Element Integra is highly recommended.”



Furutech Alpha-Line 1

“If your current soundstage sounds a little loose and disorganised, this can help to snap everything back into place. Best for owners of midrange systems.”



Chord Company Chameleon Plus

“Give your kit a serious shot in the arm – an overly dull system would certainly benefit from its ability and verve. One of our long-time favourites for high-end set-ups.”

Product	₹	Verdict	RCA phono 3.5mm-to-RCA XLR (balanced)	Length tested (m)
Wireworld Luna 6	979	★★★★★	●	1
Belkin Mini-Stereo Cable	649	★★★★☆		1.8
Chord Company Crimson Plus	2800	★★★★★	●	1
Profigold PROI3301	899	★★★★★		1
QED Performance Audio 2	4770	★★★★☆	●	1
QED Profile	1855	★★★★★	●	1
Wireworld Oasis 6	2914	★★★★★	●	1
QED Profile J2P	1590	★★★★★	●	1.5
QED Reference Audio J2P	3290	★★★★★	●	3
van den Hul The Name	8000	★★★★☆	●	0.8
Bridge Connect BEA423	2499	Not rated	●	3
Chord Co. Chameleon Plus	8300	★★★★★	●	1
QED Signature Audio S	23,535	★★★★★	●	1
van den Hul The Wave	15,900	★★★★★	●	1

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.

Product	₹	Verdict	Biwire
Atlas Equator 2.0 OFC	750/m	★★★★★	
SCP 16/20FC-HD-WT	174/m	Not rated	
Chord Co. Carnival Silv. Screen	380/m	★★★★☆	
Chord Company Leyline	160/m	★★★★☆	
QED Silver Anniversary XT	668/m	★★★★★	
Wireworld The Stream 16/2	2119/2m	★★★★☆	
Wireworld The Orbit	4239/2m	★★★★☆	●
QED Revelation	1908/m	★★★★★	
QED Silver Anniv. XT Biwire	1336/m	★★★★★	●
van den Hul CS122	2050/m	★★★★☆	●



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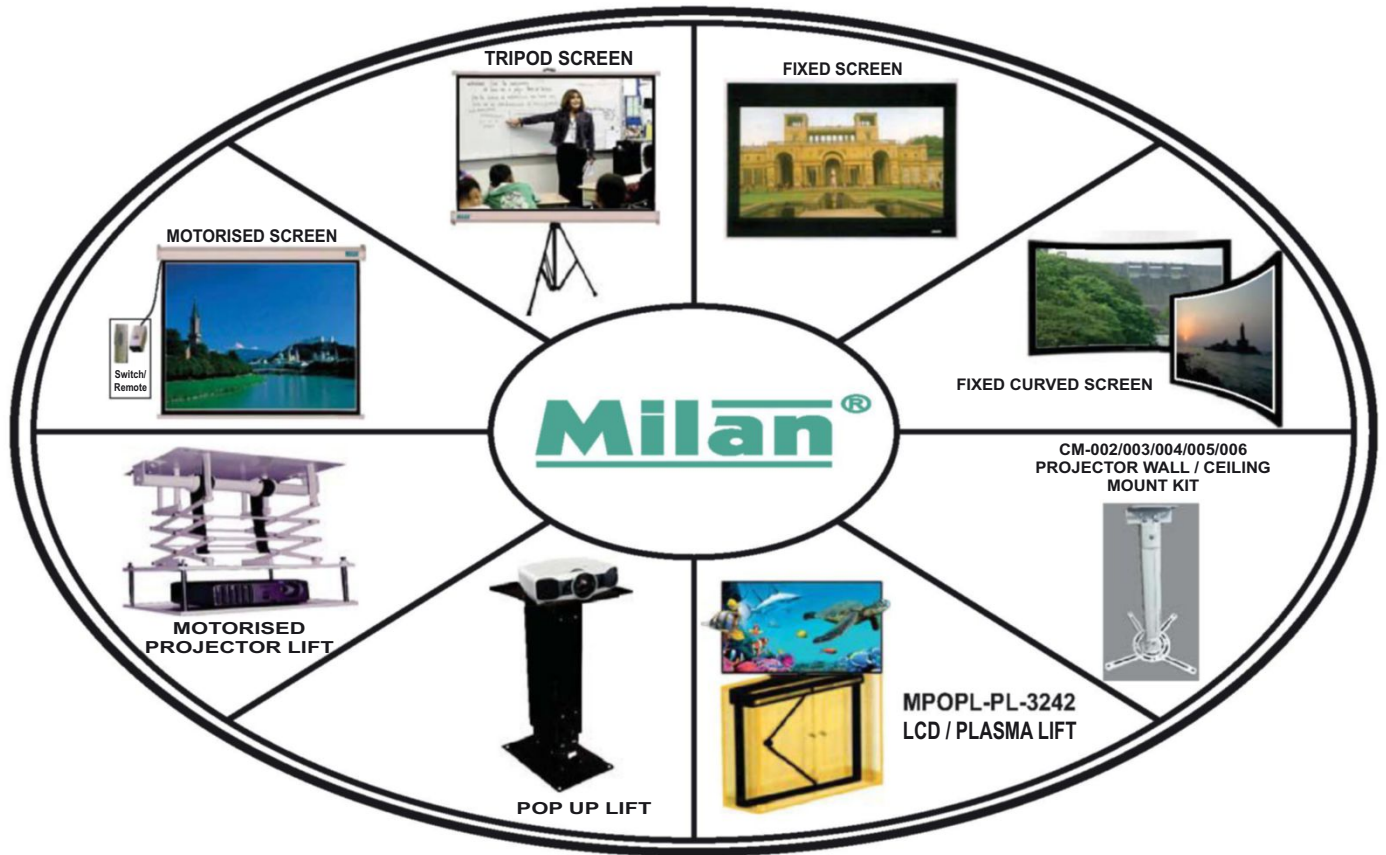


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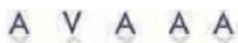
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TOP SHELF

Martin Logan Neolith

Exotic engineering mated with pioneering design



Martin Logan has been the pioneer in the field of electrostatic speakers, and their Monolith and Statement E2 line of products are a testament to that. Their latest offering, which we first previewed at Munich High End earlier this year is yet again on another level of potency, and is meant for the insatiable audiophile.

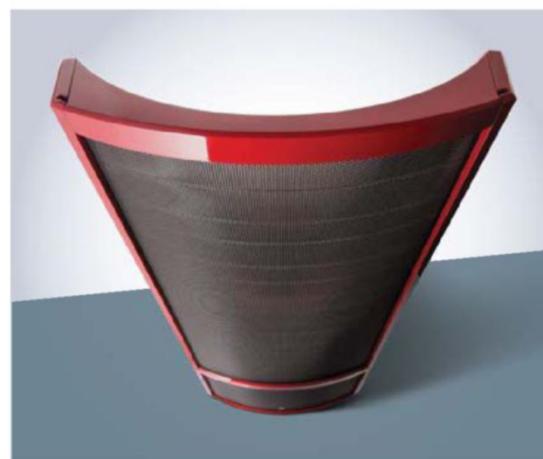
Neolith, as Martin Logan calls it, uses the company's proprietary curvilinear electrostatic transducer to deliver sound that not only envelops the listener but also is convincing in its imaging and offers speed and accuracy. Each of the curved electrostatic panel measures 22x 48in, and the speaker itself is nearly 6-feet tall. Martin Logan uses a proprietary vacuum bonding technique along with aerospace adhesives and extreme engineering to build panels with optimum horizontal curvature.

Such attention to detail enables the company to build panels that do not compromise on performance, sound quality or structural integrity. At

the same time, vertical dispersion is kept at minimum, which reduces unwanted floor and ceiling reflections.

The futuristic design lures the eye and as you inspect closer, you will find that the base encloses a 15in rear-firing ported woofer and 12in front firing sealed mid-bass woofer. They complement their electrostatic partner perfectly. The Neolith, thanks to its bass response that goes all the way down to 23Hz, should be able to render deep, gut-stirring bass without a fuss. It has a rated efficiency of 90dB, can handle 1300W of power and thanks to its fully passive design customers can choose to single wire or bi-amp the speaker with high-performance audiophile grade solid state or tube amplifiers.

We can't wait to hear the Neolith again and you should spend time with one as soon as you can. It is being imported here by AudioOne and will be offered in seven colours at select stores all over the country. For ₹ 66 lacs, it should be a steal!



A work of art is probably what you are thinking, when you look at the Neolith speakers. It sure is and by the time you have read this, we would have heard them first hand here in India. Look out for a full review soon.

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